CHEA International Quality Group

Quality International

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Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić, CHEA Senior Advisor on International Affairs, Receives Award for Distinguished Service To Quality Assurance In Higher Education In Africa


Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić

The 2015 Distinguished Service to Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Africa Award (DSQA) was conferred on Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić on September 22 at the 7th International Conference on Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Africa which held in Abuja, Nigeria. The award is given to any individual or group that has made significant and sustained contributions over a minimum period of 20 years, to bolstering quality of higher education in Africa and is jointly sponsored by the consortium of GUNI-Africa, African Quality Assurance Network and the Association of African Universities. The ceremony was witnessed by 201 delegates from 38 countries. Stamenka is the first woman to be awarded the DSQA which is the highest honor on quality assurance that can be conferred by the consortium.

The seventh International Conference and Workshops on Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Africa took place in Abuja, Nigeria on September 21-25, 2015. This year's theme was strengthening quality assurance in Africa to meet regional and global challenges. The meeting sponsors were the Global University Network for Innovation, GUNI-Africa, the African Quality Assurance Network and the Association of African Universities. The conference Communique that focuses on recent quality assurance developments in Africa, an international perspective to quality assurance in Africa, efforts to further enhance quality assurance in Africa, open and distance learning, harmonization efforts between Africa and the European Union and other topics may be read here. ❖

The Iraqi Higher Education System and Accreditation

CHEA/CIQG Senior Advisor on International Affairs' Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić's Interview with Professor Rund Ali Hammoundi in September/October 2015

Please Give Us A Brief Overview Of The Higher Education System In Iraq.


Professor Rund Ali Hammoundi

The Iraqi higher education system is one of the oldest in the region; its beginnings date back to the 1920s of the last century, and it used to be one of the strongest higher education systems among the neighboring countries. Nevertheless our country went through instability and difficult circumstances during the last few decades. These circumstances affected negatively education in Iraq in general and higher education in particular.

Student enrollment in Iraqi higher education in 2004, according to a survey conducted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), was 251,135, 42 percent of whom were women. Almost 50 percent of the students at the time enrolled at the five universities in Baghdad.

Today, the number of universities in Iraq prime under the auspices of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research Baghdad is 20 state universities and 24 private universities as well as 50 technical institutes. However, in the autonomous Kurdistan region, there are an

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additional 15 governmental universities and 14 private universities as well as some 20 technical institutes under the auspices of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research of the Kurdistan Regional Government. The total number of higher education students in the Kurdistan region is currently 120,000, evenly split between male and female.

Iraqi medical students attend lecture at Basra University College of Medicine

Despite the setbacks inflicted on higher education by the unstable circumstances, Iraqi universities still produce some quality graduates who are valuable additions to the local workforce. Recently, a few thousand of these graduates from Iraq prime as well as the Kurdistan Region pursued their postgraduate studies in universities and centers of excellence the world over without having had a major knowledge gap problem.

Within This System, Please Provide The Background Of The Evolution Of Quality Assurance And Accreditation in Iraqi Higher Education.

Past attempts (in the last century) by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research in Baghdad involved benchmarking of the curricula in Iraqi universities but did not go much further than that. However, in the last few years, interest in international accreditation within Iraqi universities has been increasing and several universities are adopting measures of quality assurance (QA) with a view to eventually obtain accreditation. The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research in the Kurdistan Region has been particularly proactive in this respect. They have institutionalized the process of QA in the public and private universities and are acting as a kind of QA agency with an authorized QA Board in the Ministry which oversees the performance of the different universities in Kurdistan. A major project was carried out (2010-2014) by UNESCO for eight engineering colleges in Iraq prime and four engineering colleges in the Kurdistan Region; this involved training for the ABET accreditation. The project went so far as site visits to these colleges by the UNESCO experts. The project was quite successful in getting those colleges on the right track for their future accreditation endeavor.

Could You Give Us Your Personal Vision Of Quality Assurance In The Iraqi Educational System, Both From An Institutional Perspective As Director Of The International Relations Office at the University of Duhok And At System's Level?

In the era of quality knowledge breakthrough and quality control of learning standards, it is vitally important for the Iraqi higher education leaders to encourage and support the Iraqi universities to start a robust system of quality assurance which eventually can lead to national and international accreditation. This will give authenticity to the degrees that Iraqi higher education institutions offer and approve that these degrees are meeting the national and international standards. This is achieved by continuously evaluating the quality and precision of learning outcomes which should meet the minimum standards for the degrees offered and to relate the program and specifications to the subject benchmark. Furthermore, accreditation is a prestigious process that any university should have to go through. Hence, there is a worldwide trend that every university, college or vocational school should go through periodic accreditation review.

All the public universities in Iraq are licensed by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research in Baghdad. However, the license or work authorization does not mean accreditation. License usually is given through one-time evaluation to any academic institution to start operating. After approval of the license it is assumed that the licensed academic institute can meet the minimum level of requirements initiated by the ministry. Thus giving the license or work authorization is a one-time process, not a periodic process of quality control. This distinction between license and accreditation is important to avoid any confusion between them. I believe that the execution of the accreditation process in the university would have to be a top down-bottom up undertaking. The vision and work by the Ministry of Higher Education and QA Board would have to be augmented by the universities' administration and faculty at class level. There is a need for further training of the academic faculty in this respect.

Could You Describe The Main Responsibilities Of The Iraq National Accreditation Agency (INAA) And Give Its Background?

I submitted a report to the higher committee of education in Baghdad that is responsible for drawing up the policy of the higher education in Iraq. The report is regarding initiating an independent body for national accreditation. The proposed name for this independent body is "Iraq National Accreditation Agency (INAA)." The proposed mission of INAA is:

1. To evaluate and assess students' precision learning outcomes and the assessment of the entire quality of the learning processes in the Iraqi higher education institutions through a very systematic, sustainable and transparent system.

2. To ensure that these institutions meet the minimum standards of learning outcome.

3. To ensure that the institution be formally engaged in evaluating its efficacy (institutional effectiveness).

4. To ensure that they have good management and support services within the institution.

5. To ensure the contribution of research to different fields of knowledge.

How Do You See The Development Of Quality Assurance And Accreditation In Iraq In The Future And What Are The Main Challenges?

Getting accreditation from an international body is a long and rigorous process, and it needs a lot of time and collective and collaborative work. The quality assurance departments in the ministry and the universities might play an essential role to help the Iraqi academic institutes to get the accreditation. It is essential to take into consideration that the accreditation process might take years to be achieved. There are several steps that should be taken into consideration before starting the accreditation processes. These are: Start an informational campaign to help the universities' leaders, administrators and academic staff to understand the importance of national and international accreditation. Obtain adequate financial allocation to start the process. Work on building a solid quality assurance system to meet the standards of the accreditation bodies. The quality assurance system should be targeted on three main components of the academic institutions; they are students, staff and curriculum.

Do You Consider That International Accreditation May Have Benefits For Iraqi Higher Education And If So How?

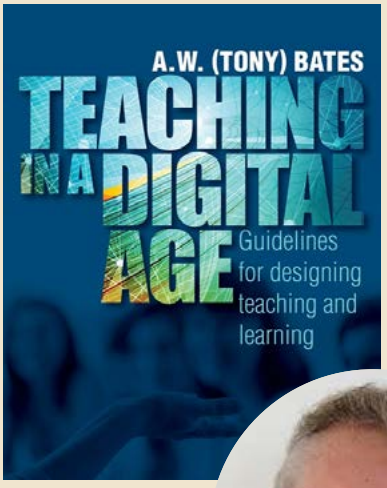
To make the Iraqi higher education system very well-known and recognized among the universities worldwide, we have to start the process of the accreditation from international accreditors. This accreditation might be institutional or programmatic, depending upon the nature of the institution or the program. It is well-known that the American accreditors are the most efficient and robust bodies to give the accreditation. It is a trend for the different educational systems in the world to seek accreditation from the different American accreditors. Each Iraqi higher education institution should have the right to select a reputable and trustworthy international education agency.

In the United States as well as in other western countries, a connection is made between the funding to any university and the number of new student loans with the accreditation of the university for the sake of quality education. Similarly the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research should provide special incentives to Iraqi universities which gain international accreditation and encourage them to expand their programs to instigate competition between the different Iraqi universities and institutions.

Professor Rund Ali Hammoudi graduated with distinction from the Department of Geology, Baghdad University, Iraq. She pursued her higher education leading to the degree of PhD at the University of Mosul in Micropaleontology and Stratigraphy. She has been working in academia since 1978. Her fields of interest as exemplified by her published work include sedimentology, paleo-environments and foraminiferal biostratigraphy in oil fields in southern Iraq and the Kurdistan Region. Since 2007, she has been leading the International Relations Office at the University of Duhok, Kurdistan Region, Iraq. She initiated and implemented several projects regarding higher education and role of woman in academia with several American and British Universities. She is currently the University of Duhok coordinator of the European Erasmus Mundus projects together with Erasmus plus. Her personal mission is the internationalization of universities at home. ❖

Teaching in a Digital Age: Guidelines for Designing Teaching and Learning by A. W. (Tony) Bates

Published as an e-Textbook by BCcampus



Tony Bates, one of the world's most thoughtful commentators on educational technology, has distilled 50 years of experience into this impressive book. Published as an open textbook through BCcampus it is a dynamic, living project available electronically to readers globally.

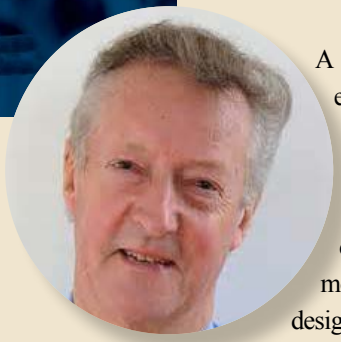
Within the growing literature on online learning this work stands out in four ways. First, it addresses the changing skill and content requirements for teaching and learning in the 21st century. Second, it offers direct help to academics trying to integrate technology into their teaching. Third, its historical review of technology summarises important research on student use of media from the 1970s onwards. Finally, the engaging structure of this e-Textbook is a credit to Bates and his editorial team.

It begins with the fundamental changes occurring in education, exploring transformations in economies and societies in order to identify the skills needed in a digital age, to posit a proper relationship between education and the job market and to assess how expanding enrolments impact on teaching methods. Observing that "students are probably the most changed part of higher education in the last 50 years," the book argues that today's challenge is to give growing numbers of increasingly diverse students access to success. Reinforcing elite systems by "dialling the clock back to the 1950s" (Bates' take on current UK policy) will not serve 21st century societies well.

The book continues with a cogent account of learning theories: objectivism, behaviourism, cognitivism, constructivism and connectivism. After asking whether the nature of knowledge is changing and how this might modify our approaches to teaching, Bates concludes that there should be more emphasis on developing the skills of applying knowledge rather than simply teaching content.

The second excellent feature of the book is that it starts where faculty members really are. We are treated to some enjoyable vignettes – doubtless only semi-fictional – that capture, candidly and entertainingly, conversations at dinner parties, in common rooms and in the privacy of homes as academics discuss how technology is impacting on their work and the latest bees in their deans' bonnets. The analysis of different methods of teaching is divided helpfully between solely campus-based instruction and fully online teaching.

Turning to MOOCs, Bates notes their major structural limitations for developing deep or transformative learning or for nurturing the high-level knowledge and skills needed in a digital age. MOOCs may have a greater potential for tackling large global problems through community action than in in higher education.



A review of decades of research on educational technology examines learning media through their formats, symbols systems and cultural values. The sections on media selection and choosing delivery modes will be very helpful to those designing teaching for the online space.

REVIEW BY SIR JOHN DANIEL

After summarising traditional approaches to quality assurance, the thoughtful chapter on quality argues that concepts must evolve as methods of teaching and learning change. Bates defines quality as "teaching methods that successfully help learners develop the knowledge and skills they will require in a digital age" and argues for concepts of quality that do more to accommodate the affective or emotional aspects of learning. "New methods of teaching are emerging that have not been around long enough to be subject to analysis of best practices. A too rigid view of quality assessment based on past practices could have serious negative implications for innovation in teaching and for meeting newly emerging learning needs." We must sometimes challenge "best practice" so that new approaches can be tested. The design of many MOOCs and the high dropout rates in US two-year colleges new to online learning suggest that institutions are not yet developing teaching methods that exploit the strengths of both classroom and online learning.

Finally, the author urges institutions to "get real" about the need to train teachers for the digital age. "We have to move from a system of voluntary amateurism to a professional, comprehensive system of training for teaching in post-secondary education." This impressive book provides a basis for such training. Tony Bates shows us how to "walk the talk" about teaching in a digital age. ❖

Higher Education: A Hotbed of Corruption?

A blog from the Center for International Higher Education - July 26, 2015

By Goolam Mohamedbhai
Former Secretary-General of the Association of African Universities

This column is reprinted with the permission of the editors of the Center for International Higher Education's blog The World View*, which appears in* Inside Higher Ed.

Hardly any week goes by without the appearance of an article on corruption in higher education. The stories cover not only individual students or faculty but also whole institutions and even countries. And corruption in higher education has even crossed borders and become global. One cannot help asking whether higher education has become the hotbed of corruption.

"Corruption for resources, fame and notoriety place extraordinary pressures on higher education institutions……. In some instances, corruption has invaded whole systems of higher education and threatens the reputation of research products and graduates, regardless of their guilt and innocence". This quote comes from **Transparency International's 2013 Global Corruption Report: Education.** It can well be illustrated by what is apparently happening in Australia. In April 2015, the Four Corners program of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation revealed examples of how the standards of Australian universities are being compromised through corrupt practices, mainly as a result of the pressure on them to recruit foreign students and to ensure that they pass the exams in order to obtain much-needed funds. The examples given included the involvement of fraudulent recruitment agents, universities graduating poorly qualified or unqualified nurses, widespread plagiarism, cheating and exploitation. The program was appropriately labelled 'Degrees of Deception'. In 2014, a story appeared relating how fraud and corruption within and outside Australia's immigration services enabled thousands of foreign students to acquire illegal permanent residency visas in Australia, thereby resulting in unemployment of Australian graduates.

Corruption appears to be rampant in Russia as well. In September 2014, a paper was published in the online journal International Education Studies, describing the alarming situation of corruption in modern Russian higher education that might take the form of cheating on entrance exams, paying a bribe to facilitate the admissions process, bribing professors for better grades. Corruption is also suspected among faculty and senior administrators who may clandestinely negotiate any number of benefits for themselves. It mentions that nearly 50% of the student intake of 7.5 million in 2008/2009 academic year had to face corruption and adds that *"the corruption component of the whole industry could be compared with the budget of a small country"*. The paper gives examples of the wide range of corrupt practices in higher education, mentioning the case of a Dean who accepted a bribe of €30,000 for a PhD admission, and the feedback from the Moscow Police that some 30-40 Professors are caught each year for accepting bribes for good grades.

Africa, of course, has its fair share of corruption in higher education. It is reported that in May 2015, South African authorities shut down 42 bogus colleges and universities that were offering fake and unaccredited programs, including three supposedly US-based universities offering degrees in 15 days. In Nigeria, which has the largest higher education system in Africa, areas where corruption occurs most frequently among academic staff are in promotions, falsified research for publication in journals, fake journals, obligating students to buy texts written by the professor and other corrupt practices related to publications. Some professors indulge extortion of money for handouts and marks, and sexual harassment. In a 2012 anonymous survey among 475 students in three East African universities, about a third of the students admitted to plagiarism and to fabrication of references, 25% to collusion in an examination to communicate answers, and 5% to impersonating someone else in an examination. Even a small country like Mauritius has not been immune to corruption. A couple of supposedly branch

campuses of private Indian universities, set up in Mauritius without the necessary approval of Indian authorities and offering degrees that would not be recognized in Mauritius or India, are in the process of being closed down.

The sale of fake degree certificates of well-established universities and the operation of institutions that provide degrees with hardly any period of study, commonly known as degree mills, are now well-known. There are reported cases of even politicians, religious leaders and other senior officials in various countries, developed and developing, who have purchased fake degrees. Most of the degree mills are located in North America and Europe, while others are scattered globally in hidden locations. So far, attempts at stopping the operation of degree mills have had limited success. UNESCO has created a portal that lists all the recognized higher education institutions in different regions of the world. While this is helpful, a more aggressive approach would have been to create a 'blacklist' of known and identified degree mills. No organization has so far established and made public such a list, no doubt fearing legal and political repercussions.

But perhaps the most shocking corruption scandal, known as the Vyapam scam, has just surfaced in India. Vyapam is a government body in the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh and is responsible for conducting entrance examinations for government jobs and for admissions to higher education institutions, including the much sought-after medical colleges. There had been earlier reports of irregularities in Vyapam but until recently no one had imagined the scale of the admission and recruitment scam, involving politicians, businessmen, senior officials and some 2,500 impersonators taking exams in the name of weaker students. More than 2,000 people have been arrested. Worse, tens of people directly involved in the scam have died, some in suspected cases of murder and suicide. The matter has now been referred to India's Central Bureau of Investigation.

It is high time now to declare war on corruption in higher education. Action must be taken at multiple fronts: institutional, national, regional and global. There are already organizations addressing some of the issues, such as UNESCO's International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) and the US-based Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). But there is a need to set up, perhaps by UNESCO, of a consortium of relevant national, regional and international organizations to devise appropriate strategies, policies and actions for combating the scourge. The guiding principle for the consortium should be that higher education is neither a business nor an industry, but a social good impregnated with values. The war on corruption in higher education must be vigorously fought and won; if not, the national and global consequences could be too serious to be even contemplated. ❖

New policies in European quality assurance

By Tia Loukkola, Director, International Development, European University Association, Belgium

Tia Loukkola

In May this year, the Ministers responsible for higher education (HE) in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) met in Yerevan, Armenia, and amongst other items, adopted a new version of the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*. The ESG form the basis for quality assurance (QA) processes carried out by higher education institutions (HEIs) and QA agencies in Europe. The first version of the ESG was adopted in 2005 and the ESG 2015 marks to the end of an intensive revision process in which European stakeholder organisations – representing HEIs, QA agencies, students, employers and academic staff – engaged in a dialogue with the respective ministries to formulate a shared view of how QA should be taken forward in the future. So, what has changed in the ESG 2015?

Since the adoption of the first edition of the ESG ten years ago, external QA has received increasing attention on the policy level. However, the discussions during the revision process demonstrated that the focus appears to be shifting towards internal QA. Most of the comments received from the ministries during the various consultation rounds focused on Part 1 of the ESG, which covers internal QA. In this part there are some fundamental changes that will also impact how external QA is carried out in the future as the external processes are expected to address the internal ones:

- Standard 1.2 makes an explicit link between internal QA and qualification frameworks by including an expectation that HEIs ensure that their programmes meet the requirements of the respective national qualification framework.
- Standard 1.3 on student-centred learning, teaching and assessment is a completely new one. It lays out the expectation that all HEIs ensure that the planning and implementation of their educational mission is done with students' learning at the centre of attention.

- Standards 1.4 and 1.5 have been revised to put more emphasis on the need to ensure the quality of the learning experience by facilitating smooth progression in students' studies and developing the pedagogical competences of academic staff in a context where the learning paradigm is changing.

In addition, changes have been introduced to Parts 2 and 3 which focus on external QA processes and the QA of the QA agencies. In many cases these changes deal with clarifying standards that experience and feedback had shown to be ambiguous and unclear. Furthermore, duplications between some previous standards were removed and the structure of these two parts made clearer. The most notable new features are:

- Standard 2.4 is a new standard that firmly places the peer-reviewers at the core of European external QA processes.
- Standard 2.6 now explicitly mentions that the reports by the expert panels always need to be published whether the outcome is positive or negative. Previously there had been some debate on whether it was necessary to publish the full reports or summaries of them and whether the publication depended on the outcome of the process.
- Standard 2.7 makes the right for institutions to lodge an appeal or a complaint an integral part of any external QA process.
- Standards 3.6 and 3.7 were revised to reflect the new context in which European QA agencies are operating: external reviews of agencies as part of their accountability measures have become standard practice (3.7) and following the increase in the number of agencies that work across borders, there was an identified need to put more emphasis on professional conduct and integrity in the work of the agencies (3.6).

These are just few of the changes in the ESG that, according to the first feedback, have achieved the goal set in the revision: they are more user-friendly by being less ambiguous and less repetitive. Furthermore, they reflect better the current reality and aspirations of European HE. As such, the authors believe the ESG will facilitate and encourage the further development of both European HE and approaches to QA, fully in line with the original purposes of the document. ❖

The *ESG 2015* are available at http://www.enqa.eu/index.php/home/esg/.

CHEA/CIQG International Quality Principles

By Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić

At the second annual meeting of the CHEA International Quality Group (CIQG) (2014), colleagues from dozens of countries debated and discussed the challenging issue of the desirability and feasibility of a single set of international standards for academic quality in higher education (link to policy brief on this). Following the meeting, the CIQG Advisory Council continued this conversation, ultimately deciding that it would be more effective to develop a set of commonly accepted international quality principles – in contrast to a set of standards – at this time.

After a first draft prepared in January 2015, a broad consultative process among the 19 CIQG Advisory Council members from nine countries representing all regions of the world, a final version was released by CIQG in May 2015.

Below are some comments by the Advisory Council members involved in the process:

"The 7 succinct principles will be a useful point of reference for many around the world who are looking for a holistic expression of the elements of quality."

"The process showed, once again, how you can improve a document by using an iterative process that allows colleagues from diverse backgrounds to provide input and then redrafting the text in the light of their comments."

"I think there is some urgency. The issues we address are high on the lists of policy options for many nations."

"It will be very helpful as a contribution of CIQG to the international discussion."

The primary objective of the principles is to develop a common understanding of quality around the world through creating a framework that can be used at national, regional and international levels. The principles are addressed to various audiences: academics, students, employers, government, quality assurance and accreditation agencies, and the public at large. They also address the issues of quality and

accountability and note that our understanding of quality needs to include responsiveness to changes in higher education. Their intent is to inspire an ongoing quest for effectiveness and quality in higher education.

The International Quality Principles (IQP) were launched by CHEA in May 2015 (*http://www.chea.org/pdf/Quality Principles.pdf*). University World News carried an article announcing this new initiative, stating that the principles were a response to the "sense of urgency for a shared understanding of higher education quality in an increasingly global landscape."
http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20150612163645719

The news was picked up and promoted by a number of international organizations such as the International Association of Universities, the Commonwealth of Learning, UNESCO, Contact-North and the Asia-Pacific Network on Quality assurance Network (APQN) among others.

CIQG has received valuable feedback about the International Quality Principles. They are considered as very helpful in developing regional tools, such as the "Quality Label," in Asia-Pacific; they provide a solid foundation for the harmonization of quality assurance programs in Africa. Since their launch, the principles were presented at conferences around the world (Egypt, Turkey, Spain among others) by members of the Advisory Council and CHEA President.

To further promote the discussion about the principles, CHEA organized a Webinar on 3 August bringing together 115 participants from 18 countries. The discussion mainly centered on:

- **What are these principles?**
- **Why have they been developed?**
- **How might they be used?**
- **What actions and practices might we undertake, using these principles?**
- **How do the principles further the international quality dialogue on assuring quality?**

While the International Quality Principles are intended to inspire national and institutional development only, it was interesting to note that, during the Webinar discussion, a number of participants spoke to a need for the principles to have a stronger regulatory function. Some participants also suggested to have a longer text, explaining each principle in more detail.

As a way to further promote the quality dialogue around the principles, CIQG has commissioned white papers on each of the seven principles from authors from different parts of the world. These will be published in early 2016 and available on the CIQG Website.

The forthcoming 2016 Annual Conference of CIQG will have a session devoted to the International Quality Principles. ❖

The CIQG Advisory Council met in Washington, DC on January 30, 2015

JOIN CIQG!

Members of the CHEA International Quality Group are part of the international conversation on accreditation and quality assurance. Members receive:

- **The CIQG newsletter, *Quality International*, and other CIQG publications including *Policy Briefs* and additions to the *CHEA/CIQGPublications Series***
- **Invitations to participate in Webinars and other CIQG activities.**
- **Member discounts on registration for the CIQG Annual Meeting, which draws hundreds of participants from around the world**

In addition to CHEA's 3,000 member institutions that automatically become CIQG members, recognized U.S. accrediting organizations, quality assurance bodies, higher education institutions, associations, businesses, foundations and individuals are eligible to join CIQG.

Learn more about CIQG and its activities, visit the CIQG Website at www.cheainternational.org.

Exploring Accreditation and Quality Assurance: Mexico and the United States

The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) and Asociación Nacional de Universidades e Instituciones de Educación Superior (ANUIES) co-hosted a meeting of Mexican association leaders and government officials and U.S. accreditation executives in Mexico City in August 2015. The purpose of the meeting was to explore ways in which the United States and Mexico might work together more closely on quality assurance and accreditation issues.

Topics included promotion of student mobility, institutional partnerships and accreditation/quality assurance partnerships. The group will hold a second meeting in Washington, DC in Spring 2016 and will focus on identifying specific projects to further cooperative efforts in quality assurance between the two countries. ❖

Participants from Mexico and the United States took part in a meeting to explore ways the two countries might work together to address quality assurance issues.

UNESCO Guidelines on the inclusion of learners with disabilities in Open and Distance Learning: the Role of Quality Assurance

The United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture (UNESCO) recently organized (September 17-18, 2015) an expert meeting to validate Guidelines on the inclusion of learners with disabilities in Open and Distance Learning (ODL). (*http://en.unesco.org/events/expert-meeting-unesco-draft-guidelines-inclusion-learners-disabilities-using-odl*). Based on the fact that 15 per cent of the population in the world have a disability, UNESCO believes it is vital that access to educational opportunities be made widely available, using in particular opportunities for ODL.

With this in view, the guidelines address the role and obligations of multiple stakeholders, such as governments, institutions, instructors. The stakeholders also include qualifications recognition and quality assurance (QA) bodies as significant actors. A Matrix of Action for Educational Delivery follows the recommendations to educational stakeholders.

The Guidelines underscore the role of QA bodies in supporting access to learning opportunities for persons with disabilities through ODL by harnessing open solutions such as Open Educational resources, Open Access and Free Open Source Software. Stating that quality is the primary responsibility of higher education institutions (HEIs), the Guidelines nonetheless recognize that External Quality assurance Bodies play an essential role in fostering a quality culture at institutional level.

In this context, the final document includes the following recommendations to quality assurance and qualification recognition bodies:

• Application of non-discriminatory recognition.

Apply principles of fair and non-discriminatory recognition of qualifications undertaken in non-traditional modes (such as online and distance learning) established in UNESCO's regional recognition conventions.

• Awareness raising.

Develop understanding of issues related to ensuring the inclusion of persons with disabilities (such as highlighting the benefits of inclusiveness and the provision of a wider range of learning experiences)

Standard setting. Include across quality standards and criteria explicit provisions to make learning accessible to a wide diversity of students including persons with disabilities.

• Retention and learning outcomes.

Quality standards must require HEIs to have mechanisms in place that provide all enrolled students with effective opportunities for retention and graduation, and that ensure that all graduates have achieved equivalent learning outcomes regardless of the mode of delivery.

• Continuous improvement of QA processes by QA agencies.

Consider the particular areas where quality assurance and recognition criteria and procedures may need to be re-visited to ensure quality teaching and learning for persons with disabilities in their higher education experience, including ODL.

• Phased implementation.

QA agencies should work with HEIs for a phased implementation of inclusive practices, such as capacity building for academic staff, student services, delivery modes, instructional materials and resources, physical facilities.

The Guidelines will be adopted at the forthcoming UNESCO General Conference (November 2015) and will be voluntary and non-binding.

The 2016 CIQG Annual Meeting has chosen as its overall theme: "Quality Assurance and Accreditation: Multiple Demands; Multiple Challenges" with the aim to examine the increasing demands that quality assurance needs to respond to, such as Academic Corruption or Cross-border Accreditation. Will quality assurance around the world be able to take on board yet another task, however worthy it may be? ❖

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