

Micro-Compass quality assurance short programme: Designing effective quality assurance systems in HE Institutions in Bangladesh

Palto Datta

Regent College London, UK

David M J Graves

Dg Anti-Fraud Consultants Ltd
Nottingham Trent University, U.K.

Abstract

Due to increased demand for quality education worldwide, the Higher education sector globally has been undergoing an unprecedented level of changes over the past several decades. These result in increased public expectations towards the institutions' provision, new tasks and responsibilities for scholars and administrators, new modes of knowledge production and transfer. The abundance of individual and organisational change processes requires higher education institutions to rethink the quality of their provision in higher education.

*This study aims to examine the importance of the Fundamental of Quality Assurance of Higher Education Sector and the influence of a short training programme on quality assurance in developing excellence in education. **Micro-CQAP (micro compass quality assurance programme)** provides direction and focus that is based on evidence, appraisal, and experience. The study is based on the recent venture by the authors of this study providing a 5-days training programme to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Maritime University (BSMRMU) and its impact on their overall quality assurance system within the university. The outcome of the training programme and findings of this study suggest that a short training programme on quality assurance within the institution enhances the overall understanding of Quality Assurance and help to implement it in practice more effectively and efficiently.*

The short programme was based on providing basic knowledge about what quality in higher education is, where it comes from, why quality assurance should & must be carried out, and how the process can be set up and managed at Higher Education institutions. This study is original as it was based on the experience, observations and feedback received after conducting the training programme from the participants. It has significant implications for the bother Higher Education Institutions, Government, and various stakeholders in Bangladesh.

Key words

Quality Assurance, Higher Education, Bangladesh, Teaching & learning, student involvement Training

Corresponding author: Palto Datta

Email address for the corresponding author: Palto.Datta@rcl.ac.uk

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1. Introduction & Background

The short programme on quality assurance was developed by the Centre for Innovative Leadership Navigation of CBER (Centre for Business & Economic Research), U.K., at the request of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Maritime University (BSMRMU), Bangladesh. The **Micro-Compass Quality Assurance Programme (MCQAP)** was a bespoke initiative designed to clarify focus to ensure robust standards that are both aspirational and achievable. MCQAP is value-driven and strives to ensure that the existing institutional standards, processes, and procedures are thoroughly appraised and evaluated.

This 5-day short programme took place in early December 2019 at the university's main campus in Dhaka. However, while the facilitators provided the agreed course context according to the university's requirements, it required some adjustments to accommodate the participants' expectations. Precisely, the training subjects were adjusted on the 4th and 5th days of the course to incorporate one of the most critical aspects of the quality assurance framework that is "quality assurance in Research". This pragmatism and flexibility are one of the core strengths of MCQAP and underscores the importance of such an approach in day-to-day leadership and management in higher education.

1.1 The rationale for the training

The purpose of a stringent Quality Management System within an academic institution is to set out the policies, procedures, processes, regulations, and guidance that define and assure the academic standards and quality of any university's academic portfolio. Therefore, it is globally understood that academic standards and quality must be maintained for all education providers to pass the expected monitoring processes, whether nationally or internationally. With this focus in mind, the CILN, U.K. and the **Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Maritime University**, Bangladesh, created the platform for a collaborative working partnership. This five-day training session was the first step of this long-term collaboration.

Therefore, its rationale and linking to its objective was to focus on the more comprehensive understanding and implementation of the quality standards management systems within the field of academia currently in place at BSMRMU. Therefore, the course focus was explicitly designed to support the existing practices in the area and enhance those practices by focusing on the strategic and operative level of quality assurance within BSMRMU. This learning module engaged with the institutions Senior Management Team, Senior Teaching Staff, Academic Researchers, administrative staff, and its quality managers. They are in charge of or involved within the quality assurance discipline of the institution. The training sessions were attended by the institution's senior management responsible for quality assurance (Vice President, Vice-Rector and Deputy Vice-Chancellor for academics) and faculty.

1.2 Objectives

Through its holistic approach, **Micro-CQAP** sought to gain a comprehensive appreciation and understanding of the prevailing organisational culture to identify areas of strength and those aspects that might require additional emphasis, revision, or resources. The main objectives of this paper are:

1. To understand the importance of training programmes for the academic and managerial staff to improve an understanding of quality assurance systems within the institutions.
2. To assess the influence of MCQAP on the staff behaviour towards institutional quality assurance and its practices
3. To make reasonable recommendations based on the short training programme the ways institutions can improve their quality assurance provisions to improve their educational standards

1.3 About participants

The MCQAP was designed for the senior management staff and faculty of BSMRMU. Therefore, participants who participated in the MCQAP from 1-5th December 2019 were the senior officers, head of the faculty and departments, senior & junior faculty, institution's senior management responsible for quality assurance (Vice President, Vice-Rector and Deputy Vice-Chancellor for academics) and head of administration. A total number of 46 participants attended the workshop.

1.4 Schedule

The five days training workshop was conducted on five consecutive days (1-5th December 2019); based on the BSMRMU's consideration that the senior member of staff, including senior officers, faculty, and head of departments, should not be away from work for these days. Whilst there was an appreciation that the team had a busy workload, what with various classroom sessions and exam preparations, it was felt that the training would be an essential step in the institution's ongoing commitment to quality assurance. The training workshop was conducted from 1-5th December, and each day the session began at 09.00 am and end at 1.30 pm. Each day there were two fifteen minutes coffee/Tea breaks; at 10.30 am and at noon. There was a lunch break after the session at 1.30 pm. Each day it was comprised of three sessions.

2. A brief literature review on Quality Assurance

Quality Assurance

To ensure continued economic growth and development, creating and maintaining an environment of competitiveness is essential. Central to this is the institution of education or, for that matter, higher education that provides economic empowerment. For this to happen, education providers, particularly in the private sector, must appreciate that market forces drive a buyer-seller phenomenon just like in any other business. This needs to have an optimisation focus on customer satisfaction and customer relationship. In other words, „quality“ must be inherent in the system. The buyers, i.e., prospective students, must have this „assurance“ and that this assurance is not a one-off event but is a process that is audited and evaluated against acceptable standards and performance parameters and is enhanced at regular intervals dictates of the environment.

The very purpose of quality assurance (Q.A.) is to send out the message that the organisation takes care of its customers, i.e., the students, arguably the most important stakeholder. They must be convinced that the product is worth having. If this were to happen, then Q.A. principles must be owned by the organisation as a whole but more so by the employees - academic and non-academic. The message must also ensure that the staff and students work in an environment of trust and the system is supportive, participative, and transparent prevails in teaching and learning activities. Overall, the philosophy of sharing and caring must be visible. Concurrently, the Q.A. must also caution the incoming students that their entry must be against a set of minimum requirements that they must satisfy. While they would have rights because of the monetary transactions that have taken place, they must not absolve themselves of the responsibilities accompanying the provision of rights.

The initial purpose of this study was to examine the importance of providing short training programmes on the fundamentals of Quality Assurance within the higher education sector. This brief literature review intends to focus on the main aspects of quality assurance in global higher education 'post' Covid-19. The Covid-19 has a severe impact on the academic industry and what was accepted as usual Quality Assurance Standards. It is fair to say that many 'normal' standards will need to be reviewed to bring them in line with what is now seen to be the 'new normal'.

To be able to restructure the fundamentals of Quality Assurance, we must first understand what quality assurance is about, and that is: Quality Assurance is an overview mechanism to ensure quality in

higher education, examines models of Q.A., and explores the concept of quality (Ryan, 2015). In addition, to provide a review of research on the effectiveness of quality assurance practices within higher education providers as expected by national and international accrediting bodies. Current research has shown that Covid-19 has brought about a change of attitude in many well-established higher education providers. Many, for the first time, have realised that the stakeholder base needs to be more involved. One challenge, in particular, revolves around faculty members and other stakeholders, such as students, about the Q.A. process. Given that students are at the centre of higher education and invest time and money in the system, the consensus concludes that involving them could improve the Q.A. processes.

According to Karaim (2011), the projected worldwide demand for Higher Education could reach 265million students by 2025, an upward trajectory and an increase of nearly 100 million students in 2000. The author further asserted that this could represent an increase of 163 million students within the next 25 years. The demand for a high-quality education system increases as there is a growing demand for quality assurance (Q.A.) in the higher education sector globally, where there is increased mobility of students and faculty and Higher Educational Institutions in Global Networks (Hou, 2012; Varonism, 2014). Q.A. (quality assurance) is one of the most critical drivers for institutions for achieving excellence in Higher education. However, many institutions face a tremendous number of challenges ensuring that the quality of the educational programme meets national and international standards. (World Bank, 2007). Hence a need has emerged for the cooperation of quality assurance agencies and acceptance of quality assurance review decisions.

Education has now seen an urgent need to establish a common framework for a quality assurance model that would provide a holistic model of learning experiences for the learners that includes continuous assessment of learning design, quality content and appropriate pedagogy that is fit for the purpose (Puzziferro and Shelton, 2008). As shown in Figure 1, a conceptual model of quality assurance (Q.A.) on higher education comprises several areas.

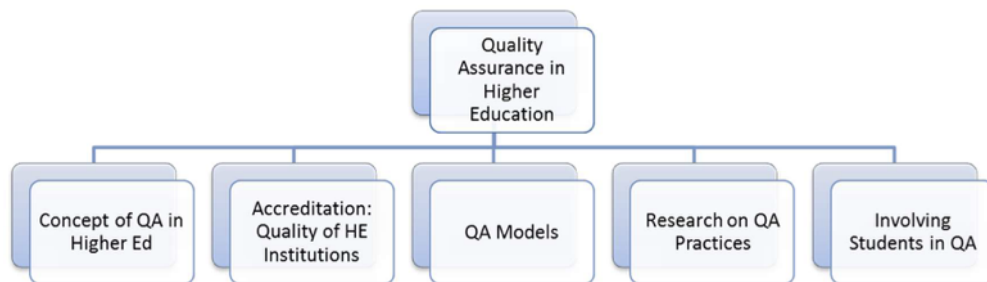


Figure 1. Quality assurance in higher education conceptual model.

Source: Ryan, (2015)

By examining the above model, it can be seen that there is a continuous demand for quality culture to ensure a high degree of accountability and transparency while addressing the challenges of globalised higher education (Smidt, 2015). Accepting this in a practical sense, quality assurance reviews provide external, third party, independent and objective cognisance. Such studies offer observations about partner institutions, products, programmes, services, and processes, providing recommendations for improvement. Whilst we acknowledge that Quality Assurance within academic institutions is a critical component, it must also be accepted that because of the many varying practices across the academic sphere that can only be described as multi-dimensional and contextual and therefore, it will always result

in a gap between the views of professionals in quality assurance and academic staff and students. There are several key attributes of quality in Higher Education that include value creation, excellence, consistency, and meeting stakeholders' needs and expectations. Yet, no specific quality assurance framework can address all of these quality attributes. Therefore, it is imperative to choose what kind of quality are developed and assessed (Harvey, 2014; Wilger, 1997). To synergise the stakeholders working practices and their understanding within any academic institution, the institution must engage with a professional quality assurance third-party training provider.

The quality of educational provisions provided by an Institution is crucial in their strategic plan in the student-centred education context. Students' evaluation of the academic programmes can be a robust assessment instrument used to stimulate quality enhancement in a university. Higher Education providers must acknowledge and accept that the individual learner's standpoint should be placed at the heart of quality in all areas of education. Consequently, learners are an essential component of quality assurance programmes and processes (Ryan, 2015). The most significant and most metamorphic change in the Quality Assurance process for the future is likely to involve students in the Q.A. process. Their involvement is now an important topic, and educational leaders consider how best to include students in their Q.A. systems more so than they are involved directly.

2.1 Higher Education sector in Bangladesh: An overview

For those prepared to look and see, there are many signs that Bangladesh is on an upward trajectory economically. Healthy levels of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) continue to flow into the country, and orders for Bangladeshi-made goods remain buoyant. Taken as a whole, the picture is encouraging, with the country's Gross Domestic Product in 2016 calculated to have been US\$ 221.4 billion (Source: World Bank, 2017). Whilst these GDP figures are certainly encouraging, there is no room for complacency, doubly so when one compares Bangladesh (population 163 million) with the island nation of Singapore (population 5.6 million). Bangladesh is the 10th most populated country in the world. The following table indicates the population figures in future:

Bangladesh population figures	Year
170,466,781	2020
186,459,899	2030
197,133,813	2040
202,209,053	2050
Source: www.populationpyramid.net	

Whilst there are signs that by the middle of the century, the rate of growth will slow a little, it is clear that population pressures are going to have severe ramifications for a variety of sectors. One sector it is sure to impact on is that of education, more especially higher education. Bangladesh has had a noble record regarding education, especially the store it has set by the importance of language and culture. Regardless of various political events, there has been an appreciation of the centrality of education to both the economy and life in general. Publicly funded higher education institutions have played a generally positive role in the life of the nation. Still, in recent decades it has been the private sector that has begun to meet various needs concerning ensuring Bangladesh holds onto many of its brightest citizens and enables them to grow and prosper.

As is often the way, Bangladesh was ahead of many of its immediate neighbours when it came to liberalising its tertiary education sector. In the 1980s, the idea of permitting private universities was first mooted, and this finally came into being with the Private University Act (1992). This was a bold and, some

might say, courageous initiative, which has transformed education provision in Bangladesh and has played a vital part in the country's economic development.

Since PUA (Private University act) and the establishment of North South University (NSU) the private higher education sector has grown year on year. It has helped meet some of the needs from local students, particularly those from the more affluent sections of society. Such has been the proliferation of private higher education institutions that currently there are 95 of them compared to 37 in the public sector UGC (2018). The courses they offer generally market friendly courses, primarily in English Language, Business Administration, and Information Technology. Levels of employability for students is high, and as rule student satisfaction levels are higher than those in the public sector. The very best of the private sector institutions offer value for money, but still the fees are such that they remain well out of reach of the quarter a million Bangladeshis who matriculate with their Higher Secondary School Certificate every year.

In relation to the overall growth in all aspects in Bangladesh, we have witnessed an unprecedented growth in tertiary education sector in Bangladesh over the past two decades (since later 90s). Number of higher educational institutions are already vast and number of students in this sector reached 2.84 million in 2015 while it was only 1.60 million in 2010 (Banbeis, 2016). Between 2010 and 2015, the number of higher education institutions grew from 1,748 to 2,417 institutions (almost 60% increase). However, the growth was mainly within private tertiary education sector. The growth in public sector was at a smaller rate from 306 in 2010 to 376 institutions in 2015

The tertiary education system in Bangladesh is based on three distinctive subsectors those can be again divided into a public and private:

1. The University subsector: In 1991 at the time of independence, there were only 4 public universities. All were public finance and autonomous entities. Currently there are 35 publicly funded Universities. Private universities are a new development in Bangladesh and currently there are 95 such universities. In early 1990 as part of the drive of liberalisation process, the private sector came forward to establish privately funded universities. University Grants Commission (UGC) as the apex body of the government for higher education is responsible for funding of public universities in private Universities. However, these are mainly in most of the larger cities

2. The College subsector: There are currently over 1500 colleges providing tertiary level education and most of them are affiliated to the national Universities offering mainly undergraduate and Honors programmes. They do not have degree awarding power. National Universities award the degree.

3. The Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) subsector

However, access to the tertiary level education is limited in Bangladesh. Only 16 percent of the college graduates' students are able to enroll into the higher education. But most of them are studying in the Universities affiliated colleges

3. Study methodology

This study is based on the short training programme provided in relation to the quality assurance system in Bangladesh. The immediate effectiveness of the training is assessed based on the feedback received from the participants. Two different sets of interviews were taking place during, and post training namely focus group interviews and individual learner's feedback. There were three focus group created-two groups based on faculty and one is based on senior management. Furthermore, in-depth interviews were carried out after six months of the training programme to learn the long-term effectiveness of the short programme. interviews also carried out with two senior member of the university-vice chancellor and the programme coordinator who is also the Dean of the Business School.

85% learners provided the completed feedback those were analysed to understand the effectiveness of the training programme.

4. Training procedures in brief

The training session started with an inaugural session on the first day of the programme. V.C. of the University opened the programme and delivered his introductory address. He stressed the importance of this programme and encouraged academic staff, HODs, and senior officers to attend these classes and he welcomed the facilitators from CBER. On behalf of CBER, Executive Chair of CBER delivered his message of welcome to the programme and the benefits of attending this programme. He briefly outlined the programme contents. Main training facilitator explained the main purpose of the programme, its rationale, main objectives, what the trainees would learn during this programme by pointing out the core content to be covered during this programme and the key benefits. Facilitator, in consultation with the trainees set the basic guidelines to be applicable during the training days in order to maintain a productive, focused, and organised training program. The trainees agreed upon several guidelines for the training like putting their phones on silent, arriving on time, respecting the ideas of others, being attentive and engaged and not interrupting when others talk etc. Participants were also asked about their expectations from the training and what they expected to learn during the five days programme.

After the inaugural session, the remainder of the training went ahead as planned where there were presentations used to display major points of discussion and the points were discussed by the facilitators and the participants shared their views and experiences about the topic discussed. Training facilitator started with the first introductory session explaining the nature of quality assurance in Higher Education sector and major challenges HEIs face. There was a tea break every morning at 10:15 am which lasted for fifteen minutes. After the short break the session would continue until the lunch break. Lunch break normally took place after finishing the sessions at 13.30 pm. Another 15-minute tea break was observed everyday just after 12.00 pm and the session would end at 13.30 pm.

Before ending the day's session the facilitators would recap the topics discussed during the day with input from the participants. Each day would start with a recap of previous day's revision of main points. This was done by asking participants about what they had learnt and what were the main points discussed. Different training methodologies were used such as relevant short video clips, PPT slides, group discussion, group tasks, case studies, examples, turn & talk, reflection, tap into the learners' prior knowledge, think pair share, hand signal and others.

On the fifth day (the last day of the programme) there was a class tasks for the learners conducted by the facilitator which was aimed at gauging the knowledge and understanding of the participants about the topic discussed on the 3rd and 4th day (on quality assurance in research and how to publish in indexed journals). Finally, the overall programme evaluation and feedback was collected from the participants. This evaluation was intended to obtain the participants views about different aspects of the programme, from the coverage of the topics to the effectiveness of the programme, quality of facilitators, venue, and preparedness to their overall impression of the whole experience.

The programme ended with the concluding session and the giving out of the certificates to each participant.

5. Facilitation techniques used

The multitude of training methodologies that were used were extremely successful as it was believed that interaction was needed to deliver the subject matter in the most effective way to stimulate and increase the learning process. Open discussion forums were highly successful as it piqued the participants interest and enabled them to openly debate issues in a collective manner to identify new ways

to update and improve current procedures and practices within their institution. These multiple methods of delivery were highly appreciated by those attending as their feedback indicated their level of thinking went beyond simple comprehension to the higher sense of memory retention.

6. Barriers encountered during training sessions

The training programme was conducted smoothly with the support from the training coordinator and other member of staff. However, during first three days of the programme, there were a few barriers which need to be addressed to make the programme more effective. There were also few opportunities for practice during the training. The following are some of the views and potential barriers encountered during the programme:

1. Similar programmes had already been conducted by others.
2. Participants were pre-occupied and concerned about their current workload as they were busy trying to accommodate class work with examinations.
3. Participants were not informed about the subject content of the training programme beforehand.
4. Some of the participants felt they were going over familiar ground.
5. They wanted the facilitators to focus on research and how to publish in indexed journals.
6. Most of the participants were anxious about and reluctant to participate in teaching observation tasks.
7. Participants were unsure about their personal development programme and where those responsibilities lay.

Due cognisance was taken of this feedback, reservations, and potential barriers to learning. After each training day the training facilitators reflected on what they had heard and observed and this was instrumental in the decision to tweak and refocus the training to give it an additional focus on research, something that met with universal approval amongst the participants.

7. Techniques used to overcome barriers during training sessions

1. Although similar programmes had already been conducted by others it was agreed the structure of this training programme was considered as being the most effective because of its ability to be fluid in nature. This allowed the subject matter to be changed to accommodate the expectations of those attending thus allowing maximum learning. See also 3. above.

2. As it was recognised that participants were pre-occupied and concerned about their current workload the facilitators reviewed the previous days content and if required to do so covered issues again in order to 'double cover' a particular area of learning to benefit those who required a second explanation.

3. As it was found that participants were not informed about the contents of this training programme beforehand it resulted in the programme requiring some change to give it more focus on attendee expectations. As indicated in (1) above. This was found to be not only the most effective method but obtained approval from attendees.

4. Some of the participants felt they were going over familiar ground. It was explained that 'Standard Operating Procedures' in Quality Assurance needs to be revisited in order to establish if current working practices are still relevant, need changing, or updated.

5. Attendees wanted the facilitators to focus on research and how to publish in indexed journals. As the programme structure had flexibility built in this subject was covered in detail by facilitator and will be followed up with recommendations for the future.

6. During the activity events it was found participants were anxious about participating in individual/group work. This was recognised as an area of development but was overcome during the training session with the tutors mixing individual dynamics. This proved to be an effective solution

during these sessions. A recommendation will cover individual development in the areas of skills and confidence training courses for the future.

7. As participants were concerned about their personal and future development the subject of 360-degree feedback method within the workplace was introduced. This was extremely popular, and facilitators were asked for this method to be covered in detail within the post course report.

8. Outcome of the training

Academic Standards and quality assurance process was the primary focus of this programme of learning. As previously stated, it was with this focus that the Centre for Innovative Leadership Navigation and the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Maritime University explored these areas to set in place a clear perception to achieve a higher level of best practice and understanding.

The daily feedback sessions that took place clearly showed that all participants were actively engaged with the programme and therefore, and in line with Bloom's Taxonomy each participant demonstrated the following skills:

1. How to evaluate internal evidence and external criteria in relation to the institution.
2. How to analyse quality assurance ideas and as a result propose best practice solutions.
3. How to apply newly learnt skills of understanding of Quality Assurance and be able to departmentalise ideas in order to understand its processes better.
4. How to apply knowledge to actual situations in preparation for future research studies.
5. Be able to demonstrate a deeper understanding of the Quality Assurance processes in order to appreciate its impact on the institution's responsibilities to react to sustainable/organic growth.
6. Achieve a level of thinking that went beyond simple comprehension to the higher sense of knowledge retention.
7. How to focus on research and how to publish in indexed journals for the benefit of both self and institution.
8. The 360-degree feedback method, its benefits to both individual and institution.

By its arranging of this programme BSMRMU have clearly demonstrated an understanding of the benefits of investing in its people by encouraging staff to attend this important programme. The immediate benefit to BSMRMU will see a strengthening of skills within its staff and the level of proficiency those skills are performed at. The level of understanding of attendees, post course, will also develop staff engagement, loyalty, staff retention and commitment. The overall ripple effect of this training course is, it will reduce any weak links within the institution who normally, rely heavily on others to complete basic tasks in relation to Quality Assurance, its application and understanding.

Notwithstanding the recommendations made there is clear evidence that BSMRMU are fully committed to the long-term project in the management and improvement of the institution's standards of Quality Assurance, their processes and procedures and methods for Q.A. standards appraisal and evaluation.

9. Recommendations and future activities

No	Recommendations	Required
1	The BSMRMU management should endorse the development of a single, coherent set of Quality Assurance standards for management and delivery of education & training	Quality Assurance Manual
2	Institution should develop and implement a set of standardisation system in teaching and assessment	Programme Hand- book Unit handbook

		Scheme of work guide Lesson plan Assignment brief (for assignment) Moderated exam papers Model questions Answer for all exam questions
3	Institution should ensure that all teaching staff has a minimum level of teaching qualification.	Teaching qualification at threshold level
4	BSMRMU should consider options for joint training & reciprocal recognition of training for Q.A. functions with other bodies	Joint training
5	Institution to introduce continuation training opportunity in the form of presentation skills course	Tutor course delivery requirement
6	Institution to explore the 360-degree appraisal system for all staff.	Training requirement for staff, Managers and Senior Management Staff
7	Institution to put in place a 5, 10, & 15-year plan for strategic direction and professional development of all staff members in order to feed into institution mission and objectives.	Individual & Management levels to take ownership
8	Support and encourage all staff to take ownership of their own particular development and to link it with the institutions line / management structure of reporting and appraisal system.	Develop training sessions to cover both specific individual training and awareness of recommendation 6
9	Consider the benefits of a collaborative programme to focus on the continued standards of Quality Assurance within the institution.	Institutions' Senior Management Team and CILN to discuss
10	Greater emphasis to be placed on benchmarking the institution against global competitors and thought leaders. Such an outlook needs to permeate the entire institution.	Senior management to direct this as a strategic action plan in order to build a strong and organic development plan for the future
11	An institution-wide individual files (ROA - Records of Attainment) for all staff that documents on and offsite training, Continuous Professional Development, and achievements.	Record keeping documentation
12	Careful consideration to be given to the timing of onsite training so that it does not clash with examination periods or coursework deadlines.	Appropriate development, Teaching & learning Calendar
13	A concerted effort to be made to foster a healthy questioning culture, one where fresh idea is actively encouraged, and people are incentivised to be solutions orientated.	Institute to encourage a sense of individual ownership in order to encourage input by institution's staff. Link to 14 (Focus Group Meetings)
14	Regular monitoring of case studies to take place to ensure that they are both relevant and reflect real-life situations of a local and international nature.	A creation of a focus group to feed into this initiative
15	A far greater emphasis to be placed on encouraging mutual classroom observations as well as peer assessment.	A broader understanding and signing up to the process of 360-degree peer observation to be encouraged as a positive.

10. Originality and study implication

Originality and the general understanding of this terminology is that it is linked to the practice of research. The field of research is becoming saturated and as a result it is becoming very difficult to focus on a new area of research. Many researchers are looking now at past researched subjects and micro-analysing the findings in the hope of creating a new thread of research. Of course, it must always be remembered that originality remains one of the most important criteria for a successful research outcome. Research should be seen to be a significant addition to the accumulated knowledge within the discipline under research. By keeping a keen focus on this part, it implies that when the research has been completed it will offer something new and/or something significant.

11. Discussion & Conclusions

In Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Maritime University (BSMRMU) recognition of the need and value of additional Quality Assurance training from an outside body it demonstrated self-awareness and aspiration. The commitment shown by the senior leadership and management team to such training proved a major contributory factor to its overall success. That said, there is always a danger with such training and appraisal that it is seen as an end in itself and herein can lie the risk that valuable lessons are not learnt, and processes and outlooks changed as a result.

Concentrated training of this nature is either resisted or embraced, and it is a great credit to the staff of BSMRMU that after some initial reticence and a little scepticism all personnel approached the training with professionalism and often with real enthusiasm. What was especially revealing was the hunger for additional insight into research and research publication and this is clearly an area that requires greater emphasis and focus. It is imperative that the institution sees itself in an international context and thus adapts its Quality Assurance mechanisms to reflect best practice. Benchmarking both locally and internationally needs to become routine and this requires an openness and outlook that is reflective and aspirational, one based on a healthy questioning culture and a solutions-orientated mindset.

There was clear evidence of a commitment to Quality Assurance, with plenty of excellent work taking place. That said, a crowded academic programme often means that staff have not always been able to fully utilise new skills and approaches and thus careful thought needs to be given to timing of training and room made for monitoring and follow-up. With heuristic learning being a key element of Quality Assurance, it was felt that additional benefit could be gained from ensuring more frequent mutual classroom observation with the aim of fostering greater knowledge sharing.

In respect of the formal Quality Assurance mechanism and processes it would help if these were codified and standardised in such a manner that all staff could take ownership of the process. A robust Quality Assurance system not only sets standards but should help provide the scaffolding to assist staff and other stakeholders. Engendering a wider appreciation and understanding of Q.A. international standards need to be of paramount importance as does institutional and even departmental benchmarking. There are clear signs at BSMRMU of an aspirational desire in respect of Q.A., but this needs to be embedded in all activities and attitudes on a daily basis so as to prevent complacency. It would help if the institution capitalised on the evident enthusiasm for research and thus works assiduously to ensure that as many staff as possible upskill themselves and work to place research papers in scholarly international journals.

Central to continued success will be the role and example of those in key leadership and management roles. Equally an effective and supportive mentoring process could help shape and develop a supportive culture, one that is dynamic and aspirational in nature. The Micro-Compass Quality Assurance Programme (MCQAP) helped concentrate minds and has gone some way to crystallising existing ideas and thoughts, but it is important to recognise that this is only part of the process. There needs to be a

systematic approach to Q.A. that involves all stake holders, one that is regularly reviewed and given adequate time, personnel, and resources to ensure that it becomes a cornerstone of continuing success.

It was heartening to see that the senior leadership team and staff at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Maritime University are receptive to new ideas and thus are well placed to drive forward academic standards in an environment that puts Quality Assurance firmly at its heart. By acting on the recommendations listed in this report matters will be further advanced to the benefit of all concerned.

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