



WEBINAR:
QUALITY ASSURANCE OF ONLINE LEARNING

FINAL REPORT

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FUNDACIÓN PARA LA
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Introduction

During the last term of 2020, the Tarea Global Foundation set to explore the feasibility to conduct a webinar on the issue of Quality Assurance of Online Learning. The need to address the topic arose from the information gathered in several webinars attended throughout 2020, formal and informal conversations with staff (academic and non-academic) from different universities in Chile and in the South American region, and the expert advice of members of the Foundation's advisory board.

Forced by the COVID-19 pandemic, universities all around the globe had to switch massively from contact sessions to primarily online delivery of their programs. Institutions struggled during the year to structure and articulate an offer to satisfy the urgent need to continue their course provision. The challenge was even greater for those HEIs which had not consistently developed e-learning courses before 2020.

By the end of the year, most institutions in the Latin American region had managed to deliver distance education courses, with diverse degrees of success, in at least part of their program offer.

Once the initial urge to secure online courses was tackled, the discussion quickly focused on whether the distance learning offer was meeting the desirable quality standards and whether learning outcomes were comparable to those of traditional contact-based classes and lectures. In many cases the issue was framed within the idea that online education was implemented as a temporary solution to be overridden during the second semester of 2020, as soon as the pandemic was under control. Time has proven that the health crisis is to be longer than anticipated and that preventive measures need to be extended probably further beyond 2021, thus online programs will need to continue.

Furthermore, the advantages and possibilities of distance learning have become more evident for HEIs. This will probably result in a more permanent and broad online learning offer than the available before the COVID crisis. Online teaching and learning will become a necessary feature of HEIs across the world even when 'regular' classes and activities are resumed. Consequently, reflecting on how to ensure quality standards of online learning has become an even more pressing concern.

The webinar 'Quality Assurance of Online Learning' was held on January 20th (Santiago). The activity was possible thanks to the collaboration between Tarea Global Foundation, the Australian Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE), the Spanish National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA) and the Catholic University of Temuco (Chile).

Quality Assurance Webinar - concept

On the face of such concerns, Tarea Global addressed the need to organize a webinar in which 18

We conducted some research into HE systems that had a longer tradition of online programs and had already accumulated experience and knowledge on quality assurance of online learning before the 2020 context. A pre COVID approach would provide more of a long-term perspective, beyond the immediate response to the scenario brought about by the pandemic. We also contacted HEIs in Chile to identify local examples of actions undertaken in the matter.

As a result of the research, the webinar content involved four topics:

a) NATIONAL AGENCY FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT AND ACCREDITATION -ANECA - (SPAIN)

ANECA had developed a strategy for quality assurance of online programs and short courses before the pandemic, which they emphasised in the face of the 2020 contingency. The Agency also has a long-standing history of collaboration with HEI's in Latin America and it is considered a referent in the tertiary education sector.

We contacted Dr. Rafael Llavori, ANECA's Director for International Relations and member of Tarea Global's Advisory Board, who agreed to take part in the activity.

b) APEC - QUALITY ASSURANCE of ONLINE LEARNING TOOLKIT

Another source of international evidence was the Toolkit published by APEC. It provided a comprehensive insight of the issue based on multiple international experiences and an analytical structure that facilitates the identification of the many elements involved in quality assurance.

Through Ms Eliana Chamizo, from the International Relations Office at the Ministry of Education of Chile, we contacted Ms Karen Welsh from Australia's Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) requesting help identifying an expert who could present the Toolkit at the webinar.

Ms Welsh introduced us to Ms Carrie Kilpin, Director at the International Strategy Section, International Partnerships Branch at DESE. Ms Kilpin liaised with Ms Tricia Roessler who had previously conducted APEC Workshops on the Toolkit and who was involved in the production of the

document whilst working at the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency of Australia (TEQSA). Ms Roessler accepted to be a panellist on the webinar.

c) UNIVERSIDAD CATÓLICA DE TEMUCO – EDUCATION TECHNOLOGY DEPT. (CHILE)

The Universidad Católica de Temuco provided an interesting example of a local and concrete experience in the subject. The Education Technology Department had developed a series of criteria to secure quality standards based on local (guidelines by the Chilean National Accreditation Agency) and international frameworks (Online Learning Consortium - OLC). Dr Monica Kaechele, Director of the Education Technology Department, accepted to present at the panel.

d) QATAR FOUNDATION (QATAR)

The Webinar considered a fourth presentation that could encompass a broader view of the issue, situating it as a present and future global challenge for tertiary education. This perspective was provided by Dr Francisco Marmolejo, former World Bank Tertiary Education Expert and currently Adviser at the Qatar Foundation. Dr Marmolejo is also a member of Tarea Global's Advisory Committee.

Invitation and registration processes

Tarea Global issued e-mail invitations to HEIs across Latin America to take part of the webinar. The process relied on our own data bases and the associations and networks of institutions that are part of our collaborators.

Particularly effective were the invitations sent through ASCUN (Colombian National Association of Universities), the Agency for International Development Cooperation at the Chilean Foreign Affairs Ministry (AGCI) and through Ms Andrea Valencia, Policy Manager at the Australian Embassy in Mexico.

The registration process incorporated a short survey to collect information such as the participants' location, their role within their institutions and their initial understanding of the QA of online learning issues, among other related data.

The call and registration processes yielded a positive result with 568 registrations from over 190 institutions in 16 countries.

Although the actual turnout to the webinar was just shy of 50% of the registered participants, we still assess it as a remarkably successful outcome, well beyond the organizers' expectations. The 550+ contact details collected will be a useful resource in future activities.

Registrants' Data

The following is a summary of the information gathered through the registration process:

REGISTRANTS BY COUNTRY	
México	236
Colombia	156
Chile	85
Honduras	23
Panamá	21
Ecuador	13
Perú	13
Brasil	5
Argentina	3
Costa Rica	3
Other	10
TOTAL	568

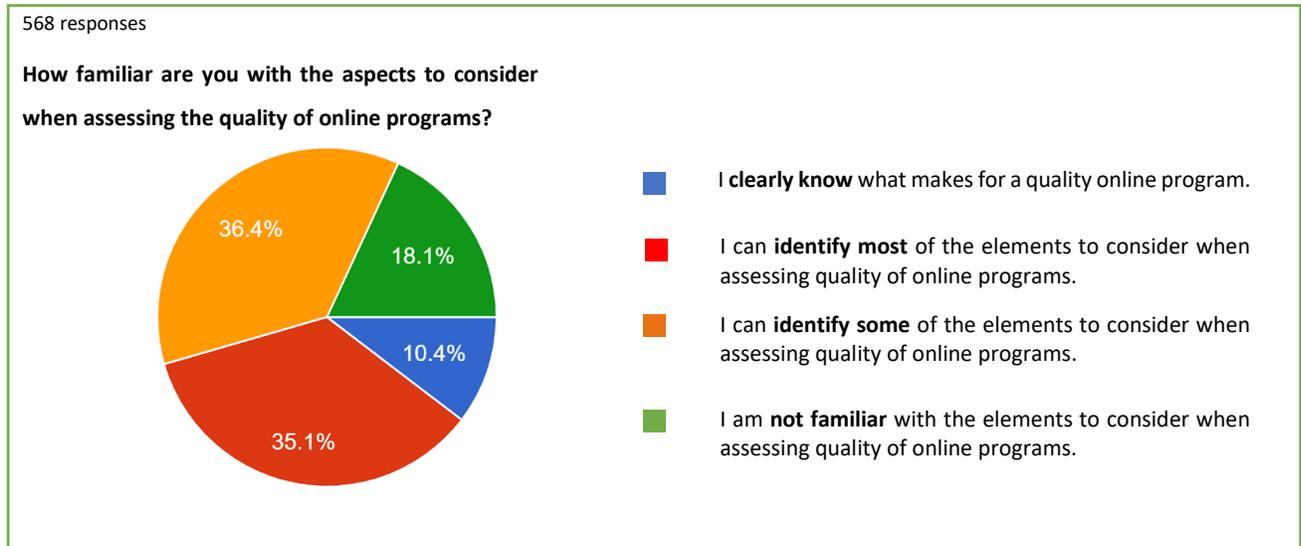
GENRE	
Female	354
Male	214
TOTAL	568

MAIN ROLE WITHIN THEIR INSTITUTION	FREQUENCY	%
Lecturer / Teacher	290	51%
Program and course design	105	18%
Quality Assurance	79	14%
International Relations	22	8%
Other	72	9%
TOTAL	568	100%

Besides the participants' demographics, the survey aimed at collecting some information regarding:

- The participants previous knowledge about quality assurance of online learning programs.
- The participants preconceptions regarding online learning.

The results indicated that **45.5%** of the registrants stated to have a solid knowledge of what makes for a quality online program whilst **54.5%** had only 'some' or no knowledge.



The survey also included a set of statements to collect some insight regarding preconceptions about online learning from the registered participants. The statements were based on a survey previously applied at an APEC workshop for Vietnamese universities.

568 responses

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
It is easier for students to cheat in online courses	7%	50%	45%	3%
Online learning outcomes should be comparable to those of regular classroom classes	9%	25%	43%	23%
The quality principles applicable to face-to-face learning are applicable to online learning	8%	35%	40%	16%
It is easier for students to become disengaged in online courses	8%	32%	42%	16%

The results indicate that:

- **48%** of the registrants believe it is easier for students to cheat on online courses.
- **66%** agree that learning outcomes should be comparable between online and traditional face-to-face classes.
- **56%** agree that same quality principles should be applied to online and classroom courses.
- **58%** agree that students' engagement is more problematic in online courses.

Post webinar data

Preconceptions Survey

Following the online session, it was possible for participants to access www.tareaglobal.org to review the webinar material (presentation videos, the APEC Toolkit, power point files and reference material used by the panellists). Access instructions were emailed to the 568 initial registrants.

To view the material, participants had to confirm whether they had taken part in the webinar. Those who answered YES were redirected to a new survey which replicated the same question applied in the previous survey regarding preconceptions of online learning. The aim was to contrast pre- and post-webinar answers to verify if there were any changes in such perceptions that could be attributed to the online session. There was a total of **150** responses for the post-webinar survey.

The following is a summary of the information gathered through the post webinar survey:

ATENDEES BY COUNTRY	
México	69
Colombia	44
Chile	11
Honduras	8
Ecuador	5
Panamá	4
Perú	2
Argentina	2
Other	5
TOTAL	150

GENRE	
Female	92
Male	58
TOTAL	150

MAIN ROLE WITHIN THEIR INSTITUTION	FREQUENCY	%
Lecturer / Teacher	80	53%
Quality Assurance	26	18%
Program and course design	23	15%
International Relations	12	8%
Other	9	6%
TOTAL	150	100%

Using email addresses as ID for each case, the pre webinar responses for the same 150 cases were identified.

The following table summarises results from both surveys (for the same set of cases):

150 responses

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?	PRE WEBINAR RESPONSES				POST WEBINAR RESPONSES			
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
It is easier for students to cheat in online courses	7%	45%	45%	3%	5%	53%	37%	5%
Online learning outcomes should be comparable to those of regular classroom classes	11%	29%	36%	24%	3%	21%	47%	29%
The quality principles applicable to face-to-face learning are applicable to online learning	13%	33%	34%	20%	8%	23%	41%	28%
It is easier for students to become disengaged in online courses	11%	31%	43%	15%	11%	26%	51%	12%

When before and after responses are compared, the results show a positive change in the preconceptions:

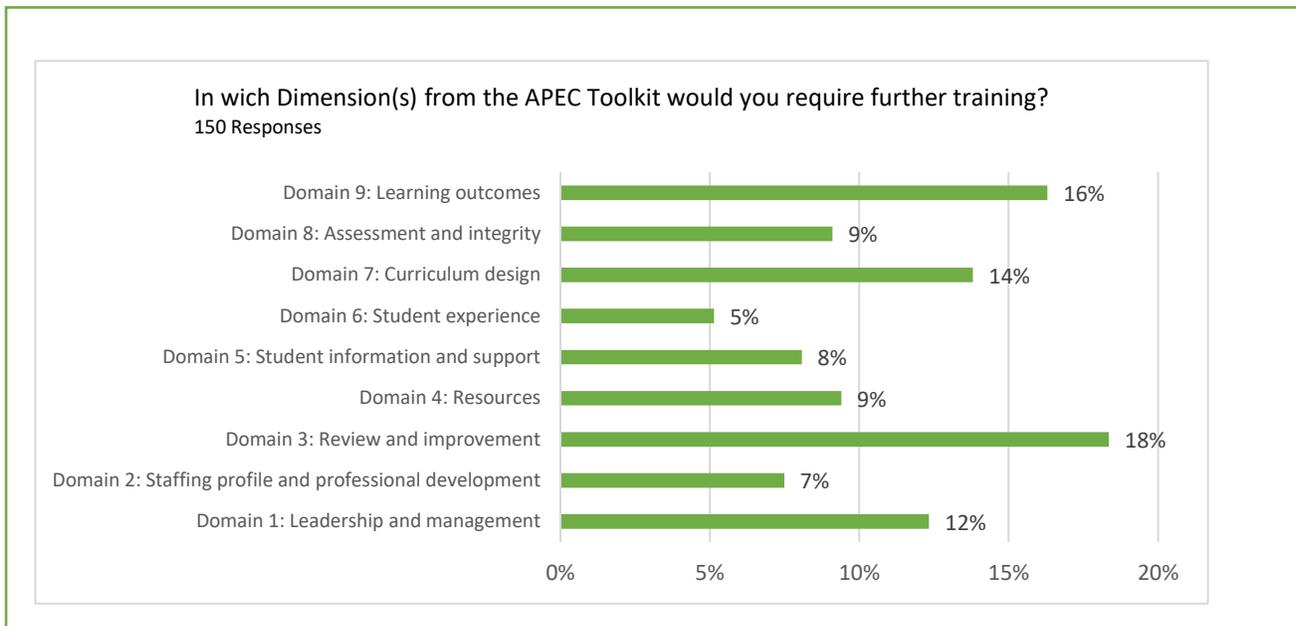
- Before the webinar, **48%** of the participants believed it is easier for students to cheat on online courses. The percentage falls to **42%** after the webinar.
- There is an increase of **16%** of participants who think learning outcomes of online courses should be comparable to those of regular classroom classes (from **60%** to **76%**).
- Before the webinar, **54%** of the participants agreed that same quality principles should be applied to online and classroom courses. The percentage increased to **69%** after the webinar.
- Finally, after the webinar there is a 5% increase of responses stating that it is easier for students to disengage in online courses, (**63%** post webinar vs. **58%** pre-webinar).

In general, the results of the comparison between the pre- and post-webinar surveys indicate that after taking part in the activity, the audience had a better understanding of some of the characteristics of online learning and the quality elements attached to them.

Further Needs

The post webinar survey also collected information regarding to areas in which the audience needed further in-depth information and training.

The question was structured using the dominions comprised in the APEC Toolkit.



The responses show that there is a need for further learning about **Domain 3: Review and Improvement** (18%), followed by **Domain 9: Learning Outcomes** (16%) and **Domain 7: Curriculum Design** (14%).

Also, the survey's results show that the **Student Experience Domain (Domain 6)** is the least frequent answer, with only 5%, followed by **Staffing Profile and Professional Development (Domain 2)**.

Final Conclusions and Future Steps

1. Participation

- The webinar provided clear evidence of the high interest on the subject among HEIs in the Latin American region. Despite its limited promotion and dates that coincided with university summer breaks, the webinar attracted more than 500 potential participants.
- Originally, we had estimated in around 100 the number actual participants. The actual number reached over twice as many people.
- The webinar had a peak over 250 participants and 190 of them stayed connected throughout the entire session which ran more than 30 minutes overtime. This could be interpreted as evidence of the high level of interest of the participants.
- The seemingly lower attendance turnout could be explained by school calendar difficulties. For instance, in Colombia and Mexico institutions returned from summer break the same week of the webinar, Chilean institutions were closing the 2020 academic year, and in Argentina HEIs go on academic recess during January. This factor could have had a negative effect in the attendance.

2. Outcomes

- Even though panellist had a limited time to address their presentations, the pre- and post-surveys demonstrate that there was a positive effect regarding the preconceptions of online learning held by those who took part in the webinar.
- A total of 150 post-webinar surveys were submitted during the week after the webinar. As explained earlier these represent 150 people who attended the webinar and logged in afterwards to follow up on related documents and resources. They represent 79% of the attendants who took part in the entire activity.

- These 150 participants could become a potential group keen to engage in future activities on the subject.

- The comments and questions received during the webinar showed that:
 - The practical examples provided by the Catholic University of Temuco resonated with the audience. Participants valued the fact that actual practices from a 'regular' university helped to grasp a better understanding of the concept of QA of online learning and in particular the concepts contained in the APEC Toolkit.
 - There was a better understanding that the issue of QA needs to be developed internally and individually by each institution and that frameworks such as the Toolkit and the ANECA strategy provide relevant tools to that aim.
 - Online programs have helped to expose grey areas of tertiary education, such as the actual dynamics of classroom teaching and learning. These challenges brought about by the online provision of programs are a global issue that concerns HEIs around the globe, and
 - That online programs are here to stay hence institutions need to develop ongoing QA strategies.

3. Training Needs

- Domains 3 and 9 from the APEC Toolkit appeared clearly as the areas perceived as less developed and requiring further information and eventually training.

- The fact that the least mentioned Domain when addressing needs is the Domain related to Students Experience rises some questions. Is it an area that has been properly addressed and does not require further work or does it remain an area that tends to be invisible for HEIs?

Future Steps

Based on the overall experience, and considering the information gathered through the questions addressed to the panellists and the surveys responses, we believe there is plenty of room and needs for further information, training, and access to resources.

Some of our suggestions for future action on the subject consider:

1. Translate the APEC Toolkit into Spanish and distribute it in HEI's in the Latin American region.

The language barrier is an obstacle to promote the contents of the Toolkit through the region. A Spanish version of the document would facilitate expanding its use as a resource to encourage HEIs to adopt and develop strategies to ensure quality of their online programs.

The adoption of common guidelines to secure quality standards could be a powerful tool for online programs of Latin American tertiary institutions to gain participation in the Asia Pacific HEI community.

Outcome: Spanish version of the Toolkit available online and promoted in HEIs across the region.

2. Collect further evidence on the Student Experience Domain in the Latin American region.

Given the low priority attributed to Domain 6, we suggest to further investigate on the subject. This goal could be achieved by carrying out a small number of online focus groups with students from different HEIs in the region. The participants students could be contacted through some of the participants who took part in the webinar and/or through our Foundation's contact network.

Outcome: Evidence of students' perception of their online experience in HEIs in Latin America.

3. Develop a pilot program of further training.

We suggest building a short training tool (in Spanish) to promote the Toolkit and its use. The strategy for the pilot considers designing online modules to review the domains of the Toolkit that seem to attract more interest (Domains 3 and 9). The methodology should include self-paced activities combined with synchronic online sessions.

The results of the pilot could inform the development of more modules covering the rest of the Domains of the Toolkit. The training tool could be distributed through APEC offices in the region.

The strategy would boost the adoption of the Toolkit in the region at a larger scale than promoting it through face-to-face workshops and seminars, even in the pandemic context.

Outcome: Online learning module on Domain 3 of the Toolkit distributed and completed by a sample of universities in Latin America.

4. Webinar series: Toolkit Domains.

Finally, we suggest designing and implementing a series of webinars throughout 2021 to address the contents of the Toolkit with more depth.

The webinar series could be organised following the structure of the Domains. It should involve the participation of fewer panellists allowing for more time for the presentations and audience participation. This strategy should be carried out in parallel with the publishing of a Spanish version of the Toolkit and the development of a pilot for training and professional development on QA of Online Learning.

Outcome: Series of online webinars addressing one or more of the Toolkit's Domains using a more workshop-like design.