



**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION of the P. R. of CHINA
ORGANISATION for ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION and DEVELOPMENT
International Seminar on the Development of Higher Education and Financing Policies**

Kerry Centre (12-13 July 2004), Beijing

Working Group 3: Quality evaluation in a diversified higher education system

Dr. Lichia Saner-Yiu, President, Centre for Socio-Eco-Nomic Development, Geneva

Introduction

Mass higher education coupled with greater diversity of educational sector has triggered governmental initiatives on issues of quality assurance. Traditional, often informal procedures for quality assurance, suitable with only a few institutions and relatively small enrolment, are now seen as insufficient for the more diverse circumstances of a larger system of higher education.¹ This shift to formal systems of quality assurance is among the most significant trends affecting higher education over the last decades. Emergence of knowledge society and the commercialisation of the educational services have further strengthened the sense of urgency.

Accreditation, standard setting, self-study, external review and public ranking are some of the broadly accepted approaches to evaluate and ensure quality of higher education. Nevertheless, debates continue over the role and proper form of evaluation and quality assurance for higher education. There is an increasing recognition that these widely accepted approaches focus primarily on the “qualification” of the educational institutions to offer programmes and to grant degrees, in addition to their intake “capacity”. In contrast, these quality assurance instruments have paid much less attention to the learning processes and the learning outcome of higher education.

Similarly, there exists also the perception that existing quality evaluation systems are often designed from the perspective of the regulatory authority and their needs. Diverse forms of evaluation are meant to provide feedback to the authority for the policy evaluation and planning purpose. These systems tend to be externally driven by the authority which uses resource allocation as leverage for control and improvement.

In a diversified higher education system, these instruments need to be supported by additional quality assurance tools to ensure proper return on investment (resource utilisation and economic and social benefits) and consumer satisfaction (employability and social mobility). This additional battery of quality assurance instruments should have the following characteristics: independence, results based, process oriented, and self-regulatory.

¹ El-Khawas, Depietro-Jurand & Holm-Nielson, 1998, Quality Assurance in Higher Education: Recent Progress; Challenges Ahead. Paper contributed by the World Bank at the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education, October 5-9. Paris.

Themes of Working Group 3:

1. In assessing the quality of higher education, what quality indicators should be included in order to shift the focus of quality to the competency development and acquisition of students? Competency is defined as the ability to apply effectively the knowledge, skills and behaviour in performance.
2. While it is widely recognised that economic development is correlated with the development of higher education, but fiscal, human resources and infrastructure constraints have made the results of higher education expansion unsatisfactory. How can quality evaluation contribute to a closer link between higher education and social, economic and cultural development of the country? How can quality evaluation contribute to a better match between education attainment and labour market demands?
3. What elements need to be integrated in an effective quality evaluation system that would be self-regulating and can provide timely feedback to the administrators, faculties, students and policy makers for decision making?
4. While the “market” is offering differentiated educational programmes and products, what approach to quality evaluation might be better suited to this market condition?