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Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
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联合国教育、
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Ethics and Education

Ethics and Education

Combating unethical practices at all levels of education is an essential task for UNESCO in its efforts to make the right to a quality education for all a reality. As stated in the Monterrey Consensus on Financing for Development: unethical and corrupt practices constitute “a serious barrier to effective resource mobilization and allocation, and divert resources away from activities that are vital for poverty eradication and economic and sustainable development”. (Monterrey, 18-22 March 2002)

Improving access and ensuring equity, quality and efficiency in the education sector cannot be achieved without due attention to ethical issues. Several UNESCO studies suggest that the ‘leakage’ of educational funds is more severe for poor schools than for rich ones; that illegal payment for school entrance and other hidden costs help explain low school enrolment and high dropout rates amongst the poorest segments of the population and that the manipulation of pro-poor criteria contributes to reducing the overall resources available for those most in need.

Making the Right to Education a Reality

To facilitate progress towards the six Education for All (EFA) goals adopted during the Dakar Conference in 2000, urgent action is needed to deal with the unethical practices that exclude some children from primary and secondary school as well as from higher education.

Both in the case of unethical management of the education sector itself and in the case of unethical behavior at classroom level, it is of foremost importance for UNESCO and its partners in education to combat these practices. Current responses involve actions ranging from information-gathering and sharing to policy dialogue and capacity-building; from promoting professional codes of conduct to fighting against ‘diploma mills’ providing bogus qualifications.

Ethical Frameworks

Some major texts deal with these issues. As early as 1966, the ILO/UNESCO Recommendation Concerning the Status of Teachers referred to the importance of adopting codes of ethics “to ensure the prestige of the profession and the exercise of professional duties in accordance with agreed principles”. More recent texts, such

as the UN Convention against Corruption, UNCAC (Merida, December 2003), call upon the international community to focus more specifically on the fight against corruption. UNCAC commits all UN agencies, with each specialised agency, including UNESCO, having its particular role to play.

Ethical Challenges

As regards UNESCO’s mandate in education, key ethical issues include combating fake qualifications and diplomas, violence in schools, illegal fees, misuse of funds and theft of school equipment, discriminatory attitudes, sexual harassment, unjustified absenteeism and the collection of illegal fees.



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Such unethical practices are all the more damaging because one of the core roles of educational institutions is to reflect and foster values, ethics and responsible citizenship. Moreover, in the context of a globalised world, the emergence of knowledge societies

encourages more and more young people to turn to educational institutions to provide them with the means to join the knowledge economy. The resulting surge in demand is one which educational systems and institutions all over the world are trying to meet. It is also a demand which unethical businesses all over the world are increasingly trying to exploit.

Fake Diplomas – UNESCO’s Response

The integrity of the global higher education system is threatened by the multiplication of bogus operations known as degree mills. They respond to the boom in demand for advanced qualifications, particularly in the developing world, by offering spurious credentials. The globalisation of higher

The International Institute for Educational Planning: Activities on Ethics and Education

- **Collection of knowledge** on ethics and corruption in education, including the identification and study of success stories;
- Organization of **capacity building activities** for officials, donors and NGOs;
- Promotion of **policy dialogue** among various partners, including ministries of finance and of education, parliamentarians, agencies, civil society organizations, etc.;
- Promotion of **international co-operation**.

As part of its future orientations, IIEP has started:

- Developing a **toolkit on teacher codes of conduct**;
- Launching **new research on transparency in the targeting of incentives**, to compare different mechanisms for incentives allocation, in order to determine which ones prove more/less successful in reaching their intended beneficiaries.

education and the steady extension of the Internet facilitate their operations and also make it easier for them to cover their tracks when authorities move against them.

UNESCO and its partners are working in various ways to protect the integrity of higher education internationally and to promote capacity-building for quality assurance. UNESCO has created the *Global Forum for Quality Assurance and the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education* in order to give all stakeholders the opportunity to discuss these emerging issues. Together with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), UNESCO has developed *Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Cross-Border Higher Education*, which are now being used by many countries in developing their own legislation and/or policies.

To 'blacklist' bogus institutions is an impossible task, so UNESCO is taking a 'white list' approach and has launched an Internet portal that will bring together lists, provided by national governments, of officially recognised higher education institutions. When governments provide such 'white lists', students and others concerned about the authenticity of institutions and credentials can use these lists to check their status.

Usurping UNESCO's Name

Some degree mills misuse UNESCO's name, with different levels of abuse and use. Claims, ranging from 100% false to not entirely untrue, use a multitude of tricks, all of which try to establish a false connection or misrepresent a real link with UNESCO to give the impression that their outfit is an internationally-recognised provider of higher education. One institution may use several different tricks.

UNESCO has partnered with the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) and the two organizations set up an expert group in November 2008 to develop suggestions for international effective practice on degree mills.

Combating degree mills requires a multi-pronged attack. First, countries must want to protect the integrity of their higher education systems. This requires good communication so that the education authorities are aware of all companies that register in order to conduct an educational business on their territory. Second, quality assurance agencies must tackle the difficult challenge of bringing cross-border eLearning within their ambit. Third, all bodies granting financial aid to students, or defraying tuition fees, should ensure they are not inadvertently supporting degree mills. Fourth, employers, HE admissions officers etc. must check credentials presented to them. As with other forms of crime, the certainty of discovery is the strongest deterrent. Fifth, the media, including the Internet, should make the public aware of bogus educational institutions. Finally, an international network for information and alerts about degree mill activity would be helpful, since spurious operators are internationally mobile and can quickly re-appear in a new jurisdiction when closed down elsewhere.

Contacts: Muriel Poisson
m.poisson@iiep.unesco.org

Stamenka Uvalic-Trumbic s.uvalic-trumbic@unesco.org

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