

# Quality in Education, Training and Lifelong Learning: The Path to Education Excellence Through ISO 10015

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*Distinguished Chairperson Mr. Kakkar, Distinguished panellist, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen*

*It is a great honour for me and my colleague, Tommie Johansson, to be here at this very important event, 2<sup>nd</sup> National Quality Conclave on behalf of the International Organization for Standardization in Geneva. A special thanks to Mr. Girdhar Gyani, Quality Conclave India, for his kind invitation.*

*The topic that I will address today relates to ISO 10015 quality standard for training (and education). It is a relatively young and less known QMS in the ISO9000 family. But let me start from the beginning. Why it is important to apply similar management principles of quality to the education and training sectors.*

High quality education can positively influence labour factor conditions of a country's economic development. The availability of a highly skilled labour force is a factor contributing substantially to national or regional economic development. Most countries consider investment in education as being of strategic importance to enhance national competitiveness and to increase opportunities to attract foreign direct investment.<sup>1</sup> Today such investment has been expanded to cover a much longer life span of the work force in order to sustain national competitiveness in a globalised world. This is no exception for India and this point has been reiterated by many distinguished personalities and speakers today.

Analyses of factors ensuring competitiveness and prosperity of leading European and North American regions have shown a consistent pattern. Summarising the results of a cross-regional survey covering 20 regions in Europe and North America, Koellreuter<sup>2</sup> identified 50 factors, which have an influence on a region's economic advantage. The most decisive factors in ranking order (1 being most important) are a) Availability of highly skilled labour (1); b) Price/performance of highly skilled labour (2); c) Price/performance of skilled labour (5); Availability of skilled labour (6).

Making education fit a country's current and future needs in the fields of economic and social development is crucial for the country's ability to adapt to the continuous changes of the world's economy. Adequate educational systems are needed to ensure the availability of a skilled and highly skilled labour force, without which economic and social development will be jeopardized and local and foreign investment discouraged.

Higher enrolment of higher education coupled with greater diversity of the educational sector has triggered governmental concerns about quality. Informal approach to quality assurance, suitable in the past with only a few institutions and relatively small enrolment, are now seen as insufficient for a larger system of higher education.<sup>3</sup> This shift to formal systems of quality assurance is one of the most significant trends affecting higher education over the last decades. Emergence of knowledge society and the commercialisation of the educational services have further strengthened the sense of urgency.

Accreditation, standard setting, self-study, external review and public ranking are some of the broadly accepted approaches to evaluate and ensure quality of higher education. Nevertheless, debates continue over the role and proper form of evaluation and quality assurance for higher education. There is an increasing recognition that these widely accepted approaches focus primarily on the “qualification” of the educational institutions to offer programmes and to grant degrees, in addition to their intake “capacity”. In contrast, these quality assurance instruments have paid much less attention to the learning processes and the learning outcome of higher education. More so, how to use quality assurance instruments for better alignment of higher education with labour market demands has yet to surface.

There also exists the perception that current quality evaluation systems are often designed from the perspective of the regulatory authority and their needs. Diverse forms of evaluation are meant to provide feedback to the authorities for policy evaluation and planning purpose. These evaluation systems tend to be driven by the respective authorities who use resource allocation as leverage for administrative control and for operational improvement.

In a diversified higher education system, such evaluation and performance management instruments need to be supported by additional quality assurance tools such as ISO 10015 to ensure proper return on investment (resource utilisation and economic and social benefits) and consumer satisfaction (manifested by employability and social mobility). This additional battery of quality assurance instruments should have the following characteristics: independence, results based, process oriented, and self-regulatory.

Excellence in education is the fast lane of moving a country and its people up the development ladder. While accreditation ensures the minimum requirements of offering degree programmes or certified education, and while programme evaluation provides periodical overview of the performance of education institutions, neither addresses the employability of graduates in the labour market nor the actual learning outcomes. To achieve excellence in education, a more process oriented quality management instrument that ensures on-going involvement of employer organisations and society at large in the education process and focusing on the learning outcome is a necessary requisite.

Education however covers not only higher education, but the whole range of learning activities from cradle to grave in the context of life long learning. In light of limited access to higher education, more emphasis of quality education needs also to be put on basic education, secondary education and VET. Graduates of these education institutions are the backbone of a society and workplaces.

A better match between the labour demand and supply are crucial for stability and for inclusion in any country. At the moment, most countries have failed to live up to the promise that education would deliver better earning, a more productive workforce and would allow more youngsters participate in the prosperity. World Bank report on this topic points to this dark fact. It showed that in the past 50 years most developing countries have increased their education expenditures.

However only a few countries, mostly in East and South East Asia actually proved the causal relations between higher education attainments with improved individual earning capacities. Why?

As the Honourable President of India said in his inaugural address, quality is about indigenous design, development and production. How often do the requirements of its customers and its stakeholder the education process take into consideration? How often does the education institution actually deliver a learning process that would meet these requirements? The call for indigenous design, development and production by the President Kalam is also applicable for the education process. It is time to put students, their future employers and the society at the centre of the quality of education debate.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is time to consider the triple bottom line. Social, economic, and environmental indicators are also applicable as measures for the quality of education. By social bottomline, I mean the quality of citizenship, the accessibility of quality education by all, the social mobility based on competence, and inclusion based on meaningful participation of individual graduates in the community. Economic bottomline, I mean employability, earning capability, productivity, and quality of work. The last but not least, the environmental bottomline needs to measure contribution to environmental preservation and sustainable development.

Education involves the development of character, competence, citizenship and learning capacity for the future. There are tremendous costs involved when quality of education is poor, such as unemployment, wasted individual lives, social tension, substandard performance, poor quality of products and services, and low productivity. This list is long! The ISO 10015 standard is a process management tool to ensure reliability of the learning process and to guarantee that learning is closely aligned with the needs of students, employers and society. Quality of education therefore needs to be measured by the employability of graduates and its contribution to the triple bottomlines of the communities or societies at large.

ISO 10015 is designed for the in-service training as well. It is a QMS to make sure that investments made in training your staff will be aligned with the business strategy and can translate into **increased** productivity, cost reduction, reduction of cycle time and innovation. ISO 10015 is developed to ensure that training is not just cost but investment into the firm's future. ISO 10015 is the QMS to help companies better utilise its training dollars in achieving its business objectives. Competent staff not only guarantees the firm's execution capability, but also increases its competitiveness in the market.

Ten minutes is too short for going into the specifics of the standard itself. More information is available from the Bureau for Indian Standards and Confederation of Indian Industries as well as the ISO website. There is a short article in the ISO Focus Magazine on the ISO 10015 standard and its use. More information, of course, can also be obtained from myself and my colleague, Tommie Johansson who, as one of the experts on TC 176 contributed to the development of this standard.

Thank you, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, for your attention. Thank you, Mr. Chairman for inviting us to join this distinguished panel.

## References

<sup>1</sup> Michie, Jonathan (2002), "Foreign Direct Investment and Human Capital Enhancement in Developing Countries, Competition & Change", 6, pp. 363-372.

<sup>2</sup> Christoph Koellreuter, "Increasing Globalisation: Challenge for the European Regions", BAK International Benchmark Report, 1997, Basle.

<sup>3</sup> El-Khawas, Depietro-Jurand & Holm-Nielson, 1998, **Quality Assurance in Higher Education: Recent Progress; Challenges Ahead**. Paper contributed by the World Bank at the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education, October 5-9. Paris.