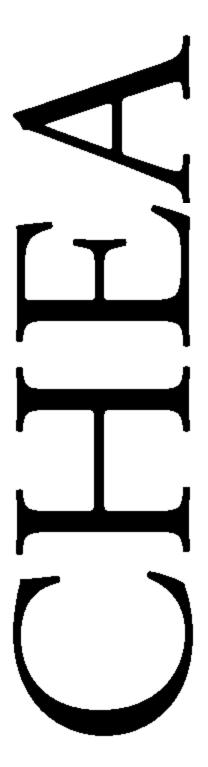# International Quality Review:
Values, Opportunities, and
Issues

*Major Papers Presented to the CHEA 2002
International Seminar*

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Council for Higher Education Accreditation

The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) is a private, nonprofit national organization that coordinates accreditation activity in the United States. CHEA represents more than 3,000 colleges and universities and 60 national, regional, and specialized accreditors.

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Introduction

THE COUNCIL FOR HIGHER EDUCATION ACCREDITATION (CHEA) held its third International Seminar in conjunction with the 2002 CHEA Annual Conference. In order to carefully explore some of the key issues in international quality review, CHEA asked three highly respected and thoughtful colleagues to address these topics:

- Quality Assurance in an International Environment: National and International Interests and Tensions (Dirk Van Damme, VLIR—Flemish Interuniversity Council, Belgium)

- Quality Assurance for Distance Learning: Issues for International Discussion and Action (Simon Marginson, Monash Centre for Research in International Education, Australia)

- International Quality Assurance, Ethics and the Market: a View from a Developing Country (Mala Singh, Council on Higher Education, South Africa).

This *Occasional Paper* brings together the three major papers presented at the 2002 seminar. Each of the papers provided a sound foundation for robust debate and deliberation at the meeting. Each expresses points of view that sometimes provoked agreement and, at other times, disagreement. The papers do not represent policy positions for CHEA, but are presented here as important contributions to the ongoing discussion and actions in international quality review in many parts of the world.

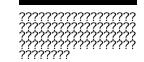# Quality Assurance in an International Environment: National and International Interests and Tensions

by Dirk Van Damme

1. The Internationalizing And Globalizing Higher Education Environment

To say that the environment for higher education policies, institutions, and professionals is changing rapidly and dramatically, is not original at all. The list of contextual changes affecting the institutional operation, the culture, and even the foundations of contemporary higher education is very long. It is more difficult to develop a sound conceptual understanding of these changes and developments, to imagine the future challenges and risks with which the global higher education community will be confronted as a result of them, and to provide some possible answers and avenues of action.

At the last CHEA Chicago Conference, CHEA President Judith S. Eaton referred to three crucial changes in the contemporary world of higher education: universalization, "new commercialization," and internationalization (Eaton, 2001). No doubt, internationalization is one of the core dimensions of the contextual changes affecting higher education today, closely linked to both other changes mentioned by Eaton. Of course internationalization is not a new phenomenon in higher education and some of its manifestations are well known and increasingly well documented. One can think of the accelerated growth of foreign students in many countries (perhaps slowed down by the effects of increased global insecurity for the moment), partly provoked by student mobility programs such as Fulbright, ERASMUS, NORDPLUS, UMAP, UMIOR and others, by various scholarships programs in the framework of international and development cooperation policies, but also consisting of spontaneous mobility. Also staff exchange and mobility are reasonably familiar exponents of internationalization of higher education. It is a well-known fact that the need for highly qualified researchers in many Western laboratories and universities is increasingly met by the import of foreign researchers, leading to brain drain and erosion of the knowledge infrastructure in other parts of the globe. The picture of internationalization today is not only a gloomy one.

One could say that moving people is the first layer of internationalization of higher education. However, the focus of internationalization is much wider now than the mere mobility of people. The next layer can be characterized as the movement of institutions. The rapid growth in various kinds of export of higher education institutions shows that a global higher education sector has materialized now definitely. Branch campuses, franchising and various other arrangements of "transnational" higher education have become an important way of bringing higher education to new markets, often in countries in development or in transformation. This development is accompanied by privatization or "new commercialization," because of the increased opportunities for for-profit delivery in transnational higher education modes drawn on by private providers and corporate business. The demand for flexibility of delivery also has caused the transition to a third layer of internationalization, characterized by moving content, knowledge, and courseware. Of course, moving people always has also implied the movement of ideas, resulting, for example, in the internationalization

of curricula. Via the activities of international professional associations, regulations concerning recognition of qualifications and emerging international approaches to quality assurance, time-space confinements of higher education subject matters have been weakening, giving way to international convergence of courses and curricula. Real dislocation of higher education provision however is made possible by the emergence of virtual delivery. Distance higher education has been a reality for some time now, but the expansion of the Internet and the production of appropriate software and suitable courseware has opened the way to real virtual higher education, not only freeing students of time and space constraints but increasingly de-institutionalizing teaching and learning processes in general. The unbundling of provision, noticeable in various forms of transnational higher education, fundamentally challenges the institutional framework of conventional universities.

Some experts have drawn attention to the fundamental shift in meaning that the concept of internationalization has been subject to because of the emergence of new forms and layers in it. Marijk Van der Wende (2001) has argued that there has been a shift from a "cooperation paradigm" to a "competition paradigm" in the internationalization of higher education. In a similar vein Peter Scott (2001) has analyzed the transition from the "old paradigm" of internationalization, ruled by geopolitical considerations, to the "new paradigm," much more economically dominated and linked to globalization and the development of the knowledge economy. There is no doubt that the old approach of international cooperation, visible is so many forms of internationalization in higher education dominated by considerations ranging from imperial, over post-colonial to rather idealistic ones, is now exchanged for a much more economic reality of an emerging competitive global higher education marketplace. Many internationalization strategies and actions of universities worldwide now are market-driven instead of motivated by intentions of cooperation and mutual development.

Indeed, globalization now seems to be a much more appropriate concept than internationalization to come to terms with the changes in the higher education sector. There is no generally accepted definition of the concept of globalization but in the increasingly widespread use of the concept a number of aspects and dimensions are clear. Elsewhere, I (Van Damme, 2001b) have approached globalization from the following dimensions: the rise of the network society, the restructuring of the world economic system with the rise of the knowledge economy in the core of the world economic system and new dependencies in the periphery, the political reshaping of the post-Cold War political order, the growing real but also virtual mobility of people, capital and knowledge, the erosion of the capacity of the nation-state to master the economic and political transformations, and the complex cultural developments marked by homogenization but also segregation. The concept of globalization of higher education indicates that higher education increasingly is linked to these global developments, but it also suggests that, in contrast to internationalization, higher education is not the actor nor motor of these developments, but rather one of the systems affected by them.

Globalization thus is a very massive concept, threatening conventional modes of higher education in many ways but also creating huge opportunities. The fact that the concept of globalization is heavily loaded with emotions and that it has triggered the birth of new social and political movements, points to the increasing insecurity of the new environment. Even in higher education the global environment in which institutions have to operate, is perceived as destabilizing, subjecting institutions and professionals to economic competition, market dependency, and various forms of dislocation. Especially in small countries, the erosion of the accustomed national policy framework and the absence of a comparable international one are perceived by the higher education community as rather uncomfortable. Many universities feel left behind in the hard arena of international competition with-

out much defense. And the events of September 11th have shown to the powerful nations of the world that globalization is their fate as well and that the world looks quite different now, definitely ending isolationist policy tendencies.

Perhaps, the most pervasive aspect of globalization is the increased reality and sense of interdependence. The fragmentation of national higher education systems increasingly is replaced with the integration of the global higher education sector. Interdependence also means that changes in one part of the global higher education system affect institutions in other parts. This creates opportunities as the rise of the for-profit, commercial higher education subsector testifies, but it absolutely also generates important challenges and problems, not at least in the field of quality.

2. The Impact Of Globalization On Higher Education

The consequences of globalization for the higher education sector are far-reaching and fundamental. Certainly, globalization will provoke a new phase in the "universalization" of higher education because of the increase in educational demand expected as well in the knowledge economies of the developed world as in the middle classes in the emerging economies in other parts of the world. Increased physical and virtual mobility and information streams will incite many people in all parts of the world to seek benefit from the main avenue of promotion and upward social mobility in meritocratic society, namely higher education. Many of them will be willing to invest in that, even if the national economies in many countries are not able to guarantee the expected private return. The globalizing professions, the internationalization of the skilled labor market and, not at least, the growth of higher education sector itself seem to offer sufficient alternatives. As the rise of transnational higher education testifies, higher education is becoming one of the booming markets in the global economy. This expansion and massification will not be matched by a proportional rise in public expenditure, thus leading to an increase in private and commercial provision and creating huge problems of access and equity. The expansion of the demand side forcefully fuels the marketization of global higher education since barriers to information and to physical and virtual mobility are broken down so that potentially every institution in the world can benefit from the increased global demand. It is highly likely that the internationalization strategies of universities worldwide increasingly will be focused on expanding their share in the global higher education market, thus compensating for diminishing public funding. Not only in the teaching and learning field, but also in the field of scientific research, technological development, consultancy, and service functions new high demands are put on universities by the expanding knowledge economies. Scientific research, the production of new knowledge, and the development of technologies are becoming activities of critical importance in the knowledge and information driven economy and thus are increasingly subject to internationalization and global competition. Side effects of this are the emergence of a global market of skilled researchers, dislocation, and brain drain.

In trying to meet the new demands and to improve their position in the global marketplace universities are confronted with many new rivals that challenge their traditional monopoly. Nor in scientific research and technological development, nor in teaching and learning, nor in their internal management universities are very successful in defending old positions.

- In the research field, they have to transform themselves rapidly into knowledge production and dissemination centers, able to compete with rivals that also function as knowledge centers in the industrial and commercial service sectors. Universities, traditionally strong in fundamental scientific research, are now confronted with competing research laboratories in large multinational corporations. Mainstream research paradigms and

activities are supplemented by "Mode 2" (Gibbons) oriented research, but in this field universities face huge competition from the consultancy business and various other providers of applied and policy-oriented research. In the areas of technological development, links with industry and consultancy many universities try to transform themselves into more "entrepreneurial" institutions, able to meet the demands of the corporate world.

- Also in the teaching and learning field academic institutions face competition by new providers from the for-profit, corporate sector, often more capable to organize very flexible delivery at a transnational scale. Universities worldwide feel obliged to engage in more innovative, often electronic delivery modes and to expand their activities in the area of distance education, continuing education, vocational training, and lifelong learning. Academic degrees and other credentials are believed to be the last real monopoly of universities, but with the expansion of vocational and business certificates and the gradual erosion of the value of academic degrees on the labor market—in exchange for a multiplicity of credentials and a continuous validation of experience knowledge and competences—also this monopoly seem to face its end.

- The high demands placed upon universities worldwide, the evolution in governance and accountability, and the competition with various rivals create tensions in academic institutions and urge them to professionalize and to improve their management. A culture of "new managerialism" is now penetrating academia rapidly, improving the internal structures and functions, but also creating tensions with the academic professorate and with academic and democratic approaches to university management.

In short, globalization affects the essence of the academic system. Some observers doubt whether universities will be able to resist the erosion of their academic essence in the context of globalization, marketization, and the growth of the knowledge economy. Some speak of "academic capitalism" and predict the disappearance of the old idea of "university," naively suggesting that until now the university was a kind of "haven in a heartless world." Others are more optimistic; they believe that universities have the capacity to adapt to new environments and that globalization creates many new opportunities that could strengthen the role of universities in the long run. Not only at the institutional level, but also at a higher level, that of the academic community in the broader sense, the impact of globalization is pervasive. Global competition has an atomizing effect on the higher education sector, which progressively is losing its sense of community and identity. Existing institutions are not only differentiating into various types and profiles, but also increasingly perceive their former colleagues and partners as competitors. And new providers of higher learning don't consider themselves to be part of a higher education community, which they blame for not being able to innovate radically and for leaving a huge demand unmet. Globalization urges the international higher education community to redefine its identity and to give some positive answers to its challenges.

3. The Need For A Global Regulatory Framework
Most modern higher education institutions are product of national developments and policies and are fully integrated in national educational systems. In an increasingly international environment—marked by a globalized and liberalized marketplace, globalizing professions, mobility of skilled labor, an international arena of scientific research and academic personnel, brain drain, and international competition between universities and between universities and other institutions and companies—national policy frameworks find themselves more and more powerless. As in other domains of public policy affected by globalization,

national governments experience that they no longer hold the necessary tools for steering the higher education sector. In many countries, universities have acquired a great deal of institutional autonomy during the last decade, further weakening their dependence from national policies. However, at the same time the protective—sometimes also protectionist—elements inherent in national policy frameworks are disappearing gradually.

What is needed then to balance the impact of globalization on higher education is a global regulatory framework that can supplement and progressively substitute the various national policy frameworks. There seem to be two sides on this framework. First, a sound policy aiming at the liberalization of the global higher education market, removing the remaining barriers to mobility and free trade in education services and putting an end to protectionist policies in individual countries. It is an illusion to resist globalization of higher education by narrow policies that equate "public" with "national" and that only seem to serve the short-term interests of domestic institutions. Even if the European, Canadian, and American higher education communities rightly oppose a narrow, radical, and market-driven liberalization as proposed by the U.S. government in the WTO negotiations, protectionist national policies are not a viable alternative. The second side of a global regulatory framework is much more important, namely a constructive and positive policy of convergence of policy frameworks, higher education architectures, degree and credit systems, and even curricula. The process started with the Bologna-Declaration (1999) in Europe is a clear example of this, but in the context of free-trade agreements, like for example NAFTA or MERCOSUR, similar tendencies of international convergence of higher education systems exist also in other parts of the world. In the longer run this eventually will lead to, for example, the generalization of the bachelor/master-degree structure, the dominance of English as the lingua franca in higher education and scientific research, the development of compatible credit transfer and accumulation systems to recognize, transport, and validate teaching and learning experiences, the international recognition of degrees and diplomas, a negotiated consensus on core knowledge and competencies and their place in curricula, especially in specific professional fields, etc.

I believe that these developments of convergence should be based on a global regulatory framework that transcends the old opposition between "public" and "private," that affirms the public functions of higher education as a whole while recognizing its market opportunities, that is based on self-regulation of the international higher education community while developing partnerships with all stakeholders involved, that ultimately defends the interests of learners worldwide by taking up the issues of access, equity, and quality. Elsewhere I (Van Damme, 2001b) have indicated some important elements of such a global regulatory framework that urgently ask for a global approach, namely the regulation of private and transnational providers, the recognition of foreign qualifications and credits, and international quality assurance and accreditation.

The price for not developing a sustainable global regulatory framework could be very high. A first risk is globalization and marketization without constraints: the development of a liberalized global marketplace of higher learning without any trustworthy steering mechanism. Some experts defend such a radical market-driven approach as the only way to modernize higher education and to urge the institutions to innovate and to meet the social demand, but I fear that such a "wild" version of global educational capitalism will not offer any transparency to learners and students, will lack a decent system of consumer protection, and will not be able to guarantee minimal quality standards, offering a free route to rogue providers and diploma mills. Secondly, many countries will react in a regressive way by reinstalling protectionist policies, thus limiting again the internationalization of higher education and the mobility of students, staff, and graduates. Thirdly, the absence of any kind of global self-regulation by the higher educations community itself will be answered by the

development of all kinds of regulations from the professional associations, themselves increasingly being organized at a global level. It is my firm conviction that if the international higher community is not able to balance the impact of globalization itself by developing a sustainable constructive regulatory framework, the professions will impose more and more external regulations, imposing their norms on the higher education sector and eventually annihilating the autonomy of academia. Vocational standards regarding skills and competencies will then take the place of higher education qualifications and credentials. I am not opposing the validity and intrinsic value of professional regulations, but I believe that the academic world should defend its autonomy in trying to integrate those external imperatives with its own ideas and approaches of academic quality.

4. Developments And Issues In Quality Assurance

No doubt, the quality challenge is the crucial issue in the overall problematic of the impact of internationalization and globalization on higher education. Many observers fear that an unregulated global higher education market will give way to a devaluation of quality standards. Evidence for this fear can be found in the uncontrolled development of diploma mills, increasingly operating via the Internet and offering degrees of "non-accredited" universities without even any form of educational activity. Although the risks of such developments should be taken very seriously, especially in the global periphery of the academic world, it is perhaps exaggerated to develop a global approach to quality based on a worst-case scenario. It is also true that traditional universities use the quality argument sometimes as an instrument to blame innovative new providers and to defend protectionist policies. Of more general importance is the risk that the quality standards of public and private universities operating in the competitive global education marketplace erode imperceptibly as a result of commercialization and differentiation of educational supply. In a more demand-driven educational market, standards tend to adapt themselves to the demands of the customers. Then, quality assurance procedures, which can be seen as a form of supply-side regulation, tend to become weaker. The question is legitimate how quality will be ensured in a globalized environment where higher education institutions and practices escape the supervision and quality control mechanisms of national authorities.

Quality assurance and accreditation schemes have been developing in national higher education systems since the early nineties. A complex of societal factors have caused this important development: concerns for a potential decline of standards in the context of massification, diminishing confidence of stakeholders in traditional informal academic quality control mechanisms, increasing public and political demand for more accountability, pressures to increase performance and cost-effectiveness, and the gradual development of a more competitive higher education market where quality becomes an asset and labeling device. There is now a general acceptance of the necessity of formal procedures of external quality evaluation of higher education institutions and/or programs. Many countries still are busy with establishing quality assurance and accreditation systems along these lines. However, the question is legitimate whether the conceptual and political foundations of current quality assurance approaches, which are some twenty years old, still are valid in a drastically changed environment.

Some critical questions towards contemporary quality assurance approaches in higher education therefore must be put on the table. A first important point is the domestic orientation of quality assurance systems. Although the development of quality assurance in higher education has become an international phenomenon in itself, the quality assurance systems themselves are almost exclusively national. Every country has established its own quality assurance system, based on its history, the character of its higher education sector and the dominant policy approaches. An immediate consequence of this is that the international

activities and transnational operations of universities rarely are covered by the regular quality assurance systems of the home country to the same rigueur as domestic activities. Also, the activities of most quality assurance agencies normally are limited to the officially known and recognized higher education institutions, leaving aside new providers, corporate universities, and various new kinds of educational provision, especially when operating via the Internet. There is a growing conviction that there is need for a "quality assurance of internationalization," and several initiatives (codes of practice, self-assessment instruments, evaluation, auditing and certification of internationalization activities, etc.) have already been taken in this regard (Van der Wende, 1999). Also for e-learning and Internet-based distance education quality standards and codes of practice have been produced (e.g., IHEP, 2000; see also Middlehurst, 2001b). Quality assurance for distance education and e-learning has been an important topic in discussions and conferences worldwide. Nevertheless, one has to recognize that "borderless higher education" and virtual higher education still are not covered to the same extent and thoroughness by formal quality assurance systems than traditional delivery modes.

Another problem resulting from the national development of quality assurance systems is the high variety in forms, procedures, and functions. Although there is convergence noticeable, many differences remain in the operations of quality assurance agencies and the standards used. International benchmarking of standards has only started. Also in this regard the globalizing professions try to compensate the inability of the higher education sector itself to agree on internationally benchmarked standards of academic quality, by imposing their own professional standards. The Washington Accord for the field of engineering and technology shows that this is a very powerful strategy, resulting in clear benchmarks for educational institutions and in high opportunities for mobile graduates in the international labor market. However, as said, genuine academic quality assurance based on the principle of self-regulation asks for international academic quality standards, not only professional ones.

Also with regard to the kind of statements, decisions, and external effects of quality assurance arrangements there is a lot of variation. The U.S. has a differentiated accreditation system, established long ago as a voluntary system in the absence of statutory state recognition of institutions, programs, and degrees. Accreditation has become the dominant quality regulatory framework also in other parts of the world, for example, in Eastern Europe where it is a state system to control the supply side and especially the influx of foreign providers, or in Asian countries where private providers also take an important share of the higher education market. In general, accreditation has expanded recently as an instrument of the state to control the impact of transnational delivery on the domestic higher education market. In many other parts of the world, such as in some Western European countries, developments towards accreditation are heavily opposed and discussed. Some countries, such as Germany, Flanders and the Netherlands, believe that in the framework of convergence and the introduction of the bachelor/master-degrees as agreed upon in the Bologna process, there is a need to build a sound system of accreditation of these new degrees on top of the existing external quality assurance system in order to guarantee their international trustworthiness and recognition. Other countries, and their higher education sector and quality assurance agencies, think that accreditation systems run counter to academic autonomy and freedom, will jeopardize internal improvement functions of quality assurance, and will introduce too much market-driven elements into the higher education system.

My personal position is that I think in the context of globalization, trustworthy external quality assurance in higher education is necessary and it should result in clear and understandable feedback to the outside world. At this moment, however, there is no international consensus at all on the validity of accreditation or any other quality approach as a future

common approach in a globalized higher education system. There are also opposite tendencies, which have a propensity for strengthening internal quality assurance at the expense of external evaluation, as is the case in the UK following the conflict between the academic institutions and the QAA. The worst problem even is that, the Flemish-Dutch case excepted, these debates are run from a purely national basis where domestic arguments are more powerful than international considerations.

The issue of internationalization of quality assurance and the discussion on accreditation are closely linked to other important elements in the debate about the future of quality assurance in higher education. A coordinated international approach to quality assurance and accreditation questions the dominance of the "fitness of purpose" approach prevalent in many national quality assurance systems and advances a quality framework based on an evaluation of the "purposes" and the standards of higher education as well. I have already made reference to the issue of the international benchmarking of standards. Discussions on the limits of peer review procedures and the involvement of students, industry, and other external stakeholders in quality assurance panels also point to the necessity of strengthening external functions and features of the quality assurance system. Also the arguments that universities should improve the follow-up phase, should provide clearer information and feedback to students, stakeholders, and the general public, and should invest more in institutionalizing quality assurance into their day-to-day operational activities and in developing a genuine "quality culture," originate from a demand for a greater accountability from the side of universities. I strongly believe that the international academic community should defend a self-regulated system of quality assurance, but I also believe that in a globalized world and in a much more market-driven global higher system they can take up such a position successfully only if they fully understand and acknowledge the outside demand for accountability, trustworthiness, and transparency. The risk for not doing so is that the outside world will question fundamentally the willingness and capability of the academic community to master the quality challenge itself and, ultimately, will take over and impose an external control system upon universities, as is already the case in some countries. These examples also illustrate that such a development is not for the benefit of the quality of research, intellectual advancement, and teaching and learning in higher education institutions in the long run.

5. The Rationales For International Quality Assurance

The previous discussion has already provided some important arguments in favor of a more international approach to quality assurance in higher education. Before going into more detail on the rationales for international quality assurance, let's return to the argument that globalization and marketization are to be seen as a threat to high academic quality standards. Only if we fully understand the issue, the question can be tackled whether and how corrective policies have to be developed.

I do not think that globalization itself will have a negative impact on overall quality standards. As argued before, globalization and the resulting erosion of national policy capacity will weaken the existing regulatory frameworks in higher education. Regulations concerning the capacity to enter the higher education market, the license to teach, the recognition of degrees, diplomas, and credits and also the quality assurance, which are effected at national levels, will remain important, but in the course of globalization their impact will diminish gradually until eventually plain liberalization and anti-protectionist policies in the context of free trade agreements will reduce their power significantly. It is absolutely legitimate to ask how the prospects for the quality debate and for quality assurance systems would look like at that moment.

I see three main questions to be tackled. The first concerns the very concept of quality in

higher education itself. Twenty years of expertise and operational experience in quality assurance in higher education have not lead to a growing consensus on how the concept of quality should be defined, on the contrary. There is much more diversity in the definition of the concept than ever before. The prevalence of the relativist "fitness for purpose" model and also the "consumer satisfaction" approach, popular among new providers, only serves to avoid this difficult question. I defend a definition of quality which is not entirely relativistic to the objectives of institutions or preferences of consumers, but which has a substance related to the idea of academic work itself. However, it is difficult to define the quality concept in such a way without falling in some traps. As some quality assurance and accreditation systems clearly show, sometimes a very conservative definition is used, opposing innovation and flexibility in the name of an outdated idea of academic excellence. In this sense the quality issue sometimes is an instrument to erect barriers for new providers to enter the higher education system. We need a concept of academic quality that transcends the increasing variety in educational operation and delivery modes. Sometimes the concept of quality is also misused in order to standardize and homogenize academic contents and curricula. By governments, industry and the professions minimal quality standards frequently are seen as instruments to impose core curricula and qualification frameworks. Although internationalization and globalization should open up opportunities for the higher education sector to develop a negotiated convergence on contents and curricula, as is the case for example in the Bologna process, I don't think that the quality concept is used in an appropriate way here. We thus also need a concept of academic quality that recognizes variety and diversity also in contents and curricula. In short, globalization forces the international academic community to look into the heart of the concept of academic quality and to develop a definition that respects institutional autonomy, operational variety and cultural diversity, and that avoids conservativeness, standardization, and uniformity. Only such a concept will be able to survive in the global educational marketplace. It is also the only way to defend the sense of identity and community in the higher education world against the danger of fragmentation and atomization. The risk for not developing such a definition is the annihilation of real academic quality interests in a globalized higher education market or their reduction to mere consumer satisfaction concerns.

A second question is what effects increasing differentiation of institutions, functions, contents, and delivery modes in higher education will have for quality levels. The rise of a global higher education marketplace will open up avenues for the operation of new, private, transnational providers but also for new kinds of activities of the more entrepreneurial segment of the conventional higher education community. It would be wrong to suggest *a priori* that this will have a detrimental impact on quality, although the problem of rogue providers must not be underestimated. I sincerely don't think that an overall downward leveling or deflation of quality standards must be expected. However, a differentiation of quality levels can be foreseen. Academic excellence will continue to flourish, but also low quality providers—even above the intolerable levels of diploma mills—will take a share of the market. Hard-line defenders of the free market model of liberalized educational globalization will not see this as an important problem, since also with regard to quality standards the market will adapt itself automatically to the needs of consumers and the labor market. However, they will have to recognize that information then comes to the heart of the issue. It is a well-known fact that deregulated markets call for very good information systems in order to develop demand-driven self-regulation. Real competition only is possible if consumers can found their decisions on explicit and reliable information. The importance of the quality issue in the context of globalization perhaps is not that one has to fear for decreasing overall quality standards, but rather that it will become much more difficult to know the quality level of institutions and programs. Dissatisfaction among consumers,

abuse and exploitation, loss of trust and confidence, suspicion, etc., are then the outcomes of globalization and marketization, as is the case already in some parts of the global higher education market. I strongly believe that the global higher education system needs much more transparency, that positively recognizes differentiation and variety but that also respects consumers and stakeholders in their desire for clear information. Thus, once we have arrived at a concept of academic quality that can survive in the global educational marketplace, the question is how quality assurance and accreditation systems can be envisaged that are able to guarantee transparency at a global level.

The third question is then whether and how minimal standards of academic quality should be established and guaranteed. Of course it is a matter of political choice whether the global regulation of the higher education system should be satisfied with clear information systems, or whether it also should guarantee minimal standards. I take the last position, because I think, again, that, unlike other markets, the global higher education system has an academic substance to defend. A learner or stakeholder should have the guarantee that an academic program or credential in whatever part of the world stands for some common substance and value, whatever the diversity is within the system. If we arrive at forging a common definition of academic quality and at quality assurance systems that are able to make quality levels visible, then we should also take up the challenge to guarantee everyone the basic level of academic quality where universities all over the world should be committed to. In my view, the global higher education community should continue to defend the universalistic pretensions, which for centuries have been at the heart of the very idea of "university," and develop them further into the equitable ambition to guarantee as many learners as possible a basic quality provision. Also that is the task of quality assurance systems in a global environment.

Here we touch again on the debate about accreditation. Personally, I don't see how the two functions discussed, namely providing clear information about quality levels and standards and especially guaranteeing minimal quality standards, can be achieved at a global level without quality assurance systems which result in clear accreditation statements and decisions. Perhaps it is a matter of semiotics and is the word "accreditation" in itself cause for much resistance; essential is that external quality assurance systems have clearly defined and internationally benchmarked standards and are strong enough to result in explicit statements.

The external effects of such a global quality assurance approach are numerous, and act as powerful rationales for developing such an approach. A number of very complex issues that have come to the forefront in higher education because of internationalization and globalization could be solved more easily if the global higher education community succeeds in developing a global approach to quality assurance and accreditation. A first example is the recognition of foreign qualifications and degrees. Much progress has been achieved in the last years due to the valuable work of several instances, resulting in the Lisbon Convention. However, we must admit that unacceptable difficulties still arise for mobile graduates wishing to valorize their degrees and qualifications in other countries. The global higher education system does not take into account at a sufficient level the increasing professional mobility of its graduates. The enormous diversity in national higher education systems and degree architecture is still mirrored by complicated bureaucratic procedures to investigate whether a foreign or unknown degree matches the domestic ones. Even countries defending a liberalization of higher education trade, such as the U.S., apply very strict and severe procedures for the validation of foreign degrees in their own country. Backing this conservative and bureaucratic attitude is not only the will to protect the own, well-known institutions (and own policies), but also an often unrealistic appreciation of the quality of the domestic degrees, not checked by a truly objective comparative understanding of the value of and

diversity in foreign degrees.

In the context of a global regulatory framework, new and decisive steps have to be taken to tackle this difficult problem. Many look at the emergence of international quality assurance systems to allow significant progress in this matter. Without any international quality assurance, even a retreat is to be feared in this matter: growing insecurity about the quality status of foreign degrees will lead to even more severe checks at the level of national governments and a more protectionist attitude among institutions, creating more problems regarding recognition of qualifications and mobility of professional labor than those already existing today. Therefore, it is an interesting evolution that quality assurance agencies and professionals on the one hand and people busy in the field of recognition of foreign qualifications are much more working together than some years ago. The advancement of global quality assurance and accreditation certainly could build a basis of mutual understanding and trust in academic quality, necessary for progress in the area of recognition. However, naïve optimism is misplaced: a global quality assurance system taking into account diversity and autonomy, as endorsed above, will not result in sufficient confidence regarding contents and curricula to automatically convince recognition professionals and state bureaucrats to settle for softer procedures. In any case, it would allow some progress in this matter.

A second example is student and teaching staff mobility and other forms of international cooperation among institutions. The further development of internationalization strategies of institutions is conditioned by the progress that can be made in the field of international quality assurance. Mobility programs such as ERASMUS have started from a rather naïve assumption that quality levels in European institutions could be considered as more or less equal or equivalent. The advancement of quality assurance in European higher education has made institutions more conscious of quality standards and differentials, and this in turn has undermined that assumption. Institutions now are more critical in developing partnerships and student mobility schemes and are seeking partners considered as more or less of the same kind and of an equivalent quality level. The absence of a reliable and strong international quality assurance system jeopardizes these developments and has opened the way for unsubstantiated and purely speculative assertions about quality levels in foreign countries and institutions. If this is already the case in a European higher education landscape in the midst of a convergence process, then this problem is much more real in the global arena. Significant progress in the development of internationalization policies and strategies only can be achieved if it is accompanied by equally substantial advancement in the field of global quality assurance.

6. Models And Strategies In Developing International Quality Assurance

Even if there is gradually more and more agreement on the viewpoint that globalization in higher education asks for a transnational approach to quality assurance and accreditation, there are huge differences of vision on how to achieve this and which steps have to be taken. Perhaps it is useful to think about the development of global quality assurance and a gradual process, in which successive layers of actions and strategies could be imagined. Some fear the development of global quality assurance because they reject the most radical strategy, namely the establishment of a global accreditation agency. To take away such fears and to move the debate into a more fruitful orientation, it is useful to distinguish between several strategic layers.

- A minimal strategy is to improve communication and exchange among national quality assurance agencies, in the hope that this will lead to a kind of convergence and international benchmarking of trustworthy standards and methodologies. This minimal strategy,

defended in Europe for example by ENQA, certainly is necessary and fruitful. At an international level also the support, information sharing, and training activities of INQAAHE to its member agencies are an example of this strategy. The weakness of this strategy is that it legitimizes the quality assurance and accreditation competencies of the national states. Moreover, it risks to take too much time and to remain too voluntaristic in the light of the profound and accelerating impact of globalization on the higher education system.

- The next strategy could be the real cooperation between quality assurance agencies and the mutual formal recognition of agencies. Sometimes this is already done by agencies that contract a partner agency to carry out evaluations of transnational delivery of higher education institutions in another country. In order to transmit the evaluation formally, the first agency has to recognize and trust the work of the second agency. In the UK, the QAA thus accepts quality assessments and evaluations by foreign agencies of overseas activities of British universities. Some European countries are experimenting with joint program evaluations based upon collaboration between the national quality assurance agencies. On a European level there are also developments towards mutual recognition of quality assurance agencies. The weak side of this is that such recognition is not based upon a clear and internationally acceptable definition of reliable and trustworthy quality assurance, although an implicit acceptance of quality assessment standards and protocols of course is implied.

- A third strategy precisely is the development of such a conceptual framework of trustworthy international quality assurance. Such a conceptual framework could consist first of all of a set of definitions and principles, for example, that international quality assurance and accreditation primarily are a kind of self-regulation of the global academic community, owned by that community and guaranteeing academic values, that accreditation is only possible on the basis of existing quality assurance experiences, that international accreditation must respect institutional autonomy and cultural diversity, and promote innovation and improvement, etc. Secondly, a set of methodological standards for trustworthy quality assessment should be developed. Together, this could form the basis of a kind of "code of practice" for international quality assurance and accreditation.

- A fourth strategy then is to develop a kind of validation and quality evaluation procedure for existing quality assurance and accreditation systems based on the quality code mentioned. In a certain sense this is what CHEA itself is doing for the accreditors in the U.S. or what the Akkreditierungsrat is doing for accreditors in Germany. It could be very useful to extend such a strategy to the international level. International associations such as IAUP and INQAAHE investigate the possibility to establish jointly a clearinghouse of trustworthy quality assurance and accreditation systems in the world, based on a mutually accepted definition of concepts and basic standards and criteria. In order to arrive at this, an initiative has been taken to install a "Global Quality Label" for quality assurance and accreditation agencies worldwide, which can be awarded on the basis of an evaluation against explicit quality criteria for such agencies. The advantage of such an initiative is that institutions worldwide would have an idea of the seriousness and trustworthiness of quality assessment, evaluation, and accreditation procedures and standards of those agencies, and hence of the quality of the institutions and programs evaluated or accredited by them.

- Following on this, a fifth strategy could be the development of real meta-accreditation on an international level. The difference with the previous strategy is that in this case the meta-evaluation results in a formal recognition and eventually a "certification" of the

agency and, eventually, in the formal recognition of the quality assessments carried out by that agency. There are no real significant international examples of this for the moment and it is difficult to imagine where such an initiative would derive the authority and legitimacy from to take up a well-defined and trustworthy position in the field. However, the fact that some international professional accreditation schemes succeed in establishing their authority suggests that in principle it would be possible also for the international higher education community to do the same.

- A sixth possible strategy, the development of a real international accreditation agency, seems to be rather unrealistic for the moment, given the unwillingness of national states (and often also the national quality assurance agencies) to transfer that kind of crucial competence to an international agency, but also because many fear that this will lead to a very bureaucratic, costly apparatus escaping any kind of control from governments and higher education institutions. Nevertheless, this strategy should not be put aside too easily. There is the example of GATE, which was a certifier of transnational programs before the change in its structure and governance that tied it to a particular for-profit provider, deprived it of the legitimacy in the academic world to act as a global accreditor. As also Woodhouse (2001) asserts, there certainly is room for an agency that would offer a service of direct international accreditation of institutions or programs. Despite the resistance in some countries against international accreditation, I do believe that such an initiative, given that it can secure its academic status, legitimacy, credibility, and reputation, would be able to realize an important position in the global higher education field in short time.

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Quality Assurance for Distance Learning:
Issues for International Discussion and Action

by Simon Marginson

Introduction

Quality assurance for distance learning - especially for international electronic distance learning – is one of the most difficult challenges facing accrediting agencies and all with an interest in the healthy development of higher education.

Much is written about distance learning, but there is a good deal of hype. The debate is polarized in an unhelpful fashion, between advocates of the 'e-revolution' who understand the technologies but often have a narrow take on the policy issues and are prima facie disposed in favour of market solutions, and critics who draw on a broader set of values but have little grasp of the changes that are taking place. Further, there is relatively little in the research literature and the policy literature to guide us (Skilbeck 2001, 59). It is a case of practice running ahead of theory. Electronic distance learning constitutes at one and the same time a frontier of technological change, a frontier of pedagogical innovation and a frontier of commercial development. As on all frontiers, the rules are applied inconsistently, and in some respects have yet to emerge. Old frames of reference don't always work. At the same time, old principles still apply.

Electronic distance learning, especially in its cross-border forms, takes us further from the modern university and its incubator, the nation-state, than any other kind of higher education. Our systems of national and regional regulation were established in an earlier era on the basis of exclusive sovereign control over geographical territory. So far electronic distance education has readily crossed such boundaries, and as such it falls outside existing systems of accreditation and quality assurance. The same comment can be made about the internationalization of higher education institutions, where new cross-border relationships has moved faster than the tracking of those relationships by policy and accreditation systems. Cross-border electronic distance learning – which lies at the overlap of each of these 'gray areas' – has proved to be doubly elusive.

The world higher education community has been curiously slow to tackle cross-border electronic distance learning. Aside from the points about its novelty and its lack of fit with conventionally regulated space, three further reasons suggest themselves. First, the potential of the technologies is open-ended and there is a genuine unsureness of how to define the field – the more so because those with power rarely practice the technologies - coupled with a reluctance to intervene too early given that many interests, universities and companies, have staked excited claims. Second, policies on internationalization are rarely articulated with policies on distance learning and policies on educational technologies. Third, the development of quality assurance in the 1990s was overwhelmingly national, with the international dimension becoming important only recently (Van Damme 2000) and the global regulatory regime still embryonic (World Bank 2001, 66).

Cross-border distance learning is an elusive quarry, but one that we must track down. At stake here is the future character of higher education; and the evolving relationship between pedagogy, technology and society. Electronic distance education brings us face-to-face with

core issues of professional authority, and democratic control and accountability, which in turn determine everything else. As the European University Association notes, technologies are 'a crucial tool by which the universities might reshape their interface with the rest of society' (EUA 1996, 7). Similarly, the International Association of Universities states that it is vital that 'higher education institutions seize the initiative in the process of internationalization rather than reacting to external globalization forces, such as the market, in determining their actions'.

The resolution of these issues will help to determine the shape of the future world order in higher education - and given the central role played by higher education in itself shaping the future, the economies, societies and cultures of the world. 'Technological advances in communications are powerful instruments which can serve to further internationalize higher education and to democratize access to opportunities'. However access to communications technologies is unevenly distributed, and they have the potential to magnify inequalities and flatten cultural diversity (IAU 2000) especially if a lightly regulated market takes command. Nor is it guaranteed that technological change, especially in the form of distance learning, will necessarily lead to improvements in the quality of teaching and learning; not unless pedagogies and quality assurance grow to encompass the new potentials.

Principles

More than one set of principles can be used to shape our thinking on distance learning. The following principles have animated this paper:

1. In a global setting, people experience more than one set of relationships and have more than one identity. At one and the same time we are national, global and local beings with more than one locality. Our loyalties are bound to families, to places, to states and also to professional groups and other associations that crisscross conventional political boundaries. The more mobile we become, the more the scope for different loyalties expands. As Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen (1999) puts it, neither 'national particularism' (isolationism) nor 'global universalism' (a notion of world citizenship that neglects other associations) are adequate as a basis for human action – either in general, or in shaping future international relations in accreditation and quality assurance;

2. International relations - like relationships in an educational setting- should be based on reciprocity, mutual respect and a willingness to learn together. Subject to the point about reciprocity and mutual respect, the expansion of our capacity to communicate and network across borders is unequivocally positive. It follows that we support measures designed to further remove or reduce barriers to international cooperation and exchange;

3. Higher education is central to the creation of public good. It is key to both the democratic order and the economy and plays a broad and long-term role in human development;

4. Higher education is the principal repository of our cultures and intellectual traditions, and the main (though not the only) site of research. It rests on academic freedom. Commitment to the life of the mind is central to it;

5. Regardless of the mode of delivery, teaching/ learning in higher education is a fundamentally collaborative process motivated by educational rather than commercial objectives. Students are not 'customers' or 'clients', they are partners in producing their own education.

6. The knowledge and the independent professional judgment of faculty is at the heart of

good teaching/ learning;

7. Whether in distance learning or face-to-face learning, or all the shadings in between, pedagogical principles apply. For example, communication (teacher/ student, and student/ student) is at the heart of learning. Likewise, the provision of adequate resources to support a pedagogy capable of focusing on the specific and variable learning requirements of each student is central.

8. In on-line learning, the technology is subordinate to educational objectives and methods. As noted by the Vice-Chancellor of the Open University of the UK, Sir John Daniel (2001): 'Today the trend is to embed teaching on the web within a wider range of activities and to use the term web-enhanced courses rather than web-based courses'.

Defining distance learning

Given that electronic distance learning falls partly outside regulation it is not surprising that there is an absence of hard data on student numbers or a generally accepted typology of existing approaches. However, the literature suggests that international distance learning can vary in at least five ways.

First, there is variation in mode and medium. Electronic delivery is in some continuity with print and broadcast modes of distance learning – and can be supported by one or both - but is largely new. At the most basic level it takes in web-based communications such as e-mail. It may involve student administration (enrolment, the dispatch and marking of assignments and tests, etc.) via the web, and the retrieval of materials posted on a website. It may take in video conferencing, CD-ROMS and other multimedia. Increasingly, it requires interactivity on the web, through the asynchronous posting of work and sharing of comments, real-time chat, or tests.

Second, there is pedagogical variation. Within these different media there is scope for a vast variation in pedagogies. Just as in the face-to-face classroom – perhaps more so given that electronic learning is still fairly new and its applications are still being rolled out - there is no one 'best practice' teaching model.

Third, distance learning varies in the degree to which it is supported by face-to-face student administration, teaching and study assistance. Davis et al. (2000) find that student learning can extend over the following spectrum of modes:

primarily face-to-face
supported distance
independent distance
exclusive online

Supported distance programs involve study centres and other facilities which in some cases provide tutoring assistance. Most distance learning includes at least some support. For example, the 1999 survey of offshore Australian education by Davis et al. (2000, 42) classified few programs as 'independent distance' and found that only 1 per cent of programs were exclusively online. Nonetheless, some of the face-to-face students located in off-shore campuses had distance-style contact with the parent Australian university; while the 'off-campus distance' students enjoyed staff assistance, including some teaching in partner institutions or dedicated centres, as noted below. In practice the categories blur to some degree.

Despite this, it is important to emphasise the sharp distinction between education that is

primarily conducted on a face-to-face basis, and education that is not. In many respects they are distinct educational modes, and if sold commercially, they are distinct commodities. Students experience them as different and have a right to be fully informed about the distinctions, so maximising the scope for choice. National systems differ in the extent to which this diversity is made explicit. While American higher education is often relaxed about diversity, British and European systems, often preoccupied with establishing singular standards grounded in status equivalence, more often blur the distinction.

The tendency to read quality and quality assurance in distance learning through the prism of face-to-face education is a principal weakness in many systems of quality assurance, and has retarded the evolution of instruments specific to electronic distance learning. This problem will be discussed further below.

Fourth, cross-border international education, for example in East and Southeast Asia, is often provided on the basis of collaboration between an English-language exporter university, and a local partner in the importing country. Davis et al (2000) suggest the following spectrum of partner responsibility:

provision of study location
student support
marketing and promotion
financial administration
academic support
academic teaching
academic assessment
curriculum

In the commercial model, student support can be detached from institutional delivery and provided as a separate business. Recently chains of learning centres have mushroomed in East Asia. According to University Business:

> Sometimes referred to as the McDonald's of foreign distance learning providers because of their franchise-like business models, distance learning centres are ideal for students in remote regions that lack communications infrastructure. These centres, which are managed by large and small companies and higher education institutions located throughout Asia, are in effect locally owned computer labs – with Internet and video-conferencing capabilities, and other smart classroom features – that typically hold anywhere from 20 to 120 computer workstations connected to a satellite link (Lorenzo 2001, 6).

Finally, as the last example suggests, distance learning – like all education – can vary according to where it falls on the spectrum between public and private goods. Existing practices suggest a significant distinction between education provided by a nonprofit provider produced solely to fulfill educational purposes: and education provided on a solely commercial basis by a commercial provider, in which student learning is only a means to the real end, which is the generation of revenues. In between these extremes lie a variety of commer-

cial activities conducted by nonprofit providers, including the creation of saleable course-ware for commercial companies, and the direct provision of full-tuition courses for certain categories of students. In some cash-strapped national higher education systems, these once 'peripheral' revenue-raising activities have become necessary to the maintenance of core functions.

Can electronic distance learning be regulated at all?

In regulation the first threshold question is whether it is technically possible to regulate Internet-based activities at all. Statements that intervention by national governments simply cannot affect cross-border electronic traffic at all are not strictly accurate. The Chinese government has been successful in erecting an 'firewall' around the country, and Singapore, Saudi Arabia and South Korea also filter and censor some Internet content. However these moves are at the cost of free data exchange. More significant is the emergence of geolocation technology, which is not perfect but enables websites to direct content on the basis of place, 70-90 per cent of the time (Economist 2001). If websites can do this, then laws can direct them when and where to do it. In future it may be possible to control a would-be educational provider without overturning the whole basis of the Internet. Governments would be able to collaborate in a regulatory regime. However, we are not in that domain yet.

At this stage, where distance learning is provided by a commercial provider without institutional roots in higher education, it is very difficult to regulate. Where the commercial provider needs formal accreditation, this provides a way in. Where the education is provided by bona fide universities, it is more readily regulated, but the power to do so is unequally distributed. Where the education does not require a local location, importer countries depend on the willingness of exporters to conduct quality assurance, even though such quality assurance is conducted on the terms of the exporter without reference to the importer.

The second threshold question is how to establish international negotiations premised on the mutual achievement of public goods. It is relatively easy to set up international trading negotiations on the basis of mutual economic gain, private goods. Public goods are another matter. A key difficulty is that the means for identifying and ordering the public good are centred on the single nation-state. We can readily identify global public goods, such as ecological sustainability, or the free exchange of knowledge, or a stable world regime for the recognition of qualifications, or the dovetailing of national quality assurance systems. But we lack the and common commitments with which to determine global public goods, including the global externalities that flow from one nation's public good to another nation's public good. So cross-border transactions are predominantly seen as market transactions, and even public universities become in effect private providers once operating beyond the national realm (Van Damme 2001, 5). The public good - wherein lies most of the potential of governance and regulation - becomes invoked as national defence against global pressures, rather than a means for compensating for market failure on the global scale.

Context

As this suggests, whether and how distance learning is regulated is ultimately determined as much by the national and global policy context as by technical limits. The policy context shapes regulation in a number of ways: the growing salience of globalization, the ideological debate about higher education and especially distance learning, and the associated moves to trade liberalization in education.

Going global. Increasingly, higher education is going global. The most important change has been the emergence of asynchronous and instantaneous electronic communications and data transfer. There has also been a great expansion of people movement and institution-to-

institution relationships, for both commercial and non-commercial educational purposes. The number of foreign students has more than doubled since 1980 and now constitutes an important trade in services, especially in the UK and Australia. The trends to faculty movement across borders, and ongoing cross-country collaborations, are features of daily university life whose growth – one suspects - was slowed but not halted by September 11.

No single element has been more important in driving globalization than the development of instantaneous global communications and data transfer. In turn this has made possible a vast expansion of the potential of distance learning. It is by no means clear how on-line learning will develop but many universities have created structures and prototypes designed to position themselves favourably for future developments. In a networked world (Castells 2000, Van Damme 2001) technology facilitates the growing role of partnerships and consortia in higher education (Middlehurst 2001), especially in relation to large budget developments in communication systems and software.

From outside the United States, the globalization of higher education is often synonymous with 'Americanization'. In communications this is now less so with the relative growth of non-English content on the Internet. However – and despite the fact that on the whole US universities are less commercially aggressive towards foreign students than their counterpart universities in other English-speaking countries - the US continues to be the dominant magnet for international students. American universities are richer than their counterparts: the American model of civic independence and mixed public-private funding is increasingly influential on the global plane, and American Faculty salaries exert a powerful pull in relation to talent outside the US, especially in the developing world. By comparison, 'brain drain' from the US to the developing world is a negligible issue.

Even in developed nations such as Western Europe or Australia, in a networked world, the cultural power of American higher education, coupled with American business power and the role of English as a global tongue, has the potential to compromise the identity of local universities, posing the need for quite non-American policies of state intervention specifically directed at sustaining national strategy and identity within the global setting (Marginson 2002). It is important to remember that global mobility and exchange are neither balanced nor equal.

In turn this raise the question of forms of internationalization in higher education. As is often remarked, globalization brings with it both a tendency to convergence (homogenization) and the potential for richer more plural encounters. 'Internationalization' might mean imposing one culture or curriculum on top of another, or it might create the basis for a genuine dialogue and mutual learning. Often in distance learning the tendency for homogenization is dominant, the more so given that the web platforms and software mostly originate from the English-speaking world. Designing culturally-sensitive online learning is a major challenge.

The growing people movement in higher education poses issues of recognition of staff and student qualifications; while cross-national collaboration in teaching, for example in twinning programs, raises questions about the interface between quality assurance systems. Bi-lateral negotiations are a slow mechanism for resolving such problems on the global scale. International dealings on accreditation and quality assurance are on the rise, posing questions about the future global regulation of higher education. Eaton (2001) notes that in 1999, 34 of the 55 CHEA regional, national and specialized accreditors were engaged in international activity. Together the CHEA organizations are accrediting 355 programs or activities in 65 countries. 'This is an exciting time for international cooperation, and we ought to make the most of it', Eaton states. In Europe, the Bologna Declaration's assertion of a common higher education space has accelerated the convergence of both degree structures and national quality assurance systems. Despite continuing national variation, this is

part of a larger pattern of global convergence in the forms of quality assurance, though not yet in the mechanisms (Van Damme 2000). In a global environment each national system has implications for everyone else's. There might be greater scope for global balance and mutuality in accreditation and quality assurance, than in the raw political economy of higher education.

Warring ideologies. However while internationalization proceeds apace, a major contest is taking place over just what is being internationalized, and how. The distinction between distance learning and face-to-face learning, which is an educational distinction, has become tangled up in another distinction, derived from the war between two broad ideological viewpoints. One side, supported by tradition, sees higher education as a place for learning, research and service to society: the producer of a broad range of public and private goods; subject to academic freedom, public accountability and democratic control (Singh 2001). In this vision there is a place for the market and private enrichment but the larger good is the public good. The other side, supported by political fashion, sees higher education as fundamentally the producer of private goods, and one that should operate like a business (see Altbach 2001a and Altbach 2001b for a critique of these assumptions). In this vision the market is the dominant framework. The ultimate accountability is not to the public good but to student clients, not as partners in learning but as consumers - and perhaps to shareholders: fully commercial education is seen as the ultimate form.

The confusion here is that electronic distance learning, and educational technologies more generally, have become too readily identified with the push for commercialization. There is no inherent reason for this in the technologies themselves, or in the nature of higher education. For example, there is no reason why a public good-centred approach to education should not favour the lowering of barriers to international exchange in education, or fail to take up the learning potential of innovations in technologies (just as it took up pedagogical innovations and new educational psychologies in the past). Rather, the conjunction between delivery form and ideological stance is about economic interests. Educational technologies open up the potential for vast new markets in communications systems, computer hardware, software and multimedia; not to mention commercial links between the education and entertainment industries. Further, the introduction of a new paradigm such as electronic distance learning can be used to create a commodified form of education in which faculty lose autonomy, the links between teaching and research traditional to universities are snapped, the vocational role of higher education becomes its only role, new courses (products) can be created overnight, and client demand is shaped by marketing. If all of this can be sold as the inevitable outcome of technological change and market forces – rather than the imperatives of ideology or humming of commercial interest – so much the better.

Much of this confusion is fostered by the non-profit sector. Individual universities hope to use projects for virtual delivery as one means of generating non-core business revenues, regardless of the long-term effects on higher education as a whole (what's good for one university's budget is not always good for higher education). This is part of a more general pattern of public-private ambiguity and convergence. One can readily find instances where the market model and the public model appear to have blended, or crossed-over each other, or swapped features (Kirp 2001). This is not to say that the public/ private distinction is irrelevant. It is to say that there are hybrid forms that lie between the clearly delineated concepts of public and private, in which public and private purposes are mixed together, creating the need for more subtle processes of quality assurance.

One example of this apparent ambiguity lies in the international higher education programs in British and Australian universities. Like biotech in American non-profits, Australian international education, mostly run by commercial companies, constitutes profit-

making islands within erstwhile non-profit institutions. Because they have become the main source of discretionary revenues, the international education programs are increasingly influential in university behaviour as a whole (Marginson and Considine 2000). Another example of public/private ambiguity is the international franchising of degrees, with teaching provided partly or wholly by foreign providers, mostly operating on a for-profit basis. (Nominal equivalence can be created by a manipulated quality assurance, but 'hiring out the brand' – while creating easy revenues, especially for prestigious universities - is scarcely tenable: if the teaching is partly provided by another agent, with different legal, educational and cultural character, how can the franchised degree be the same degree? (Nor do students believe it is).

There is no doubt that both public and private goods will continue to be produced in higher education; and also no doubt that commercial providers will play a role in future. The viable for-profit institutions are successful because they meet student needs. For example, the model of no-frills student-focused full-fee vocational training developed by Phoenix is here to stay - not for all students but for certain kinds of students. Similarly, the on-line version of Phoenix works with a particular group of students: mobile, net-savvy and employer-sponsored (Ryan 2001, 29). The question is what will be the future balance between public and private goods, and whether the commercial model will move from the margins to a central role.

For quality assurance in distance learning, the implications are two-fold. First, despite the ambiguities, from the point of view of accreditation and quality assurance there is an irreducible distinction between institutions driven by commercial market forces, and institutions driven by academic values, public good and expert judgement. The bottom lines are different. The methods of quality assurance - higher education model, or generic corporate model - are different. Second, the issues of accreditation and quality assurance posed by the for-profit sector - for example whether commercial institutions should call themselves 'universities' (Altbach 2001b) – need to be distinguished from the issues posed by distance learning.

GATS. Commercial interests within higher education have received powerful support in the World Trade Organization (WTO)-led negotiations over the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). GATS aims to liberalise trade in services by providing member countries with legally enforceable rights to such trade.

Cross-border services are defined in four categories: consumption abroad, such as the onshore education of foreign students; cross-border delivery, such as transnational distance education; commercial presence, such as franchising or campuses in foreign countries; and the movement of natural persons, for example faculty travelling abroad to deliver a training course. Nations are asked to make commitments to two principles: market access (governments should not discriminate between incumbents and new entrants to a market); national treatment (governments should not discriminate between domestic and foreign service providers). By 1998, 21 countries had made specific commitments on higher education services: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway. Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey, UK, USA.

Not every nation has committed to all items. For example Australia has committed to full market access and national treatment in relation to foreign providers of cross-border distance education, but in relation to commercial presence (foreign providers teaching in Australia) has committed to market access but not national treatment. This allows the Australian government to provide financial subsidies to local producers without having to fund foreign producers, enabling a de facto discrimination. In this manner Australia pursues a trading double-standard that may be familiar also to Americans – calling for full trade lib-

eralization in importing nations, while retaining enough control over the policy levers to protect the domestic system.

Meanwhile the United States is arguing that while 'education to a large extent is a government function', the development of 'supplementary' commercial markets in higher education, adult education and industry training is desirable. This would be facilitated by national commitments on both market access and national treatment (USA 2000). While avoiding a direct confrontation with the non-profit sector and the accreditation industry on home turf, the US wants to free up opportunities for American exporters, with other national governments taking the local political flak.

As the above list suggests, free trade is in the economic interests of the advanced countries, and the exporting nations rather than importing nations. The United States is the leading exporter of higher education services, commanding a third of the market. Other leaders are the UK, Australia, Germany and France. Altbach remarks that 'any WTO-style treaty would inevitably harm the emerging academic systems of the developing countries', unable to compete economically against the major exporters, whose intention would not be to contribute to nation-building but to take home a profit. Even in the developed countries, 'the idea that the university serves a broad public good would be weakened, and the universities would be subject to all of the commercial pressures of the marketplace – an marketplace enforced by international treaties and legal requirements' (Altbach 2001a, 4).

The character of higher education is at stake, but while governments that have made GATS commitments have consulted groups representing the commercial sector, established higher education communities are often left out. On 28 September 2001 four organisations - CHEA, the American Council on Education, the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada and the European University Association signed a joint declaration indicating that the academic communities on both sides of the Atlantic oppose the inclusion of higher education services in the GATS negotiations. The declaration stated that 'higher education exists to serve the public interest and is not a "commodity"', 'authority to regulate higher education must remain in the hands of competent bodies as designated by any given country', and there must be appropriate quality assurance mechanisms, under competent bodies, to ensure that quality is not compromised, regardless of the method of delivery (EAU 2001). At the same time:

> The signatory organizations however express their members' own commitment to reducing obstacles to international exchange and cooperation in higher education using conventions and agreements outside of a trade policy regime. This commitment includes, but is not limited to improving communications, expanding information exchanges, and developing agreements concerning higher education institutions, programs, degrees or qualifications and quality review practices (EUA 2001).

Moves towards more effective global coordination of accreditation and quality assurance systems are in the interests of both proponents of the market and advocates of a public good approach to higher education. Global regulation is itself a global public good (Kaul et al. 1999): the more so if it is so configured as to encourage national self-determination and cultural diversity in higher education.

Market hubris. As the GATS negotiations indicate, the commercial sector has a formidable power to set the agenda. This power has shaped the image of cross-border electronic distance learning, which draws together a rhetoric about freedom, the knowledge economy, innovation, internationalization and new markets - plus notions of student-centred learning, freewheeling student choice and the inherent attractiveness of screen-based delivery - plus vocational relevance and cost savings, once the initial investment is made. For a while in the 1990s e-learning was widely perceived as better, more relevant and the key to satisfy-

ing growing demand, especially for lifelong learning and in the developing world.

Despite the market hubris, the gloss has now partly worn off. Formidable outlays on communications, hardware and courseware have failed to generate the expected outcomes. Western Governors has fallen far short of both enrollment and financial expectations and many other initiatives have failed, faltered or taken more slowly than expected, despite the prestige of powerful established university 'brands'. What the research has been saying for some time is now apparent to many educational managers (for example Chipman 2001, 12-13). Done properly, online learning costs at least as much as face-to-face learning; to realize the pedagogical potentials of e-discussion staffing ratios and class sizes will be little different; and among students online education on its own is relatively unpopular, except for special categories of working students. Professional associations want an established and structured curriculum, and socialization through human contact, rather than freewheeling choice on the Internet. Most students want to use the Internet, especially in communications and data retrieval, but they also value the networking benefits of face-to-face classrooms, they like to deal directly with teachers, and both young students and late bloomers want contact with other students. There is much more scope for mixed modes of delivery than for the substitution of e-learning for face-to-face.

Equally importantly, foreign students place a lower value on distance education, and on franchised degrees at home, compared with studying face-to-face in the exporting country. The potential for the large scale substitution of future 'click' universities for 'brick' universities, and a bifurcation between the social elite on 'brick' campuses and cheap mass education in 'click' campuses - the scenario explored by Press and Washburn (2001) - has receded. If students who can afford a computer have an overwhelming preference for 'brick', it will be difficult to build a 'click' university among those who cannot. On the other hand, in some developing countries there are prospects for an attenuated 'higher education' that combines broadcast delivery with limited computing at study centres. In developed countries, there is a parallel potential for an attenuated commercial version of 'brick', with 'click' as a second stream, the developmental strategy used by Phoenix.

Key questions remain. When is a higher education not a higher education? What are its irreducible components? Is 'click' a university at all? When does the selected use of e-learning enhance the curriculum, and when does it reduce teacher contact or otherwise water down the learning? To what extent are existing approaches to quality assurance translatable into distance education and to what extent should we develop new approaches (Van Damme 2000, 15). More bluntly, hopw can the hemorrhaging of quality be prevented? Contreras (2001) notes the trend to bogus degrees and all-but-bogus institutions:

> International quality control of degrees is becoming a major issue as more diploma mills are flushed out of the United States or appear spontaneously in countries with little oversight of private colleges. Some of these entities send out bulk e-mails offering "prestigious unaccredited degrees" for a fee, no questions asked, no work required. Others require nominal work or a one-month residency on some tropical isle in order for the degree to be awarded. A recent trend among unaccredited U.S. institutions is to go to foreign countries – almost always small ones – for "accreditation". Some startups intentionally seek out weak points in the international higher education oversight framework (Contreras 2001, 5).

In the borderless electronic environment, an international system of quality assurance is only as strong as its weakest link. The question is not just how to assess the quality of distance learning, but how to coordinate assessments. As Van Damme notes, globalization lays down a fundamental challenge to the more-or-less voluntaristic approach to international relations that has evolved so far

An international regulatory framework is needed to transcend the eroded national policy contexts and to some extent steer the global integration of the higher education systems. Without such a framework the globalization of higher education will be unrestrained and wild, generating a lot of resistance and protest (Van Damme 2001, 4).

Nowhere is this more apparent than in relation to electronic distance learning.

Key questions about electronic distance learning
What mechanisms are currently in place for quality assurance in distance learning in different countries?

In relation to electronic distance learning, the short answer is 'not much' as yet, though the practices of national governments and accrediting agencies vary.

Importer nations face significant difficulties in attempting to regulate cross-border traffic. Where a local partner is involved, they have jurisdiction over that partner and can apply both blunt sanctions (approval/ disapproval) or more subtle regulation via accreditation requirements and mechanisms of quality assurance. The last can create anomalies where - as is the case with Australian education located in foreign countries - sole responsibility for quality assurance is taken by the exporter. Where no local partner is involved, importer governments can only regulate distance learning by control over postal or electronic communications, which is rarely exercised. For example in Singapore, approval is not required for cross-border delivery through courses that have no local presence (Ziguras 2001). Nevertheless India is likely to require all foreign universities offering distance education to register with the government (Middlehurst 2001).

Among the exporter nations, practices vary. A number of American accrediting agencies regulate the quality of international operations, though in some cases the template is the same as used for local face-to-face operations, and neither the particular character of distance learning nor the particular character of international operations – let alone the values and needs of the importer – are fully incorporated. The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in the UK has developed detailed guidelines for the quality assurance of distance learning. It distinguishes between the qualities of the means of delivery, course content, communication, administration and student support (QAAHE 2002; also EUA 1996, 15). The UK includes the offshore activities of British universities within its ambit, and has issued well publicized criticisms of those activities. However, the UK approach is limited to the extent that it is nation-centred and monocultural, and it rests on international relations that are uni-directional. The alleged superiority of British higher education product work functions as the assumption underlying quality assurance, the effect of quality assurance, and the intended market outcome.

Despite the fact that Australia has an equivalent stake in its reputation for cross-border distance learning, the Audit Manual of the newly-created Australian Universities Quality Agency as yet employs a less developed approach than the UK agency. On online learning, it simply notes that modes of provision are becoming more diverse and quality agencies need to take into account all forms of distance learning. 'The appropriate means of gathering the data' for AUQA purposes are still to be developed (Woodhouse 2001, 2/19-2/20).

On the other hand, some individual Australian universities have developed more detailed protocols in relation to quality assurance of on-line learning. For example in its policy on the quality assurance of on-line learning, the University of Sydney (2001) draws out a range of aspects specific to distance learning including 'pedagogical curriculum issues' (learning objectives, outcomes, assessment and evaluation), 'pedagogical management issues' (development, maintenance and standards in relation to on-line materials, staff training requirements and levels of student learning support), and 'technical issues' (sustainability and robustness, technical quality, scalability, student technical support). Sydney also distinguish-

es between web-supplemented, web-dependent and wholly on-line courses.

On all offshore international activities, including distance learning, Australia's national approach is again vague (Woodhouse 2001, 2/19). Offshore visits may occur but do not seem to be mandatory (see Appendix). Under the Australian system, the relevant costs of the five-yearly audit are carried by the institution that is being audited. This may retard the development of new and potentially expensive techniques for tracking international and electronic operations.

Meanwhile, commercial industry bodies are developing their own voluntary approaches to standards setting and quality. Industry bodies have a significant stake in quality assurance, in more than one sense. First, in America at least the industry is large. Last year University Business published a survey-description of 100 e-learning companies, noting that 'the last few years have seen a proliferation of companies that promise to help universities get into electronic education' (Chnapko 2001, 37). Second, standardization, regulated by industry-wide conventions on quality, serves as a method of defining markets and products. 'Experts say the only thing holding back a revolution in tech-assisted education is the lack of standards' (Gnagni 2001). Third, in the corporate framework – as in the more commercially minded universities and university systems such as those of the UK and Australia, where international quality assurance has evolved at least in part as a necessary element of business strategy - quality assurance functions partly as a branch of marketing.

This emphasizes that in some respects commercial quality assurance is incompatible with quality assurance that draws on educational values and broader public objectives. It also points to a limitation in some of the self-reporting frameworks used in systems of university quality assurance. Self-reporting is seen as a means of preserving university autonomy, but this cannot always be equated with academic freedom. Where the purpose of quality assurance is at least partly to secure a marketing advantage, scrutiny and/or transparency are likely to be incomplete. Major problems may be unreported. Arguably, universities are more likely to impose this limitation on themselves if they follow a whole-of-institution approach to quality assurance in which control is exercised primarily by institutional managers, subordinating discipline-based academic judgements.

What quality assurance issues are posed for distance learning and how are these issues different from quality assurance concerns related to site-based education? To what extent are the differences linked to technology?

If we understand 'quality' as a matter of status or gold standard then there is no fundamental reason to argue that distance learning has a different quality to face-to-face learning. If 'quality' is understood as fitness for purpose, then to the extent that the purposes that distance learning are distinct from those of face-to-face learning then the two qualities can be distinguished only in that the purposes are different. Fitness for purpose differs to a limited degree, for example in that asynchronous remote delivery enables a broadening of participation. If we understand 'quality' in its strict philosophical sense, as the nature or essence of a thing - and this rigorous definition is the only ultimately defensible notion of 'quality' though it is far from being the only use of the term - then in certain respects distance learning has a different quality to face-to-face learning, learning that is based in organic presence. Different qualities require specific assessments.

How do we deal with this distinctive quality of electronic distance learning? Distance learning is an educational process that has elements in common with other processes of learning, and also distinctive elements. Quality assurance in distance learning should be sensitive to both learning principles common to all forms of higher education, and aspects of learning that are distance specific.

Here we need to be wary of arguments that distance learning is essentially the same as face-to-face learning, or that the two have converged in the contemporary university, in which face-to-face classes are large and universities have translated into face-to-face programs certain techniques of communications and administration that first emerged in the distance learning environment. The claims about sameness and convergence attempt to claim equality of status for distance learning (a worthy aim in some ways) by claiming identity of mode, which is wrong.

Electronic learning brings with it different equipment requirements, different systems of communication, different means of data storage and retrieval, novel pedagogies, the use of Internet and multimedia sources, and the challenge of the 'digital divide' between the technology poor and the technology rich (among many, see Gladieux 2000). All of these factors are partly technology-derived; though not entirely so. All have specific implications for quality assurance.

Electronic distance learning involves distinct problems of technical operations and student support - including problems that can originate outside the jurisdiction in which learning takes place - and also enables distinctive methods of recording student achievement and progression. Electronic modes facilitate the recording and tracking of learning which creates distinctive (and in some ways greater) potentials in relation to program evaluation - feeding directly into quality assurance. The potential of the technologies in visible product and border crossing enables a broad range of stakeholders to be brought into evaluation. 'The quality assurance strategies that are appropriate for virtual education share common features with other forms of media, but there are also differences' (Middlehurst 2001)

Regardless of the fact that many courses combine asynchronous communications on the web with real time classroom interactions, there remains an irreducible distinction between face-to-face learning and its absence. We can count the number of hours that students are in organic presence with their teachers and each other (regardless of the fact that it is more difficult to record learning interactions than it is in electronic mode). Thus it is possible to establish definitions and standards in relation to face-to-face education, and this should be done.

Perhaps universities have been reluctant to establish standards for organic presence because they prefer to restrain expectations and retain resource flexibility. Indeed, there is another version of the myth about convergence that goes as follows - face-to-face teaching and learning has become so pedagogically weak that distance learning is intrinsically more attractive: professional, modern, efficient, innovative, exciting. Here bad face-to-face learning is contrasted with good electronic distance education. This flawed logic is used to drive an argument for status equivalence, grounded in the regressive claim that teaching is remote from students in both face-to-face and distance modes. It then becomes easier to argue another unexamined assumption; that students have an intrinsic preference for e-learning over person-to-person communications.

Unfortunately for the protagonists of these arguments, research fails to find that most students have an intrinsic preference for screen-based learning. Most students want to use e-mail to communicate with faculty and each other, they want to use the web, and they also want face-to-face contact. It is not an either/ or situation. A minority of students do prefer distance learning - those that work full-time and find it hard to attend site-based classes, those that live in remote locations, those who want to access programs that are provided in other countries. These are significant groups within the larger higher education population.

Electronic distance learning also calls up a number of issues and problems that derive from the special role of the commercial sector in recent developments. These are not technology-driven but have become technology-associated. They include the extent to which some forms of distance learning constitute bona fide university education: for example the

degree of academic freedom exercised in course development and teaching functions, and the extent to which governance encompasses the principles of university autonomy and public interest. These issues are more readily addressed within the US – where applications by commercial providers for accreditation create a degree of transparency – than in relation to American commercial providers operating outside the US.

In the long run it would be highly damaging for higher education if one set of values premised on public good were applied to conventional face-to-face learning, and another commercial set of values were applied to distance learning. This would be to accept the de facto 'capture' of distance learning by the commercial sector. Distance learning and educational technologies are much too educationally powerful and socially important to be so constrained. Moreover, the capture of distance learning by the commercial sector would pose particular problems for countries in the developing world. The commercial sector has no intrinsic commitment to the creation of national higher education capacity, or the economic enrichment of the country concerned, only to the generation and repatriation of commercial revenues. For example, commercial providers are unlikely to pay much heed to national language policies or to the facilitation of access for social groups without the private capacity to pay, both of which increase production costs.

What actions need to be taken to achieve confidence in the overall quality of distance learning imports and exports? What can quality assurance organizations do to protect students, countries, and the reputation of quality assurance?

Education does not itself have to become a market to serve the economy. Arguably, when the primary goal becomes the generation of short-term revenues, education becomes less effective and securing longer term economic, social and cultural outcomes. The future of distance learning should not be determined by trade policy, but by educators plus agencies charged with the public interest.

Trade has a role, and commercial providers have a significant contribution to make, but this should be subordinate to and contribute to the larger national and global public interest. The key issue is control. Accreditation and quality assurance agencies around the world need to hold a common rejection of the GATS process in higher education, and develop a common position in relation to the commercial sector. At the same time, regulation should encourage the freest possible flow of educational resources and initiatives. The policy agenda should be positive as well as negative. Negotiating a new global regime in higher education – which would be a combination of institutional autonomy, national and regional sovereignty and global agency –provides such a positive agenda. Arguably, only institutions and agencies from higher education itself can make such a regime work.

There are many questions about the possible forms of such a global regime. In the long term, a stable solution can only be achieved on the basis of cross-national equality of respect, rather than de facto domination by a handful of exporting nations. For example, when an American or Australian university provides distance learning in, say, India, it should not be enough for that program to be quality assured in the exporting country, in terms of one set of cultural and educational norms. The program should be quality assured also in India. Otherwise there is no mechanism whereby a bi-cultural approach can be secured. Recalling Amartya Sen's point, in a plural world, multiple partners require multiple accreditation procedures and multiple lines of accountability. Likewise, in a mutual world, reciprocal procedures ought to be central to negotiation. There is no single 'best model' of higher education appropriate for all nations at all times. All nations have a potential contribution to make to the development of higher education.

The USA has a key leadership role and much depends on the capacity and willingness of

US agencies and institutions to pursue international relations based on mutuality rather than hegemony.

Credentialling, accreditation and quality assurance systems should clearly identify the distinction between predominantly distance-based degrees, and face-to-face degrees. Prestigious universities that brand their distance and online degrees (and franchised degrees) as essentially the same as face-to-face degrees in the long run harm both their reputation and the character of higher education. Distance degrees can and should be high quality degrees. The point is that they are different, and that it is in the interests of students and the public to draw out these differences with greater precision instead of using quality assurance to hide them.

Likewise, systems of accreditation and quality assurance should distinguish between commercial programs and non-commercial ones. Programs with substantially different purposes require different kinds of quality assurance. The illusion that quality is a constant, that the whole heterogeneity can be contained in one universal 'quality' should be abandoned. At the same time, it needs to remembered that accreditation and quality assurance systems - however diverse - cannot carry the full burden of the policy issues called up by budgetary cutbacks, commercial initiatives and technological change. These systems are called on to do too much, functioning as gate-keepers and protectors; as instruments of sectoral, public and student interest; and as mechanisms for continuous improvement, guarantors of minimum standards and engines for excellence.

The GATS agenda is a striking indicator of the potential for the deconstruction of public higher education. Nevertheless, mainstream providers still lead higher education because of the great weight attached to institutional reputation, because of their relations with the leading professions, and because they concentrate resources across all fields of knowledge. Non-profit institutions and public agencies can and should shape the globalization of higher education but to do so they will need to take the high road of public and student interest, rather than the low road in which the revenues and prestige of each university become end to be sought.

'He who speaks the truth must have one foot in the stirrup'
—Armenian proverb

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INTERNATIONAL QUALITY ASSURANCE, ETHICS AND THE MARKET: A VIEW FROM A DEVELOPING COUNTRY

Background Paper for CHEA International Seminar
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Introduction

Transnational higher education is a growing and unstoppable phenomenon, posing huge challenges for higher education provision and regulation within nation states. What kind of quality assurance is appropriate for transnational provision and does international quality assurance have possibilities for oversight or regulation of such provision? We know from debates at many national conferences on quality assurance that the search for consensus on what constitutes an effective quality assurance within a single national higher education system is an on-going one. For every issue where there is broad agreement, there are many others which are far from settled, given the range of competing interests and viewpoints at stake. The matter becomes infinitely more complicated at the interface of two or more national higher education systems, often quite different from each other in relation to history, priorities and resourcing, especially where this involves higher education exchange between developed and developing countries

There are a number of issues which arise in connection with international quality assurance. Some of the more obvious ones which have received and rightly continue to receive attention include

- the setting up of structures and mechanisms to gather and make available to relevant stakeholders, reliable information on programme quality and institutional reputation to apprise them of the quality of programmes and providers.

- issues of credit transfer and recognition of qualifications for purposes of further study or employment across national borders

- requirements for mutual recognition of national quality assurance structures, systems and processes

- the development of an international community of quality assurance practitioners who could share experiences and good practices for the strengthening of quality provision on a global scale - accompanied by the search for a common discourse on quality assurance and accreditation.

There are, however, other issues which have received less attention and are in need of practical recommendations to take them beyond mere noting as important concerns for sensitive handling. These include

- quality assurance across different political and cultural contexts

- the role of quality assurance in facilitating different social and economic purposes of

higher education - some of the more abstract of which require primarily qualitative rather than quantitative judgements.

- the political and economic relations between those involved in international higher education exchange, especially between exporting and importing countries, and the capacity of developing countries to take a middle path between asserting their national priorities within higher education and quality assurance arrangements on the one hand and not becoming overly parochial and protectionist on the other.

- the role and responsibility of international organisations in monitoring and acting on issues affecting importing and exporting countries.

The agenda of work for the CHEA International Commission must encompass both sets of issues. The practical and possibly more technical concerns implicated in the first set of issues are absolutely critical to ensure that the growing internationalisation of higher education is not compromised by poor quality provision. The more political concerns implicated in the other issues also require the development of appropriate policy, accompanied by relevant decisions and actions on the part of organisations seeking to shape international quality assurance. A commitment to these kinds of concerns is clearly signalled in the brief set out for the International Commission in so far as it highlights the need for an ethical framework for higher education internationalisation as well as equity and development issues in international quality assurance.

Why do such issues matter to international quality assurance? National higher education systems often reflect commitments, whether explicitly or implicitly, to values that are not confined to narrowly conceived education and training operations. Citizens also have expectations that national systems will deliver public and private goods and benefits through major social institutions like universities. How can a national higher education system manage to hold on to its own stipulated values, principles and socially framed educational outcomes at a time when it also has to facilitate the development of knowledge and skills which will enable that country and its citizens to function effectively within a globalised environment? This is one of the major political issues facing developing countries in relation to the internationalisation of higher education. It is clear that any discussion on international quality assurance must take this dimension into account. The relationship between developed countries that export higher education to developing countries is not simply a narrow educational or economic transaction confined to value-free technical skilling and credentialing. It is also one involving the potential clash of values between social development and economic development, between the public and private goods yielded by higher education and between state regulation and market regulation. What values and whose values are at work and at stake in a globalised environment? It is becoming painfully evident that the values often associated with globalisation ('privatisation,' 'deregulation,' 'liberalisation') are not necessarily compatible with specific national developmental agendas and do not bring equal benefits to developed and developing countries alike.

Several analyses of globalisation have pointed to the possibility that a global knowledge society and knowledge economy could exacerbate the divide between rich and poor countries, and rich and poor people within those countries. The key to overcoming this divide is often postulated as the enhancement of educational opportunity and access, to enable governments to grow their educated and skilled human resource base in order to successfully enter the knowledge economy. This imposes a huge developmental responsibility on education and training systems to facilitate national economic and even political survival within a fiercely competitive global economy. Such a developmental responsibility cannot be borne by individual countries on their own but must become the responsibility of global

communities (economic, political and educational) if globalisation is to serve human development rather than polarise it even further. What kind of global ethic should inform such a global developmental responsibility? The International Commission could play a critical role in facilitating a dialogue which could begin to give content to such an ethic within the context of higher education.

Analysing the impact of political and economic globalisation on higher education requires a consideration of the politics surrounding transnational provision and quality assurance claims for such provision. My paper suggests some of the ways in which international quality assurance could address these politics. My starting point does not dispute the potential value and importance of higher education export and import between developed and developing countries but reflects on some of the conditionalities which should govern such exchanges, especially their quality assurance. My concern is with the values and principles which should inform international quality assurance in order to enable transnational higher education to begin to serve clear and comprehensive development objectives in importing countries. Where does the market come into this debate? It is easy to eulogise or demonise the market in higher education without actually spelling out what the forms and effects of marketisation in higher education are - is it about the dominance of narrowly economistic cost-benefit analyses of higher education, is it about seeing higher education provision as a response to employer and consumer demand, is it about the growth of the for-profit sector in higher education and the possible negative impacts of this on public provision? My paper does not elaborate on the notion of the market in higher education but it does proceed from a concern that the view of higher education as a private good produced by the transactional relationship between a seller and a willing buyer,[1] as a commodity to be traded, is overshadowing 'public good' issues in higher education and their importance for social and civic life. Such an imbalance is threatening to higher education initiatives in developing countries which may be seeking to locate higher education within a broad social development agenda that is related to their specific histories and circumstances. My paper is written almost entirely from the perspective of a developing country that is importing higher education and, in fact, constitutes an argument for greater and more explicit inclusivity of developing country voices in the debates about co-operation in international quality assurance.

I begin my paper with a brief indication of key trends emerging in higher education as a consequence of globalisation, including the rise of transnational education and the need for international quality assurance. I go on to look at the socio-political, economic and educational implications of higher education export and import, especially for developing countries. I conclude by reflecting on the challenges for and the potential role of international quality assurance and organisations which seek to promote it in addressing some of the above implications.

Globalisation and Higher Education Exchange

The ambivalence of the sea-change that is occurring in higher education worldwide and its implications for developing countries is aptly captured in the sub-title of the report of the World Bank sponsored Task Force on Higher Education and Society.[2] The arena of higher education development holds both peril and promise. The dramatic and far-reaching changes in higher education are not only about new types of higher education institutions or new modalities of education delivery. They are about fundamental changes in the frame of reference for higher education which, in turn, is revolutionising traditional ways of thinking about the purposes of higher education and about the mission and goals of higher education institutions. Higher education systems in both developed and developing societies are being buffeted by forces which cannot be regulated or contained by national policy

frameworks, bringing contradictorily, exciting opportunities as well as dangers for education seekers and education providers. It is obvious that there is no going back to some possibly mythical golden age of the past. There could be many benefits from steering higher education towards the best of the opportunities and away from the worst of the dangers. However, whether the opportunities can be exploited successfully and the dangers mediated sufficiently does not depend entirely on national or institutional policy or commitment but on the positioning of countries and regions in the global economy. Such positioning does not occur on a level playing field since global economic forces are effectively forging a new post-cold war divide between strong states and powerful regional blocs and weaker more vulnerable ones at the periphery. In the globalisation stakes, developing countries are struggling to locate themselves between the seduction of globalisation as an unqualified good and the threat of globalisation as an unmitigated disaster.

   The defining elements of economic globalisation are now familiar enough not to require detailed elaboration. Carnoy and Castells define "a global economy as the economy whose core, strategic activities have the technological, organizational and institutional capacity to work as a unit in real time, or in chosen time, on a planetary scale. ………… a global economy is a new reality, different from processes of internationalization in previous times for one simple reason: only at this point in history a technological infrastructure was available to make it possible. This infrastructure includes networked computer systems, advanced telecommunications, information based, fast transportation systems for people, goods and services, with a planetary reach, and the information processing capacity to manage the complexity of the whole system. However, most firms and most jobs in the world are not global, in fact they are local and regional. But most, if not all economies are dependent upon their performance of their globalized core. This globalized core includes financial markets, international trade in goods and services, transnational production and distribution of goods and services, science and technology, and specialty labor."[3]

   The political implications of economic globalization are also familiar, resulting as it has in the declining power and reach of many national states to set policy frameworks autonomously and according to national priorities. As Carnoy and Castells point out, states have themselves accelerated and facilitated globalization through embracing or being compelled to embark on policies of 'deregulation, liberalization and privatisation,' not only in relation to the economy but in social provision as well. The impact of economic and political globalisation on the ability of governments to facilitate adequate social provision in areas like education and health has been severely detrimental to poor communities in developed and developing countries alike. A philosophy which espouses economic competitiveness in a global arena, education as training for 'productive skills,' knowledge processes and products as the engine of growth, and efficiency through market principles has not often been aligned sufficiently and successfully with a social justice agenda for those with low or no incomes and with low levels of education and training.

   What are the implications of economic and political globalistion for higher education, quality assurance and international relations between countries that export and import higher education? The discourse of the knowledge society and the knowledge economy has brought higher education into centre stage as a critical site and agency for enhancing national economic competitiveness within a global knowledge-driven economy. However, for higher education to be able to play this particular role in the knowledge economy, traditional conceptions of the university and its functions, its target learner constituency, its beneficiaries and stakeholders, the way it is financed and governed, its products and its impact are all being redefined in quite fundamentally different, even educationally alien ways.

   A number of converging trends, evident in higher education restructuring discourses in many countries, are forcing higher education systems and institutions to change their tradi-

tional identities and behaviours. These have also been well documented and include the following.

- the requirement by governments for higher education to demonstrate efficiency, effectiveness and value for money through business re-engineering drives, integration into public finance management and accounting systems, external quality assurance systems and other accountability frameworks designed to allow greater stakeholder scrutiny

- declining investments of public funds in higher education and the requirement 'to do more with less,' diversify sources of operational funding in a way that reduces the primary responsibility of the state for financing public higher education–all of this at a time when the costs of acquiring a qualification are escalating

- stipulations from government for higher participation rates and the requirement for mass access to higher education, especially for non-traditional constituencies

- the inability of public provision to adequately satisfy educational demand and the growth of the for-profit sector, encompassing both national and transnational private providers of higher education

- the proliferation of entrepreneurially driven teaching and research programmes aimed at market responsiveness to consumer and user demand

- the growth of information and communication technologies which has opened up opportunities for more flexible delivery modes as well as bridged 'space-time separation' between learners and providers through distance and e-learning.

- the separation of higher education functions traditionally housed within the same institutional framework, viz the development and delivery of courses, the assessment of learners and their competencies, and the awarding of credentials. These functions are now offered by different provider agencies, ostensibly "more efficiently and more cost-effectively"[4] than the traditional inter-connected model.

The burgeoning demand for more higher education opportunities driven by older learners (lifelong learning), by corporate training needs and by the access demands of previously excluded constituencies has created a gigantic market in higher education, throwing up entrepreneurial initiatives to meet new higher education demands within and beyond national borders. Transnational education is now a multi-billion dollar industry with higher education as a service export generating large sums of foreign earnings for countries like Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom.[5] The search for new markets in an expanding industry makes developing countries, whose own education and training systems are not adequate to local demands or for the development of new globally valued knowledge and skills, particularly attractive as arenas for higher education trade.

In some instances, the import of higher education is conducted within a framework of conscious choice by governments using planned regulatory arrangements e.g. Malaysia and Hong Kong. The Malaysian Education Minister articulates this position in the following way:

"We are embarking on an educational journey …. to deliver on the promises made (to) establish Malaysia as a fully industrialized country in the Twenty-First Century … To take full advantage of the opportunities offered by an increasingly borderless world, foreign universities are being encouraged to set up offshore branches in Malaysia, but only the best will receive approval. At the same time, corporations have been given the mandate to establish private universities. This dynamic relationship between gov-

ernment, the private sector and strategic foreign academic partners will no doubt help us to realize our goals."[6] Similarly, Hong Kong welcomes the contribution of foreign education providers as a critical part of meeting the education and training needs of the knowledge economy embraced by Hong Kong. However, the government has put in place regulatory arrangements which provide "for the registration of courses offered in Hong Kong by higher and professional education providers based outside Hong Kong either themselves or through a local agent or a collaborating institution. The focus of the registration process is a requirement for overseas providers to give assur-ance to the satisfaction of the Registrar (the Director of Education of Hong Kong) that the standards of their courses as delivered in Hong Kong are maintained at levels comparable with courses conducted in the countries in which the overseas institutions are situated and leading to the same qualifications, and that they are recognised as such by the given institutions, the academic communities in the countries concerned, and the relevant accreditation authorities (if any)."[7]

There are, however, numerous other instances of developing countries becoming unregu-lated markets for higher education exporters because of insufficient government attention to regulation due to political and governance instability, lack of capacity or a focus on other more pressing development priorities in the national policy agenda. In such contexts, the issue of quality assurance to safe-guard education seekers in importing countries becomes even more critical, especially where no national or regional quality assurance structures are effectively in place. The issue of whose responsibility this is, how it is to be discharged and monitored, and what principles should drive such quality assurance are important for this discussion and I will return to them later in the paper in relation to the question of interna-tional quality assurance.

Identifying education as a tradeable commodity coupled with the drive towards market liberalisation has brought higher education to a point where its inclusion in the next round of World Trade Organisation (WTO) protocols and agreements together with other services makes perfect sense. This is precisely what the logic of the market as applied to higher edu-cation requires. As we well know from the earlier General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT), the objective with regard to tradeable goods was to promote trade liberalisation "across national borders by initiating negotiations on the reduction of tariffs and other reg-ulations which could represent an obstacle to free trade."[8] Despite the complexities of sub-jecting education to a trade liberalisation regime, it seems inevitable that higher education will become part of the WTO's General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) and that national states will, as in the case of tradeable goods, no longer have full control over higher education provision in their territories. This could mean that governments may not be able to protect and nurture local public and private providers as part of the process of building a national higher education system, nor stipulate the public good dimensions of higher edu-cation over commercial and profit motives.

The GATS proposals recognise that private education and training should supplement rather than displace public education and hence allows governments to assert regulatory rights with regard to national policy objectives. To what extent such regulation will be tol-erated within a philosophy that is aimed at removing obstacles to free trade is not clear and will be a matter for negotiation. Again, as in the case of goods trade, advanced indus-tralised societies with stable higher education systems and strong entrepreneurial institutions will be able to capture the market for higher education service provision, especially in rela-tion to Africa and, perhaps to a lesser extent, Asia and Latin America. Few developing countries are likely to be players in the export of higher education but they will become drawn into opening up their domestic higher education markets to free trade. The worst-

case scenario outlined by Eric Froment, President of the European University Association where "foreign commercial institutions successfully using the WTO Dispute Settlement Understanding as a tool to gain non-discriminatory access to degree-granting authority or core funding under the national treatment provision of the agreement,"[9] becomes even more threatening in the case of developing countries.

National governments in developing countries will have to ensure a trade-friendly environment for foreign higher education investors in ways that may undermine internal development priorities. In order to mediate the worst consequences for higher education of the WTO deliberations, higher education organisations and constituencies in the developed and developing world need to mount a united engagement around this issue, seeing that it touches on many issues of common concern, including the right to conceptualise and operationalise education as more than a private good, issues of academic freedom and university autonomy, the problematic equation of companies vending education products with universities, the possible tensions between credible quality assurance on the one hand and marketing and advertising claims on the other, etc. There is, however, likely to be some ambivalence in opposing WTO regulations on higher education on a joint basis across government and higher education interests in developed and developing countries, since the latter are precisely where the most promising and lucrative markets are to be found for transnational higher education. Europe, for example, may well have concerns about foreign competition or cultural 'Anglo-Saxonisation' as a result of the entry of American or Australian universities into the higher education system of the European Union. However, the European Union may not be averse to taking up the slack in relation to opening markets in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe.[10]

Implications for Developing Countries

If globalisation, the development of information and communication technologies and the philosophy of market liberalisation have facilitated the export of higher education by developed countries to developing ones, what are the implications of transnational provision for the political, economic and educational priorities of the developing countries themselves? Conversely, the economic benefits for exporting countries is clear but what are their corresponding obligations if any, especially in relation to the ethical ambiguities involved in a trading relationship that is clearly not rooted in a relatively level playing field? The trading relationship is not even likely to be contractual if contract implies planned consensus by all affected parties on key issues at stake.

The argument that private higher education and transnational education enhance access opportunities for those seeking higher education which national public institutions cannot satisfy is a frequently made one, articulated in ringing tones as in the following text. "We must, together, insist that a fully accessible quality education is a mandate for our future that is available to everyone, regardless of who one is, where one is, or what one's position in life might be, for even aside from economic aspects, it is indispensable for our well-being on the planet."[11] The access claim has to be interrogated more rigorously to be able to understand its scope and impact as well as its limits. Without doubt, private provision whether local or foreign, has the potential to provide higher education opportunities for millions of education seekers around the world, especially where the public sector has been unable to expand rapidly enough to satisfy the vast demand for higher education. In some countries, more students are enrolled in the private higher education sector than in the public e.g. in Brazil where only 28 percent of enrolments are in public higher education and 72 percent in the private sector.[12] However, since private provision targets a fee paying clientele, it provides access mainly to the relatively prosperous sector within developing countries. Such access does not necessarily encompass the equity dimension of a social jus-

tice agenda which would take as its starting point not a 'user pays' approach but the eligibility of any qualified student for access to higher education institutions, irrespective of financial capacity. More research is needed on how the 'user pays' approach is impacting on the equity agendas of developing countries, especially in relation to the emergence of new or modified forms of social stratification along class and gender lines. In this regard, arguments have been made for private providers to contribute to the equity and redress commitments of developing countries e.g. Currie suggests that private providers should "offer scholarships to ten percent of their student population. In this way, the university could open its doors to poor and working class students who would gain places through merit scholarships based on need."[13]

The import of higher education could bring many benefits to developing countries. It could supplement and expand educational opportunity for education seekers whose needs cannot be addressed by existing public sector arrangements but who can afford and benefit from higher education. This in turn would, in the long run, grow and improve the knowledge and skills base from which the country could draw in order to meet its political and economic aspirations. However, the conditions under which such import could provide optimum development benefits need to be carefully considered. Since educational processes are not politically and culturally neutral, international quality assurance will have to engage with some of the following ambiguities and paradoxes associated with higher education exchange across national boundaries:

- The provision of higher education by foreign institutions under the auspices of market liberalisation could pose a thorny challenge for some of the priorities of a developing country, especially those which have to do with a strong social justice agenda. Under the impact of economic globalisation, it is painfully evident that the philosophy of international co-operation and development, premised on a holistic and more integrated approach to political, economic and cultural development, has been replaced by an economic growth model which privileges market performance and competitiveness. This explains, as pointed out by many analysts, the ascendancy of organisations like the WTO, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in determining international relations, including in matters of education, rather than the United Nations or UNESCO.[14] The challenge for international quality assurance is to ensure that exported higher education is more than just a commodity offered under the economic growth model and that it contributes to the development agenda of a developing country in a way that is better planned than the trickle-down effect of globalisation.

- Private higher education is often offered by well resourced institutions (which are sometimes public institutions in their own countries). Such competition could improve the efficiency of national public and private providers but it could also weaken them or redirect their focus to areas of competition with their foreign rivals, rather than concentrating on what the country needs as a whole by way of programme and qualification spread. An imbalance between national public and private providers and foreign providers makes it all that more difficult to approach the construction or reconstruction of a national system of higher education. Such systems often have specified values and priorities pertaining to national goals within a regulatory framework that may be binding on local providers but not on foreign ones. The co-existence of different providers, some under national regulation and others not, requires a fundamental rethink on what is to be designated as a country's higher education system or who constitutes a higher education community in a country, since foreign providers are not necessarily motivated by the same vision and goals for higher education in the importing country. It also raises the issue of how and on what basis the articulation between the public and private sys-

tems and between local and foreign systems will take place.

• The issue of curriculum construction and course content for exported transnational education programmes also raises a number of contradictions from a quality assurance perspective. On the one hand, there is the appropriate concern that the quality of education programmes offered in an importing country is similar or equivalent to that offered in the exporting country. This may include a judgement not only on processes and modes of delivery or supporting services but on programme content as well, especially where programme recognition is required for further study in the home institution of the exporting country. On the other hand, the extent to which course content is the same or similar raises the issue of 'cultural imperialism,' especially in a context where the languages, cultures and histories of the importing country are quite different from those of the exporting country. The bridging of cultural contexts without a reductive cultural homogenisation in a globalising environment is one of the key issues that international quality assurance will have to address. Some exporters of higher education have taken steps to address this issue e.g. the Monash Offshore Quality Assurance Committee uses as one of its monitoring requirements for offshore courses "the appropriate use of local examples and content for material foreign to the local culture."[15] For such a requirement to have operational credibility, a negotiated consensus with local educational authorities and local curriculum experts is necessary. Where no such negotiation takes place, there may be too much reliance on the judgement of curriculum developers in the exporting country as to what constitutes the 'appropriate use of local examples,' unless the quality assurance processes include a sufficient number of local experts. However one looks at it, some measure of credible involvement of national authorities as well as local academic expertise seems indispensable in the provision and quality assurance of exported higher education. What are the appropriate guidelines and requirements that should be developed in international quality assurance to make such involvement standard practice?

• transnational higher education and its quality assurance cannot avoid having to negotiate the tensions and contradictions between market imperatives which make the export of higher education into such a lucrative venture, and social imperatives relating to national or community needs which the market on its own cannot address or satisfy. The goals and purposes of higher education are multiple, complex and inter-related. For example, the White Paper on Higher Education in South Africa takes the following position:

"Higher education has several related purposes. In the context of present-day South Africa, they must contribute to and support the process of societal transformation outlined in the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), with its compelling vision of people-driven development leading to the building of a better quality of life for all. These purposes are:

• To meet the learning needs and aspirations of individuals through the development of their intellectual abilities and aptitudes throughout their lives. Higher education equips individuals to make the best use of their talents and of the opportunities offered by society for self-fulfilment. It is thus a key allocator of life chances, an important vehicle for achieving equity in the distribution of opportunity and achievement among South African citizens.

• To address the development needs of society and provide the labour market, in a knowledge-driven and knowledge-dependent society, with the ever-changing high-level competencies and expertise necessary for the growth and prosperity of a modern economy. Higher education teaches and trains people to fulfil specialised social func-

tions, enter the learned professions, or pursue vocations in administration, trade, industry, science and technology and the arts.

- Contribute to the socialisation of enlightened, responsible and constructively critical citizens. Higher education encourages the development of a reflective capacity and a willingness to review and renew prevailing ideas, policies and practices based on a commitment to the common good.

- To contribute to the creation, sharing and evaluation of knowledge. Higher education engages in the pursuit of academic scholarship and intellectual inquiry in all fields of human understanding, through research, learning and teaching."[16]

Economic growth and prosperity and labour market needs are identified as necessary purposes but so are the facilitation of equity and the development of an enlightened and responsible citizenry. If the export of higher education to developing countries is motivated primarily by market considerations rather than by the public good concerns of developing countries, the complex purposes of higher education become reduced to the economic interests of states, institutions and individuals. Are the proponents and providers of transnational higher education willing to acknowledge that they have little or no interest in educational purposes other than the economic bottom line?

It could be argued that the social, cultural and intellectual purposes of higher education have become secondary in certain countries, where social institutions other than higher education institutions are able to address needs in those areas. However, the social reconstruction agendas of many developing countries require such purposes of higher education to remain primary, and for higher education, especially public higher education, to be a crucial agency contributing to the achievement of such social purposes. What is the role of international quality assurance in upholding a conception of higher education that is multifaceted, that balances the achievement of public and private goods through higher education, that locates the fitness for purpose of institutional quality within a fitness of purpose approach framed by the national priorities of developing countries? Addressing this issue becomes a particularly acute challenge since economic globalisation has extended the range of traditional stakeholders in higher education (governments, employers, academics, students, etc) to include multinational corporations whose interest is in the knowledge and skills of a new mobile class of professionals employed to give those corporations a global competitive edge.

Proponents of a greater differentiation between different models of higher education provision accept as an exciting opportunity the fact that "globalization and the new information technologies permit a deconstruction of the functions of the vertically integrated typical university."[17] This makes it possible for a traditional public university to set up for-profit branches which offer tailored learning packages in areas of 'consumer' demand, both in the home country and in other countries as well. Chipman describes this arrangement as follows in relation to Central Queensland University: The university is a public university and part of the 'unified national system' of Australian universities. It runs four private sector campuses, three in Australia and one in Fiji. "These campuses are all run as profit centres. The costs and revenue are shared with [the] joint venturer on a contractually agreed basis. The university invests its share of the profits in strengthening the corporately and vertically integrated university in its regional heartland, including the funding of research and new course developments that would otherwise be unaffordable."[18] Extending this example to public universities in developed countries which set up private for-profit ventures in developing countries raises the morally troubling

spectre of students in developing countries subsidising students, institutions and higher education systems in developed countries, enabling them to offer and enjoy the full benefits of a traditional public university. What kind of global ethic can be constructed for international quality assurance that does not allow higher education export to developing countries to produce this kind of moral paradox?

Premises and Strategies for Intervention

Transnational higher education provision is a phenomenon that is not only here to stay but is likely to increase in scope and reach, especially with the growth of internet provision. The need for an international quality assurance framework that is acceptable to developed and developing countries alike imposes responsibilities and obligations on a number of affected parties. There are already several international initiatives whose agendas seek to address the principles, objectives and modalities of quality assurance across national systems. It is a concern for the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) with its membership spanning 45 countries from the developed and developing world. It is at the heart of the International Commission established by CHEA and it is likely to be addressed by the new UNESCO initiative to set up a Global Forum on Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education. Somewhat muted in this emerging discourse on international quality assurance has been the concerns of developing countries as the primary recipients of transnational education services.

Some form of regulation of international provision through codes of conduct or good practice guidelines is necessary. Self-regulation can be an important starting point but raises the question of what or whose regulatory framework will be invoked and who will provide monitoring and external review of judgements based on self-regulation. Given the proliferation of transnational providers, self-regulation is perhaps too unpredictable and individualistic to provide enough reassurance for a burgeoning industry. The need for regulation by national, regional and international bodies, therefore, become quite urgent. National quality assurance systems of exporting and importing countries can play a valuable role in regulating the quality of provision e.g. in relation to higher education export, the Quality Assurance Agency has a code of conduct for United Kingdom universities offering provision in other countries, or in relation to higher education import, the Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation advises the Hong Kong government on whether international providers can be registered.

Particularly important for developing countries which have become markets for foreign higher education providers, is the necessity to put in place regulatory frameworks which encourage transnational provision but on terms that are supportive of their own national aspirations. These may include market competitiveness as well as other development objectives. Such regulation may be fairly interventionist, e.g. the Malaysian government's requirement of foreign providers to provide compulsory courses in Malaysian language, Islamic Studies, Moral Studies and Malaysian Studies."[19] Another example is the proposal by Currie that the South African government should require private providers to contribute to the country's needs as a condition of registration. "Rather than being completely free to decide which programmes a private university teaches, the government could require them to offer one or two programmes of social value to South Africa. A good example is health education to combat AIDS or medical or pharmaceutical research to prevent the spread of HIV and tuberculosis."[20]

However, this form of regulation may not stand up to the demands of the WTO proposals to include higher education as a service to be regulated only through the requirements of free trade. Even though the GATS proposals allow for some government choice in stipulating the areas as well as the scope of market access or national protection, the need for developing countries to bargain for favourable settlements in other critical areas necessary for

their economic survival may predispose them to barter education away as a free trade sector rather than one requiring an explicit measure of national commitment and qualified or conditional market access. The prospects for developing countries to assert their national priorities through and in higher education appear increasingly gloomy.

The troubling jurisdictional scope of WTO and GATS regulation over the provision of higher education in any national context, but especially in developing countries, raises sharply the question of the role, power and will of other international agencies in mediating the impact of GATS or even functioning as a counter-regulatory force in relation to higher education. In this regard, it will be interesting to track where and how the UNESCO Global Forum positions itself in relation to the negative impacts of market liberalisation in higher education, which GATS embodies in its most threatening form. The joint declaration by the European University Association, the American Council on Higher Education, the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada and CHEA which represent "most universities in North America and Europe"[21] is an important first step in a co-operative approach to addressing GATS and similar attempts to align higher education policy and practice with global trade policy and practice. The call for increased international co-operation in higher education and for stronger regulatory frameworks to govern international higher education exchange is an important starting point. The assertion that international co-operation rather than market liberalisation should be the basis of international higher education exchange is absolutely correct and will be challenged by few. However, what is missing and in need of immediate high-level attention for the above action to become a truly global initiative is to incorporate the views of higher education organisations and associations in Africa, Latin America and Asia, especially since national higher education systems and institutions in developing countries on those continents are more vulnerable to the worst effects of GATS. Such associations and organisations should also play an active role in shaping new guidelines or regulatory agreements for international exchange in higher education.

For such guidelines or regulations to be credible as international higher education agreements, they have to be fashioned not only by predominantly exporting countries but negotiated jointly by exporting and importing countries alike. The focus in international quality assurance on the obligations and responsibilities of exporting countries is important but not enough since it still renders importing countries mainly into beneficiaries of decisions and actions of stronger exporting countries rather than as actors in co-regulating higher education export and import. Hence, opening up a dialogue with continental higher education associations like the Association of African Universities (AAU) is critical for international co-operation in higher education. At its 10th Annual General Meeting in February 2001, the AAU adopted a declaration on the African University in the Third Millennium which could form the basis of such dialogue. The declaration urges African universities to give "priority to effective and positive participation in the global creation, exchange and application of knowledge" but within a framework of university commitment to national and continental development. Government partnerships with the private sector is recognised as key but the benefits sought from higher education are not only economic but social. "To a greater degree than ever before, African universities must renew their commitment to helping Africa find effective solutions to its perennial problems of poverty, hunger and disease (and) must contribute more actively to the removal of incessant social conflict, civil war and sub-regional disputes and the displacement of human beings …"[22] What is the responsibility of international quality assurance and of organisations like CHEA and the International Commission in using international co-operation to support this social agenda for higher education development in Africa, given that their member universities and/or quality assurance and accreditation agencies are actively involved on the continent?

International quality assurance has the potential to develop into an important global

force in the increasing internationalisation of higher education but the organisations which seek to regulate higher education exchange across national boundaries through increasingly rigorous requirements and recommendations for the quality assurance of transnational education are faced with a series of choices that are more than about traditional (and technical) quality assurance issues. The most fundamental of these choices is whether international quality assurance will be underpinned by the ethics of the market, which takes the contractual agreement between willing individual purchasers and willing individual vendors of higher education as its frame of reference or whether it will be driven by the spirit of internationalism in higher education, premised on the co-operation of the different parties involved in international exchange, and agreements negotiated and agreed on by all those parties. The latter choice requires the assertion of a more traditional form of international relations between different higher education systems rather than a form determined solely by the competitive requirements of globalisation.

The premise for international higher education exchange and for international quality assurance based on a renewed international relations framework is political and cultural co-operation between countries rather than the regulation of contractual trade relations between exporting and importing countries.. Here I am following a point made by Michael Peters and Peter Roberts in their reflections on an agenda for alternative globalisations. They argue that the "neo-liberal 'free market' approach represents only one paradigm, among a range of possibilities" and that it is necessary to develop a "'socially acceptable' model of competitiveness." An "international relations paradigm based on inclusive consensus" is one such alternative model of globalisation.[23] This approach embraces a developmental ethos that is recognisably social rather than only individualistic in character. It also upholds a conception of higher education and its purposes that includes some of the values of the market but not in a narrowly reductionist way. It is also an approach that gives more substance to the access claims of private and transnational higher education provision. The issue of greater access to and participation in higher education, irrespective of whether education seekers are located in developed or developing countries and the encouragement to private providers to supplement public provision can be defended credibly as a 'global good,' advanced even by those who reap huge financial rewards through its provision.

Unless one proceeds from such a philosophical ethos, international quality assurance runs the risk of helping to deepen the cleavage between the developed world and many economically vulnerable developing countries. This could happen through letting transnational higher education providers behave like transnational and multi- national corporations. Such corporations have no particular national or system loyalties. Transnational education providers operating on similar principles could weaken national social justice agendas and public institutions like universities that might help to realise those agendas. International quality assurance has an important role to play in ensuring that such negative impacts on the national priorities and higher education systems of developing countries is monitored and minimised wherever possible.

Conclusion

International quality assurance and organisations which seek to promote it will have to address some of the following critical areas of choice in order to begin to fashion a global ethic to govern higher education exchange between developed and developing countries:

• International quality assurance must be seen as an educational intervention with inescapable political and cultural overtones. To be able to promote true internationalism in and through higher education, international quality assurance has to be premised on a particular view of international relations and development co-operation between coun-

tries. This presumes a view of importing countries as not simply lucrative markets for higher education trade but as partners in international development co-operation through higher education exchange.

- As a matter of urgency, international quality assurance has to develop and popularise policy and practice guidelines for higher education provision across different political and cultural contexts. It has to address itself to issues of language diversity, curriculum content, the use of local expertise, relationships with local educational authorities, etc.

- International quality assurance has to declare where it stands in relation to the purposes and goals of higher education-whether these are viewed only in narrow economic terms or whether they include social and civic objectives. This also requires a stand on GATS and unrestricted free trade arguments in higher education as well as on the relationship between public and private goods in higher education.

- International quality assurance must be willing to take on a range of monitoring, capacity development and advocacy responsibilities. Monitoring the social and educational impact of GATS, especially on developing countries, will be a critical task. This will require increased communications and a closer working relationship with national, regional and international agencies concerned with higher education in order to facilitate information gathering and exchange as well as trends analyses. As far as capacity development is concerned, paradoxically, the way to bolster international quality assurance at the moment may be to strengthen and re-inforce national or even regional quality assurance arrangements. This implies that international quality assurance is not a substitute for national quality assurance but a supplement to it. What are the ways in which national quality assurance systems of exporting countries could be encouraged to develop or strengthen codes of conduct for their universities operating abroad? How could the quality assurance systems of importing countries be supported to regulate foreign provision more effectively? As far as advocacy is concerned, high level lobbying should be considered in partnership with higher education organisations in both developed and developing countries(on issues like GATS) in order to emphasise the role of higher education as a powerful development opportunity rather than only a tradeable commodity. Advocacy for good practices and for self-regulation according to such practices could also be an important role.

The above issues constitute a huge and ambitious political agenda of work for international quality assurance. How realistic is such an agenda, premised as it is on political and economic imperatives which go well beyond higher education concerns? And why should it be taken up by organisations working in the field of international quality assurance? Since it is political and economic globalisation that has designated higher education as a key engine of growth, international quality assurance cannot escape the responsibility of asking about the nature and impact of this growth as well as the identity of its beneficiaries. Moral advocacy for higher education exchange to serve human development priorities on a global scale (combined with some very practical guidelines for good practice) could be a useful starting point for international quality assurance. In the absence of a globally acknowledged quality assurance or accreditation organisation and without international regulatory instruments, international quality assurance will have to work with principles and guidelines for transnational higher education provision, along the lines of the recently released CHEA Principles for American accreditors working abroad. Such principles can be educative and conscientising for quality assurance exporters and provide a useful yardstick for importing countries to assess foreign provision. At best, they can form the basis for a strong ethical approach to higher education provision across national borders.

NOTES

[1] Amartya Sen reminds us that free markets and transnational activities involving buying, selling and exchange are underpinned by a freedom that is not unimportant for society. However, he also points out that while "emphasizing the significance of transaction and the right of economic participation … and the direct importance of market-related liberties, we must not lose sight of the complementarity of these liberties with the freedoms that come from the operation of other (nonmarket) institutions." In *Development as Freedom*, 1999, pp 112 - 116.

[2] *Higher Education in Developing Countries: Peril and Promise*, The Report of the Task Force on Higher Education and Society, World Bank, Washington, 2000.

[3] Carnoy M and Castells M: Globalization, The Knowledge Society, and the Network State: Poulantzas at the Millenium in the *Manual Castells Reader*, CHET, Pretoria. 2000. pp 5-6.

[4] Chipman L: The Disintegration of an Industry in *Higher Education in Europe*, Vol XXIV, No 2, 1999, p 180.

[5] The following figures give some indication of the scope of demand: "According to the 1999 WTO's Education Service Report, the global market for higher education and training was estimated at US $27 billion in 1995. IDP Australia estimated that in 1999, there were 48 million learners in the world, 17 million in Asia. This compared to their projection that in the year 2025, there will be 159 million learners, 87 million in Asia. In 2000, United States education and training services totalled more than $14 billion and ranked among the country's top five service exports … placing the United States among the top three higher education exporters world wide. The other two being the United Kingdom and Australia." (Lenn M P: Higher Education and the Global Marketplace: A Practical Guide to Sustaining Quality in *Conference papers of 6th Biennial Conference of INQAAHE*, Bangalore, 2001, p 395).

IDP estimates are that "in 1990, the world population aged 18 - 21 was 407 million …. Global participation in tertiary education by traditional students will grow from 12% in 1990 to 20% in 2010." (Alley L R: Diverting a crisis in Global Human and Economic Development, Higher Education in Europe, Vol XXIV, No 2, 1999, p 188).

[6] Cited in Banks M and McBurnie G: Embarking on an Educational Journey in *Higher Education in Europe*, 1999, p 265.

[7] French, N.J: Transnational Educators - Competition or Complementarity: The Case of Hong Kong in *Higher Education in Europe*, Vol XXIV, No 2, 1999, p 221

[8] Conference of European Rectors (CRE) briefing document on WTO and higher education, January 2001.

[9] Froment E: Help Make Trade Rules or get stung at market in *Times Higher Education Supplement*, November, 2001, p 12

[10] CRE Briefing on WTO, 2001.

[11] Jones G R: The Accelerating Speed of Change and its Impact on Education, *Higher Education in Europe*, 1999, p202.

[12] Khawas E: Quality Assurance in Higher Education: Recent Progress; Challenges Ahead, World Bank, 1998, p5.

[13] Re-inserting the 'Public Good' into Higher Education Transformation, *Kagisano*, CHE Discussion Series, Issue No 1 Summer 2001, p 26.

[14] See Gosovic B: Global Intellectual Hegemony and the international development agenda in *International Social Science Journal*, 2000, p 166.

[15] Banks M and McBurnie G: Embarking on an Educational Journey …. In *Higher Education in Europe*, 1999, p 270.

[16] Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education, Department of Education, South Africa, 1997, p 7-8

[17] Chipman L: The Disintegration of an Industry in *Higher Education in Europe*, Vol XXIV, No 2, 1999, p 177.

[18] Chipman, L: 1999, p 182.

[19] Banks M and McBurnie G: Embarking on an Educational Journey in Higher Education in Europe, 1999, p. 271

[20] Re-inserting the 'Public Good' into Higher Education Transformation, *Kagisano*, CHE Discussion Series, Issue No 1 Summer 2001, p 26.

[21] Froment E: THES November 9, 2001, p 12

[22] AAU Declaration on the African University in the Third Millennium, 9 February 2001.

[23] Peters M and Roberts P: Universities, Futurology and Globalisation in *Discourse: studies in the cultural politics of education*, Volume 21, No 2, 2000, pp 138-9.

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