

Speech delivered by H.E. Mr Teiichi Sato  
on the occasion of the UNESCO/OECD Guidelines  
on “Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education”

Drafting Meeting 1

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Mr Chairman,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to have the opportunity to address the distinguished participants gathered here today.

First of all, I wish to express my sincere appreciation to both UNESCO and the OECD for organizing this very important meeting which is an excellent opportunity for stakeholders from both the so-called “providing countries” and the “receiving countries” of cross-border higher education to sit together and to exchange opinions under a common agenda, focusing on issues and challenges associated with the growth and diversification of cross-border higher education. (We have been expressing our view of the necessity for such a meeting, at both the OECD and UNESCO, as well as at the WTO, so I

truly welcome the realisation of this meeting).

Currently, at the WTO, higher education services are negotiated as commercial services, from a trade perspective. It is true that the globalisation of higher education by various forms of non-traditional delivery modes contributes to the expansion of learning opportunities in both developing and developed countries. However, continued discussions on this issue remain indispensable not only from a trade perspective, but from an educational perspective as well.

Promoting liberalisation is an important factor in trade. But, it is equally important to ensure the quality of higher education when providing such a service in a cross-border situation. This is the task which awaits us, the stakeholders in education. I therefore welcome this meeting as a significant first step in what we hope will be a fruitful cooperation and collaboration among educational policy-makers and institutions at the international level.

(I now wish to say some words on the significance of quality provision in cross-border higher education.)

The globalisation of the economy, society and culture has been rapid and the cross-border mobility of people, goods and services has increased accordingly in great strides. Information and communication technologies (ICT), too, have been a driving force in propelling globalisation thus introducing important implications for the provision of education.

Higher education plays a key role in securing sustainable socio-cultural and economic development. As a ‘global good’ common to us all, higher education enables the transmission of intellectual assets of the past and the creation of new knowledge for the future.

The globalisation of higher education and the introduction of new modes of provision are highly desirable in that they offer increased and diversified learning opportunities for all.

However, several challenges remain to be confronted. As the educational system differs in each country, students may have difficulty in judging the content, quality and credibility of a particular cross-border programme. They also have to be

protected from the risk of receiving misinformation and low quality education. It must be noted that the damage caused by low quality providers of education is often irreparable.

In the past years, Japan has actively promoted student exchanges and both the number of students going abroad and coming to Japan have increased. One could say that Japan is both a recipient and a provider of cross-border higher education.

In Japan's case, we consider increasing opportunities for receiving diversified international higher education to be beneficial not only to students and the educational community, but to society as a whole. At the same time, amidst such circumstances, there is an increasing need to provide detailed information for such recipients, as the methods of providing cross-border higher education are so diversified. Such is the situation for e-learning and services provided by commercial education providers.

The need to easily access information regarding Japanese

educational services is becoming increasingly important as we have seen a significant rise in the number of students from abroad, especially those from the Asia-Pacific region which have come under the UMAP framework. Furthermore, we have received several requests from our Asian neighbours for the provision of offshore educational programmes by Japanese institutions.

From our perspective, we believe it is important to provide potential students with comprehensive information so that they may make their selection on the basis of valid information and under the right conditions. I believe that this is not only the case for Japan, but is an issue common to all countries facing the rapid growth and diversification of the provision of higher education.

Moreover, in order for higher education provisions to unfold smoothly under varied educational systems in different social and cultural backgrounds, there is indeed a need to create common guidelines based on mutual understanding between both the providers and recipients. This could intensify international cooperation and thus assure the quality

of cross-border education.

The protection of students and the assurance of the quality of cross-border education are two important elements which have to be taken into account in the liberalisation of educational services. With this in mind, we consider that a global higher-education information network is indispensable in order for all stakeholders to be able to benefit from this liberalisation process, and we have already expressed such views at the WTO negotiations for educational services.

Also, in this regard, Japan joined Norway with Mozambique, Iceland, United Republic of Tanzania last October in submitting a draft resolution entitled “Higher Education and Globalisation: Promoting quality and access to the knowledge society as a means for sustainable development.” to the 32<sup>nd</sup> General Conference of UNESCO which adopted it.

(I now wish to make some proposals on the next possible steps.)

In view of the afore-mentioned circumstances, there is an increasing need for those international organisations responsible for education, such as UNESCO and the OECD, to take the initiative in creating an international framework for assuring the quality of higher education. This could be done by developing guiding principles on quality assurance and establishing a global information network whereby public authorities and quality-assurance institutions would be linked, thus providing a clearing-house for information on the quality of cross-border higher education.

In developing a set of guiding principles for policy benchmarking in quality assurance, it would be preferable if they were to be designed to encourage good practices among the various institutions and countries involved, based on a mutual understanding of the different educational systems and reciprocated cooperation.

Because there is a need to respect each country's unique educational system, it would be most appropriate for the guidelines to be "non-binding" rather than to set a unified worldwide standard.

In addition, it is important that both the receiving and the providing countries be involved in the quality- assurance process, based on mutual respect and partnership. More specifically, receiving countries should keep their authority on how to deal with cross-border higher education within their own jurisdiction, while providing countries should cooperate in the provision of information on quality assurance.

As for the need to establish a global information network for quality assurance, it is essential for such a network to provide the users – whether they be higher-education institutions, students or employers – with the information necessary to judge the status of a higher-education institution in a particular country, the international validity and portability of a qualification provided by the institution, etc. It is desirable that such a network be realised through UNESCO's initiative and by means of collaboration of information on the authorisation and accreditation of higher-education institutions provided by governmental authorities, quality-assurance agencies and higher-education institutions.

As a first concrete and realistic step towards constructing such a network, UNESCO could take the lead by linking the websites of existing organizations, such as national and regional educational authorities, quality-assurance agencies and NGOs; thus creating an international portal website that would provide comprehensive information on the quality of higher education. In the future, this portal could be developed further as a clearing house for such information.

For example, such a network could provide such information as:

- 1) Outlines of each country's higher education system
- 2) A framework of degrees and other qualifications in each country
- 3) Quality assurance and accreditation systems of each country
- 4) A list of recognized higher education institutions: bona fide institutions of higher education approved or accredited by the proper authorities of each country
- 5) Information about the evaluation of higher education institutions.

As a conclusion, I wish to say that the globalisation process is proceeding at such a rapid speed that we, the stakeholders in education, should not overlook the situation. In order to maximize the benefits brought about by globalisation for both the developed and developing countries and to raise further the bar on the quality of higher education in all countries, I strongly encourage a sound initiative from UNESCO and the OECD and I urge all countries to develop their cooperation in this field.

Lastly, I would like to add that I hope many of you will be able to participate in the next meeting on the Guidelines which will be held in Tokyo this October.

Thank you.