

“Towards a Global Ministry-Led Quality Assurance Framework for Transnational Higher Education: Bridging Regulatory Gaps Through Collaborative Governance”

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Abstract:

Transnational Higher Education (TNE) has emerged as a cornerstone of global educational strategy, with over 450,000 students enrolled in UK programmes alone delivered offshore, and strategic education hubs like the UAE hosting more than 30 international branch campuses. However, current quality assurance (QA) systems remain fragmented, characterised by regulatory duplication, cultural misalignment, and insufficient stakeholder engagement across borders.

This presentation introduces a novel, globally applicable ministry-led QA framework designed to address these persistent challenges through collaborative governance principles. Drawing from an integrated theoretical foundation combining Stakeholder Theory, Institutional Theory, Collaborative Governance Theory, Agency Theory, and Legitimacy Theory, the framework proposes five structural mechanisms: Joint Regulatory Councils (JRCs), Bilateral QA Compacts, Stakeholder Advisory Panels (SAPs), QA Equivalency Standards, and Integrated Data and Reporting Systems (IDRS).

Using comparative insights from the UK (as a leading TNE exporter) and UAE (as a strategic TNE importer), this research demonstrates how ministries of education can move from passive oversight to active orchestration of cross-border quality assurance. The framework emphasises structured flexibility—maintaining non-negotiable baseline standards whilst allowing contextual adaptation—and institutionalises stakeholder participation through formal advisory mechanisms.

Key findings reveal that current QA approaches suffer from: (1) regulatory fragmentation requiring dual compliance; (2) power asymmetries marginalising host-country voices; (3) limited transparency in cross-border data reporting; and (4) absence of trust-building mechanisms between sending and receiving institutions. The proposed framework addresses these gaps through co-regulation, shared accountability, and evidence-based decision-making.