Report on Quality Assurance in Physiotherapy Education

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REPORT ON QUALITY ASSURANCE IN PHYSIOTHERAPY EDUCATION

European Region of the World Confederation for Physical Therapy (WCPT)
Education Matters WG

Background

Quality Assurance (QA) is a system of recognised procedures for establishing standards in Higher Education. This report covers a follow-up survey of the range of measures employed within the European Region of WCPT to carry out Quality Assurance within Higher Education. A survey tool was developed by the Education Working Group and used for an initial report to the General meeting in 2006. The same questionnaire was sent to all Member Organisations (Member Organizations) for evaluation and preparation of a further report to be presented at the General Meeting in 2008, and to prepare a report for the General Meeting in 2010. The questionnaire was applied in reference to the policy document Quality Assurance in Physiotherapy Education and an accompanying PowerPoint guide to Quality Assurance available from the ER-WCPT website. In 2011 the questionnaire was sent again, adding a new question in order to collate examples of quality assurance processes that could be of use as guidance for all the MOs and to update the 2010 report.

Nineteen completed questionnaires were returned, resulting in a response ratio of 51.35% in 2012. The ratio of responses was lower than in the previous collection (51.35% in 2012 versus 64% in 2010).

Five countries (Malta, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia and Ukraine) that never have answered before did this time.

Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Ireland, Israel, Latvia and Lebanon that answered in 2010 the questionnaire did not answer the 2012 questionnaire.

The WG decided to also include in this report the above mentioned responses from 2010 in order to map better the reality of QA in the region having as a result a compilation of 27 responses, and a response ratio of 72.97%, for the analysis.
Table 1: Responding States.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Replying Member Organisations in 2006</th>
<th>Replying Member Organisations in 2008</th>
<th>Replying Member Organisations in 2010</th>
<th>Replying Member Organisations in 2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy, Liechtenstein, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, UK</td>
<td>Austria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Norway, Spain</td>
<td>Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Israel, Latvia, Lebanon, Liechtenstein, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, U.K.</td>
<td>Austria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, UK, Ukraine</td>
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The information sought concerned the following areas:

- National Agencies for QA
- National Regulatory Body role in QA
- MO role in QA
- Case examples on QA from MO or from schools within MOs country.

The report will consist of sections reporting on these aspects of the investigation.

National Agencies for Education QA

Twenty-one (sixteen in 2010) Member Organisations indicated that there was a National Agency responsible for QA work, which would cover physiotherapy education. In three (two in 2010) countries (Lebanon, Austria and Cyprus) the MO was working towards collaboration or developing national quality assurance processes. Ten MO’s reported that they were involved in the QA processes. The evaluations were repeated most often every three to six years, depending on the
country. One MO (Spain) reported that the frequency is different depending on being first or second/third the cycle. Sanctions were similar and commonly included loss of approval, suspension of programme, reorganisation, and further review.

**National Regulatory Body Involvement**

Twenty-one (fourteen in 2010) Member Organisations reported that there was a National Regulatory Body within their country with eleven (nine in 2010) taking a role in QA of education. Sanctions included were the same as used by National Agencies.

**Member Organisation Role in QA**

Thirteen MO’s (twelve in 2010) reported that they undertook QA procedures in assessing physiotherapy education and two (one in 2010) that they were working towards developing such processes. The frequency of such activity ranged from continuous, to a flexible approach allowing up to seven years between reviews.

Nineteen (seventeen in 2010) MO’s encourage the educational institutions to promote and use a wide range of QA procedures. The most commonly promoted procedures included Student Evaluation, self-evaluation within universities/schools, external visits and peer review.

Twelve MOs (no dates from 2010) have informed to the PT schools about the Guideline for standard evaluation process for accreditation/recognition of physical therapist professional entry-level education programmes (WCPT, 2011).

Finally, eight MOs gave some examples of good practices, as for instance Austria that supports a specific professional group in Education Matters that organize courses in cooperation with AQA (Australia Quality Agency).

Some misunderstandings have been detected in the answers from the MOs. For instance, one MOs said that in his country there is not National Agency for Education QA, when there is, as can be consulted through the ENQA (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education) web site.
Conclusions

From the responses received, it is confirmed that the majority of countries either already have some form of Quality Assurance process independent of the Member Organizations, or are in the process of developing such processes. It is evident that Member Organizations also promote the use of a range of QA procedures within the educational institutions, but the number seems to increase in a low rate for the last two years.

It must be reinforce the role of the MOs as a professional consultant for the education authorities, in relation to QA processes, working as a link between the Universities and the WCPT and the ER-WCPT policies.

It would seem to be of importance to continue to monitor the development and implementation of quality assurance measures in higher education in the Member Organizations of the European Region of the WCPT. It would also seem important that a catalogue of examples of QA processes be developed to ensure the sharing of good practice.

Recommendations

1. The Education Working Group should review the topic of quality assurance procedures in physiotherapy education and consider possible actions, including exploring the role of international accreditation as well as considering the development of European guidelines and improve the existing tool kit resources to support Quality Assurance process.

2. The Education Working Group should be aware of possible misunderstandings when the MOs are asking about the QA topic, and take the appropriate actions to avoid them.

3. Member Organisations should be encouraged to promote quality assurance processes in the physiotherapy education programmes according to the “Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area” approved by the ministers of education within the Bologna process¹.

4. Member Organisations should be encouraged to work with the national authorities on this issue and the educational institutions.

¹ see European Network on Quality Assurance; ENQA http://www.enqa.eu/