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**Expert Meeting
on the Impact of Globalization on Quality Assurance, Accreditation and the
Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education**

**UNESCO, Paris
10-11 September 2001**

**DRAFT CONCLUSIONS AND
RECOMMENDATIONS**

Distribution : meeting
<http://www.unesco.org/education/studyingabroad>

Introduction : The Framework

An Expert Meeting on the Impact of Globalisation on Quality Assurance, Accreditation and the Recognition of Qualifications was organised at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris on 10-11 September 2001 by the Division of Higher Education in cooperation with UNESCO Offices in Bangkok (PROAP), Beirut (UNEDBAS), Bucharest (CEPES), Caracas (IESALC) and Dakar (BREDA).

The objectives of the meeting were to explore the international dimensions of quality assurance, accreditation and the recognition of qualifications in a world in which globalisation is increasingly impacting on higher education. With new developments in the nineties, the issues of quality assessment, quality assurance and accreditation, closely linked to the recognition of qualifications, have transcended not only national but also regional borders, the nation-state no longer being the unique provider of higher education in an increasing range of countries. Transnational or borderless education is a topic of discussion and often one of concern. Many new providers have emerged, crossing borders without relating to quality monitoring arrangements in any particular country. An international market in higher education is emerging and some are looking to UNESCO as a forum for discussion of these issues, and notably for the promotion of higher education as a public good, especially in developing countries and in countries in transition.

The objectives of the meeting as delineated above derive from UNESCO's overall mission and fall within the following broad orientations:

- UN Millennium Declaration within which renewed focus is placed on the notion and concepts of public good;
- UNESCO draft Medium-Term Strategy 2002-2007 in which the 'emerging ethical challenges and dilemmas as a result of globalization' are placed in the centre of activities;
- The Dakar Framework of Action aimed at achieving quality education for all;

Finally, the meeting was placed in the context of the Follow-up to the UNESCO 1998 World Conference on Higher Education, the existing mechanisms of Regional Committees in charge of the Conventions on the recognition of qualifications and the activities of the newly created Section for Access, Mobility and Quality Assurance of the UNESCO Higher Education Division.

The meeting: proceedings

Mr. John Daniel, Assistant Director-General for Education of UNESCO opened the meeting and underlined the links of the meeting to the Dakar Follow-Up, the main orientations of the Medium-Term Strategy related to globalisation and the role of UNESCO as 'a laboratory of ideas; a standard-setter; a clearing-house; a capacity-builder in Member States and a catalyst for international co-operation'. He emphasized that UNESCO had no ambition to become an international accrediting body. He rather invited the participants to examine the feasibility of establishing a forum for dialogue between the different stakeholders in higher education and propose a staged Action Plan to develop this issue further (full text available on: <http://www.unesco.org/education/studyingabroad>).

The meeting brought together some fifty participants representing respectively the Presidents of the five Regional Committees in charge of the application of the UNESCO Conventions on the recognition of qualifications in higher education in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, the Arab States, the Europe Region (including North America) and Latin America and the Pacific and related experts from these regions; multilateral organisations – the World Bank, the International Labour Organisation (ILO); the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the Council of Europe and the EU Commission; international, regional and national quality assurance and accreditation bodies; a student organisation; non-governmental organisations. (Final List of Participants – ED-2001/HED/AMQ/03.Rev.)

In a rich exchange of ideas throughout the two days beginning with the key-note address by Professor Dirk Van Damme from the University of Ghent in Belgium, a number of papers were presented. Discussions centered on the emerging international market in higher education and the resulting increased need to promote education as a public good. In particular the meeting examined the developments such as the new demands on higher education, the emergence of competitors in knowledge provision, the changing challenges to access and equity as well as the necessity for new quality assurance approaches and international regulatory frameworks. The participation of both recognition experts and quality assurance experts representing all regions, at national/regional level, played a key role in the richness of the discussions due to the increasingly important links between these two broad areas. (Final list of documents – ED – 2001/HED/AMQ/4.Rev)

The specific regional needs were highlighted and a range of issues addressed in sessions and panels bringing the regional actors together. New developments in the areas of quality assurance and the recognition of qualifications were presented in a regional perspective such as the Bologna process and UNESCO/Council of Europe Codes of Good Practice for Transnational Education in Europe, the regional agreements in higher education within the MERCOSUR and NAFTA in the Americas, the emerging networks such as UMAP in Asia and the Pacific. The problems and challenges raised by private and virtual institutions were particularly highlighted in the Arab States and the African continent for which the phenomenon of brain-drain was closely related to that of international mobility. In addition to the overall agreement that inter-regional co-operation in these areas should be stepped up, the need for South-South cooperation was also highlighted, as well as the sensitive issue of cultural contexts and specificities. Some national experiences in accreditation and or recognition of qualifications were also presented (e.g. from Australia, India, Nigeria). (Revised Annotated Agenda – ED-2001/HED/AMQ/01.Rev.)

Multilateral organisations presented their own related agendas linked to quality assurance (World Bank); liberalisation of trades and services in higher education (OECD); employment issues and the use of international standards (ILO); recognition and quality assurance networks and initiatives in Europe (Council of Europe), the developing activities of the European Union in higher education with ‘third countries’ beyond geographical Europe.

In a panel of professional organisations, NGOs and experts, the mushrooming of national, regional and international activities in the field of international accreditation efforts, quality assurance related to e-learning, transnational and borderless education was made evident. The work already achieved by associations such as the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), the International Association of University Presidents (IAUP), the International Council of Distance Education (ICDE) or

the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) at international/inter-regional level was also highlighted. Examples were given of the different regional agendas and projects developed by the European Network of Quality Assurance (ENQA) and the European Universities Association (EUA), new emerging networks in Latin American in the MERCOSUR framework or international dimensions in the work of national associations such as the Council of Higher Education Accreditation in the United States (CHEA), or the Open University UK Validation Services. It was evident that a pooling of resources was very much needed.

The positive energy generated at the meeting expressed a clear will for working together in a global context. This was particularly encouraging in the light of the terrorist attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001.

Outcomes (1): Consensus

Thanks to the equitable representation of all the regions of the world, global issues were discussed in a truly global context and UNESCO was recognized as a privileged forum that can assure such a debate. In fact, some participants called this a 'historic event' and 'a unique opportunity' for such a truly global discussion.

A general consensus was reached by the participants that a global forum on the international dimensions of quality assurance, accreditation and the recognition of qualifications was necessary. UNESCO's role as a facilitator-broker for developing international frameworks and bringing together the different actors and stakeholders of the higher education sector was underlined. Central to this forum, participants stressed, was the efficient exchange of information, in particular in the context of the liberalisation in education services under the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The need was expressed for the education community to have a common stand worldwide on this issue bringing together different already existing networks and taking stock of recent developments. It was concluded that the main actors were represented at the meeting, and that some missing partners for this forum still needed to be identified, such as the WTO, private sector and industry. The Meeting concluded with a draft outline of an Action Plan for the establishment of this Forum, and recommended the establishment of Task Force to develop and monitor the implementation of this Action Plan.

Outcomes (2): Outline Action Plan

Using UNESCO functions as *a laboratory of ideas, a standard setter, a clearing house, a capacity-builder, a catalyst for international cooperation* and building on work already accomplished such as: the UNESCO/Council of Europe Codes of Good Practice in Transnational Education; existing work on glossary of terms; existing and emerging national codes and legislation; networking in quality assurance and recognition, the following suggestions for an Action Plan were made:

- Clearing house functions in partnership and through interactive website development; directory of 'trustworthy' accreditation agencies and quality assurance agencies worldwide especially those dealing with new modes of provision;
- Compiling an inventory of specific regional needs and existing expertise (specifically inter-regional recognition issues and or quality assurance matters that could be benefit

- from inter-regional cooperation eg ODL;
- Capacity building at regional level through seminars using the above;
 - Promotion and codification of good practices;
 - Development of policy guidelines to Member States in the form of international codes or other internationally accepted norms;
 - Development of information tools for learners including the UNESCO publication *Study Abroad*;
 - UNESCO to act as a facilitator - broker by developing international frameworks bringing together the different actors and stakeholders from the higher education sector, many of who were attending the meeting;
 - establish a Task Force to develop the Action Plan and report on its implementation.

(Annex I: Full text of Rapporteur's presentation)

Proposals for immediate follow-up by UNESCO:

The following activities for immediate follow-up by the Division of Higher Education are proposed:

1. establishment of a Task Force, conceived as an operational working body, which will develop further the Action Plan proposed;
2. dissemination of the results of the meeting through the website, a publication and a broad distribution of the report to UNESCO Member States;
3. continued networking between the regional offices, institutes and centre (BREDA, CEPES, IESALC, PROAP, UNEDBAS, IIEP) as well as the other through discussion lists, regional seminars, regular information exchange;
4. a second meeting of the global forum at the end of the 2002-2003 biennium to take stock of results achieved;
5. UNESCO's Programme and Budget for 2002-2003 to adequately reflect the activities proposed.

**TOWARDS AN ACTION PLAN: SOME CONCLUSIONS AND
RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Presentation by Ms. Carolyn Campbell, (QA Agency – U.K.)
Rapporteur**

Some outcomes of the meeting

- discussion of global issues in a global forum;
- exchange of information;
- identification of similarities and differences and specific regional needs;
- identification of the missing partners
- recommendations for action

Consensus

- new demands on higher education
- emergence of competitors in knowledge provision
- challenges to access and equity
- need for new QA approaches

Debates

- erosion of role of nation state
- private HE -threat/ /opportunity/norm?
- Mobility v 'brain drain'
- Unbundling of academic functions

**Towards a new regulatory framework or frameworks? - the challenge of transnational
education and new modes of delivery**

What is needed?

- An international regulatory framework(s)
- glossary of terms
- code(s) of good practice
- partnership between providers
- information and understanding

Some resources to draw on

- Unesco/Council of Europe Code of Practice
- existing work on glossary of terms
- existing & emerging national codes and legislation
- networking in QA and recognition

Towards a new regulatory framework: transferability and recognition of qualifications and credits

What is needed?

- More transparency and information on systems, qualifications and competences?
- Data on recognition problems and mobility
- Clarification of roles in recognition
- New tools and approaches?

Some available resources

- Good practice at national, regional & professional level
- Conventions/Directives/other Instruments
- Emerging cooperation between QA and recognition networks

Some suggestions for a possible action plan (1)

- Clearing house functions in partnership and through interactive website development; directory of 'trustworthy' accreditation agencies and quality assurance agencies worldwide especially those dealing with new modes of provision;
- Compiling an inventory of specific regional needs and existing expertise (specifically inter-regional recognition issues and or QA matters that could be benefit from inter-regional cooperation eg ODL);

Some suggestions for a possible action plan (2)

- Capacity building at regional level through seminars using the above;
- Promotion and codification of good practices
- Development of policy guidelines to Member States in the form of international codes or other internationally accepted norms
- Development of information tools for learners including the UNESCO publication *Study Abroad*

Some suggestions for a possible action plan (3)

- UNESCO to act as a facilitator - broker by developing international frameworks bringing together the different actors and stakeholders from the higher education sector, many of who are attending this meeting
- establish a Task Force to develop the Action Plan and report on its implementation.