

## Opening Words

Good morning,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you, in the name of the World Bank, to this workshop on cross-border higher education.

I must however tell you that, more than a representative of an international organization, I stand in front of you today as a victim of cross-border higher education. Indeed, after growing up in Morocco, my parents sent me to France to study. And this type of encounter did not happen only once in my life. Like the famous postman, cross-border higher education rung me twice, in fact even three times since I went on to study in the US after France and, years later, after working in Morocco, I went to the UK to study again.

But maybe I was exaggerating when I described myself as a victim. I think that studying in foreign universities was a great opportunity to be exposed to a variety of educational and cultural experiences. I guess that I have never fully recovered, or rather I have not been the same since.

Going to a foreign university is the most traditional form of cross-border higher education. But nowadays you can practice cross-border higher education in many different ways: you can be taught by a foreign teacher in your own country, or you can be linked to a foreign institution by videoconference or through the Internet, or you can enroll at the local branch of a foreign university. Some countries, like Australia, have made higher education services a key element of their exports strategy, others like Malaysia are at the same time importers and exporters of higher education services, yet others like Yemen want to use foreign providers as part of the capacity building strategy for their national higher education system. Notwithstanding countries like Greece whose Constitution does not even allow for domestic private universities, cross-border higher education is well, alive and growing fast. In fact, it is fascinating to note that the two fastest growing universities in the US today are the University of Phoenix and the

distance education part of University of Maryland's University College, both of whom enroll a large proportion of students living overseas.

Is cross-border higher education a good thing, or another manifestation of the dark forces of globalization? A few years ago, I was in Bolivia, and the Minister of Higher Education asked me point blank to give him one good reason why he should allow the Spanish Catalunya Open University to operate in his country. I responded what I always respond when government officials in developing countries ask me about private universities, namely that for me the distinction between private and public universities is not very relevant, I tell them that what they should really care about is to distinguish between good and bad tertiary education institutions.

Which brings me to the purpose of our meeting. We hope, through a dialogue among representatives of cross-border higher education providers, government policy makers, practitioners of quality assurance and other relevant stakeholders, to explore the capacity-building contribution that cross-border higher education can make or is making in developing countries. We are also interested in discussing the quality assurance mechanisms that can best accompany the development of these new forms of higher education. And I am fully aware that we know very little about these topics, hence the importance of a meeting like this one.

Let me conclude by thanking the co-organizers of this event, first Jos Walenkamp and the NUFFIC staff for coordinating and organizing this event with such efficiency and patience, and then Stéphan Vincent-Lancrin and his OECD colleagues for their invaluable collaboration. I would like to thank as well all the presenters, discussants and participants who, without any doubt, will make this workshop an outstanding experience. I know that collectively you have the unique capacity to advance our knowledge of the topics at hand. To achieve this goal, we must remember that we are not here to lecture each other, but to share information and insights so that we might all learn from one other with an open mind. Whenever I take part in this kind of international encounter, I am reminded of the words of the famous French writer, Marcel Proust, who once said that

“the true voyage of exploration does not consist in visiting new countries but in looking at the world with new eyes”. So thank you all for giving us this unique opportunity to look at the issues linked to the rapid development of cross-border higher education with new eyes.

Jamil Salmi