

First Drafting meeting on UNESCO/OECD Guidelines on  
“Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education”

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## Speaking points

Barry McGaw  
Director for Education, OECD

### Welcome

- UNESCO Ambassadors Mr. Sato, Japan, Mr. Omolewa, Nigeria
- UNESCO Assistant Director-General, Mr. John Daniel
- Other colleagues

### Internationalisation of tertiary education

- More than 1.6 million students in tertiary education are studying in another country each year. This figure has been growing on average at 6 per cent per year since 1980 and it can be expected to grow more quickly than total enrolments over the coming years as well.
- This internationalisation began with students going abroad. Increasingly, cross-border delivery is advancing through newer forms:
  - e-learning programmes across borders,
  - foreign institutions (public or private, including for-profit education companies):
    - engaging in partnerships with local tertiary education providers;
    - establishing a new campus abroad;
    - purchasing and taking over an existing institution abroad.

- These developments have positive effects:
  - Cross-border education activities can improve the learning opportunities for individuals.
  - They can increase access to higher education and help meet the increasing labour market demand for higher education skills.
  - They can improve understanding of foreign cultures in an increasingly globalised world.
  - AND that is why many countries are promoting student (and teacher) exchange across borders and why some countries are welcoming foreign higher education institutions in their own country.
- These developments also bring new challenges:
  - It is more difficult to assure quality provision when it occurs outside the national jurisdiction of providers, particularly when cross-border electronic provision is involved.
  - A recent Australian study cited 150 degree-mill universities in operation internationally and offering degrees based on life experiences, with prices ranging from \$US 200 to \$US 7,000. (These are, of course, extreme cases but they make clear the need for learners to be better protected.)
  - There is a need for an **educational response** to the regulatory gaps that they have created and that fall outside other international efforts like trade agreements. The response should be:
    - enhanced consumer or learner protection in cross-border higher education;
    - better information on quality of provision and value of qualifications.

### **Collaborative effort in the development of guidelines**

- OECD is very pleased to be working with UNESCO on the development of what we are calling “Guidelines on Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education”. To my knowledge, this is the first time that UNESCO and OECD will have worked jointly in developing international guidelines.

- I am also very pleased to see that more than 60 countries (including 28 of the 30 OECD countries) are represented at this meeting to begin the work.
- Among you, there are also representatives of:
  - university and students associations;
  - quality assurance and accreditation agencies;
  - agencies involved in the recognition and evaluation of credentials;
  - professional associations;
  - private education providers.
- With so many stakeholders involved from the beginning of this process, we should have a genuinely collaborative effort that takes into account the views of all stakeholders in an open and transparent way.

### **Nature of the guidelines to be developed**

- There are three processes that need to be considered:
  - quality assurance,
  - academic recognition,
  - professional recognition.
- These are often treated as three independent processes, with responsibility for them resting with different bodies, but they becoming increasingly connected with the increasing internationalisation of higher education and the mobility of students and professionals.
- The UNESCO/OECD Guidelines will address the three processes as a whole.
- I must stress, as well, that the UNESCO/OECD guidelines will be non-binding for countries. The guidelines will not supersede individual countries' authority to regulate the quality assurance and accreditation of their own systems.

- The main goal of the international guidelines is to further strengthen quality assurance, accreditation and recognition of qualification schemes at the national level. This is the best guarantee for improving learner protection and increasing the transparency of the recognition process of qualifications.
- The guidelines should build on existing initiatives. There is no need to reinvent good initiatives that exist at both national and international levels:
  - The international legal framework for recognition of academic qualifications, for example, is largely in place with the UNESCO Conventions on the Recognition of Qualifications.
  - There are significant regional initiatives to improve international cooperation, exchange best practices, and establish formal agreements, such as:
    - the European Bologna process,
    - programmes in the MERCOSUR countries,
    - initiatives taken by a large range of university and students associations, quality assurance and accreditation bodies, academic recognition information centres, and professional bodies.

### **Relationship with WTO GATS**

- The General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) is not a suitable platform to discuss guidelines on quality assurance and accreditation:
  - A clear finding of the ongoing work at the OECD on internationalisation of post-secondary education is that trade agreements, including GATS, do not have much to say, if anything, about the content and quality of education services.
  - These issues of content and quality are much better addressed within the education community, at national and international levels.
- I must emphasise, therefore, that the purpose of this UNESCO/OECD drafting session, and the ones to follow in Tokyo and Paris, is:
  - NOT to come up with concrete suggestions or guidelines for the ongoing WTO negotiations on trade in educational services.

- NOT to interpret particular articles in the General Agreement on Trade in Services.
- BUT to come up with an **educational response** to the challenges of the increasing globalisation of higher education through:
  - a set of international guidelines,
  - possibly, an international database of recognised higher education providers.
- These guidelines should focus on how better to:
  - ensure the quality of cross-border delivery of higher education,
  - protect learners,
  - increase transparency in the recognition of qualifications,
  - strengthen co-operation between all stakeholders at national and international levels,
  - while respecting:
    - national authority
    - diverse higher education systems.

### **Enhancing the value of the Guidelines**

- If the UNESCO/OECD Guidelines on Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education are to be a useful tool in as many countries as possible, capacity building will be important. We should, therefore, think about how we could combine the work on the guidelines with capacity building initiatives that could help countries to build up sound national quality assurance, accreditation and recognition of qualifications systems.

### **Thanks and best wishes**

- I am looking forward to the outcomes of this first step being taken in the coming two days.
- The success of the guidelines depends on your efforts and on your creating a good and open spirit of dialogue that, in the end, will give all of you a sense of “ownership” of the guidelines.

- The best way for the international education community to work together is with mutual understanding. You have the opportunity to prove that, with the diverse perspectives of countries and stakeholders represented among you.