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# Second Global Forum on International Quality Assurance, Accreditation and the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education

## "Widening Access to Quality Higher Education"

UNESCO, Paris
28 – 29 June 2004

## Background Document

Division of Higher Education
Section for Reform Innovation and Quality Assurance (RIQ)
http://www.unesco.org/education/higher_education/quality_innovation
http://www.unesco.org/education/higher_education/global_forum/second_meeting

Recommendations from Working Groups

Within the larger framework of widening access to quality higher education, five parallel working groups examining the issue from the different perspectives:

*Workshop 1*: ‘Mapping needs for the establishment of quality assurance frameworks at the regional and national level’

*Workshop 2*: ‘Quality Open Educational Resources (OER)’

*Workshop 3*: ‘Accessing to quality in distance education (including eLearning)’

*Workshop 4:* ‘Student empowerment for informed decision-making’

*Workshop 5*: ‘UNESCO standard-setting instruments: conventions and guidelines’

The group work allowed for more in-depth discussions and recommendations to UNESCO for follow-up, to enrich and support the Action Plan.

**Working Group 1: 'Strategy on Capacity Building in Quality Assurance, Accreditation and the Recognition of Qualifications'**

**Rapporteur**: Mohsen Said, Ministry of Higher Education, Projects Management Unit, Egypt

**Chairs**: Rick Hopper, World Bank; Peter van der Hijden, European Commission

The objective of this session was to provide a mapping of on-going activities in capacity-building for quality assurance, accreditation and the recognition of qualifications and to identify needs for further developments, in the framework of larger higher education policy frameworks.

This workshop addressed issues for capacity building from different aspects and regional perspectives, giving overviews of existing exercises and/or lessons learnt from different types of capacity-building. It highlighted experiences from Asia and the Pacific, Africa, the Southern Mediterranean countries and South-East Europe that had undergone capacity-building exercises. The workshops also brought together representatives of the donor community: the World Bank, the EU Commission, SIDA-SAREC.

**Recommendations**

Following the discussions during two sessions, the need for capacity-building at four levels was identified:

- Institutional Level: development of internal quality management; development of fair access and recognition practices and promotion of cooperation among HEIs;
- National Level: establishment of National Information Centres and QA systems and agencies; involvement of a variety of stakeholders; need to encourage institutions to establish strategic plans for QA as part of overall HE strategic reform plan;
- Regional Level: support towards the establishment of regional networks of QAA agencies and regional networks of recognition information centres; need to involve educational policy makers but also educational administrators; support for collaborative research and training activities;
- International Level: promotion of cross-border education; development of policy frameworks for QA and Recognition using, inter alia, the regional recognition conventions; creation of clearing-house functions and organization of fora for coordination; establishment and maintenance of portals or databases of quality institutions and QAA bodies.

These reforms are to be based on national needs and enable national partners. The target groups identified were teachers and students. It was recommended that in the long-term perspective, UNESCO was to link with other IGOs and funding agencies, notably the World Bank and the EU.

**Working Group 2: 'Open Educational Resources Workshop'**

**Rapporteur:** Sally Johnstone, Executive Director, Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications (WCET), U.S.A.

**Chair:** Susan D'Antoni, International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP)

This session described developments in Open Educational Resources (OER), specifically related to the sharing of content.

These presentations were followed by lively discussions that continued with about 1/3 of the people for three hours the following morning. The following recommendations and statements were agreed upon for presentation to the whole group of delegates at the final session on 29 June and summarize the critical elements of the discussions.

Open Educational Resources (OER) as a movement is a direct reaction to the privatization of knowledge. OER champions sharing of knowledge worldwide to increase human intellectual capacity. OER is not a degree awarding strategy.

**Recommendations:**

**Broaden definition of OER to include:**

- Learning resources
- Courseware, content modules, learning objects, learner support and assessment tools, on-line learning communities
- Resources to support teachers
- Tools for teachers and support materials to enable them to create, adapt and use OER; as well as training materials for teachers; and other teaching tools
- Resources to assure the quality of education and educational practices.

**UNESCO should create a forum to support communities of interest** to encourage the sharing of OER, and the development of capacity for all cultures to develop their own OER projects

**UNESCO should take the lead in creating Principles of Good Practice for OER that will include:**

- Encouraging use of open source software, adherence to international standards, usability, ethics, etc.
- Encouraging self-managed communities to monitor and help to enhance the quality of specific OER projects

**UNESCO sensitizes decision makers to the value of OER for educational and educator capacity building** and also raises the awareness of the educational community. OER is a strategic approach to supporting education as a public good.

**Recommended strategies:**

**International**

- UNESCO creates portal of OER projects
- UNESCO creates a working group to clarify the five recommendations and implement the strategies

**Regional**

- UNESCO creates language-specific communities for OER resources
- UNESCO stimulates the development of OER content in areas needed for local development

**Workshop 3: 'Access to quality higher education provision in distance education'**

**Rapporteur**: Zeynep Varoglu, UNESCO Division of Higher Education

**Chair**: Dr Altaf Hussein, Pro-Vice Chancellor, Allama Iqbal University, Pakistan.

The objectives of this session are to provide background on issues and developments related to quality assurance of distance education (including eLearning). It provided an overview of quality assurance procedures at the institutional level, focusing on Mega-University models for quality assurance; and discussion on main topics of concern for quality assurance of distance education.

Highlighted in this discussion was that the largest demand in those wanting to access higher education will occur in the coming years from developing countries. As traditional face-to-face education will not be able to meet these demands, distance education will be key to meeting this demand. It is however important to underscore that distance education delivery mode for higher education holds the largest potential for expanding access to higher education while it is vulnerable to the propagation of degree mills.

**Recommendations:**

**Fostering of inter-governmental cooperation in cross-border higher education**

- There is a need to ensure that importing and exporting countries are cooperating to ensure the quality of cross-border provision. This would include sharing information on how the exporting country is assuring quality with the importing country.

**Colllecting Data/Sharing information**

- Need for more fora for dialogue between key stakeholders in distance education to discuss the issue of quality assurance of distance education.
- Need for more data, on a more systematic basis as an instrument for dialogue among different actors.
- Sharing the fruits of regional meetings and interactions at the international level.
- Need for indicators to determine to what extent policy in higher education is contributing to the development of our societies; important issues are at stake such as employability.
- Need to ensure that all stakeholders active in the field are involved in the information exchange, and ensuring the sharing experiences of active stakeholders to guard against the duplication of efforts where relevant.
- Need for more information on distance education from the developing world

**Links to Recognition Frameworks**

- Linking to recognition frameworks will promote the credibility of higher education provided through distance education
- Learning from ECTS system – consensus building process to make sure that learning is part of a transparent and open system. This is particularly important for

promoting lifelong learning (LLL). It was stressed that it is important to look at the experiences including the success and failures of this European process at the global level.

- Use of an instrument similar to the Lisbon Recognition Convention Code of Good Practice in TNE that could be modified to look at distance education in general (eLearning in particular, perhaps).

**Support to the different roles for different stakeholders**

- Move towards a more systematic approach to meeting the challenges of ensuring quality distance education. This would include support for different stakeholders (e.g. public responsibility of governments, institutions, students, quality assurance agencies) in carrying out their specific responsibilities in ensuring the quality of higher education through distance education.

**Working Group 4: 'Student empowerment for informed decision-making'**

**Rapporteur**: Frank E. Gertze, Director of the Namibia Qualifications Authority, Namibia

**Chair:** Ms Vanja Ivosevic, Executive Committee, the National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB), Belgium

The objective of this session was to focus on proposals for capacity building for students by developing information tools on quality higher education provision worldwide.

This session included an overview of existing tools for informing students on quality higher education provision worldwide. In addition, discussions centered on a strategy for developing new tools for empowering students to make informed decisions in order to evaluate the quality of learning experiences offered.

Highlighted in the discussions were the differing experiences of students in developing and developed countries with a focus on the perceived outcomes and actual outcomes of qualifications. In addition, increasing use of business terminology in higher education was underscored. This was particularly relevant in discussions of strategy development for student involvement, marketing practices and capacity building and empowerment training. The inclusion of key stakeholders in capacity building for informed decision-making was prominent in the discussions. The key stakeholders were identified as: students, individuals, national bodies, international bodies, providers of higher education both local and international, employers, school counsellors, NGOs, community organisations, professional bodies, quality assurance agencies, governments and international bodies.

**Recommendations:**

Following discussions during one session the following recommendations for follow up were made:

- Ensure that the students play an active role in driving quality assurance systems. Involve all students in the information dissemination and empowerment campaigns. The focus of the 3rd Global Forum was recommended to be students.
- Need to carry out a clear needs analysis in this area with regard to the needs of students and existing resources to meet these needs. The importance of extending the reach to all students and aspiring/potential students was highlighted.
- Consultations with national agencies to best simplify and publish information. It was suggested that common features of national lists of accredited qualifications be identified. It was also recommended that these lists should be consolidated and harmonized.
- Ensure that the requirements and focus are clear with regard to academics, undergraduate, post-graduate students and potential students are clearly taken into account.
- Involve all partners to demystify basic concepts about quality assurance.

- Develop an internally consistent database of terminology.
- Allow international bodies to become visible in the face of transnational delivery of qualifications.
- Further data collection and research on issues such as: identification of the typical student profile in the 21st Century; identification of existing systems and their weaknesses and strengths; the role of mass higher education and quality provision; and the role of other partners in the empowerment of students for making informed decisions.

**Working Group 5: 'UNESCO Standards Setting Instruments: Conventions and Guidelines'**
**Moderators:**
Mala Singh, Executive Director, Higher Education Quality Committee, South Africa

William Sabaya, President of the Regional Committee for the UNESCO African Regional Recognition Convention and Representative of the The Higher Education Accreditation Council, Tanzania

**Chair**: Sjur Bergan, Council of Europe

The session focused on presenting new initiatives and reporting on on-going ones, within the framework of standard-setting activities, as part of the implementation of the Global Forum Action Plan.

The first session, Chaired by Mala Singh (South Africa), presented an international initiative to draft joint UNESCO-OECD guidelines on 'Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education'. Jan Levy (Norway), Chair of the Drafting Group for the Guidelines, made an introductory presentation presenting the context of cross-border provision of higher education, the need to provide an educational response to the growing commercialization of higher education, and especially underlined the need for access to transparent information in order to protect learners. Receiving countries were respondents in the panel discussion so as to offer an input to its further development (China, Malaysia, Colombia).

The second session, Chaired by William Sabaya (Tanzania), provided a reporting on the state of the art of reviewing regional conventions on the recognition of studies and qualifications in higher education. The on-going work at regional level in Africa, the Arab States, Asia and the Pacific and the Mediterranean was highlighted in order to raise challenges and provide input for further work in this area.

The respective presentations and discussions pointed to the existence of a high degree of convergence of the needs met at the regional level with a special focus on making the conventions more relevant: e.g. introducing the principle of recognizing qualifications unless a 'substantial difference' could be proven; strengthening mechanisms for implementation through focal points and national information bodies; further promoting capacity-building on quality assurance and accreditation; crucial importance of information exchange through networking and databases; recognition of qualifications provided by new providers including distance education and eLearning, assessment of learning outcomes and use of transparency tools such as credit-transfer. The 'Guidelines on Quality Provision of Cross-border Higher Education' were perceived as supporting the revision process.

**<u>Recommendations:</u>**

**UNESCO-OECD Guidelines on Quality Provision of Cross-border Higher Education**

- Include a 'health warning' on diploma and accreditation mills, false documents, unhealthy providers;
- Include an obligation as to freedom of enquiry;
- Value-added in addressing a wide range of stakeholders;
- Effective only if adequately implemented.

**Revision of conventions on the recognition of qualifications:**

- Co-ordinate the different regional processes towards a new generations of conventions;
- Share information on a South-South axis;
- Use UNESCO-OECD guidelines in the process;
- Promote capacity-building for QA at internationally regionally and nationally, both at systems' and institutional level;
- Develop a network of practitioners and stakeholders;
- Organize a Global Forum on recognition issues.