

Next Steps: Pilot Study on an International Information Tool on Recognized Higher Education Institutions

Third drafting session
17-18 January 2005, Paris

This note proposes the next steps for a pilot study on the development of an international information tool on recognized higher education institutions. This proposal responds to the conclusions of the second drafting session of the UNESCO/OECD Guidelines on quality provision in cross-border higher education. It has been prepared for the third drafting meeting of the UNESCO/OECD Guidelines on quality provision in cross-border higher education (OECD Headquarters, Paris 17-18 January 2005). At this meeting, participants are asked to note and comment on the next steps for the pilot study.

Background

At the first drafting session of the UNESCO/OECD Guidelines on quality provision in cross-border higher education (Paris, 5-6 April 2004), it was suggested to establish an ‘international database on recognised higher education institutions’ listing all degree-granting higher education institutions. There was a consensus on the need for sufficient and reliable information on the quality of cross-border higher education provision and on having an experts group to explore this possibility in more detail, including possible forms of provision of information (e.g. a database or a portal).

During the second drafting session of the UNESCO/OECD Guidelines on quality provision in cross-border higher education (Tokyo, 14-15 October 2004) consensus was reached to separate the development of the international information tool from the adoption of the Guidelines. In this regard, it was agreed to revise the reference to the international information tool in the Guidelines for governments (paragraph 6) to read: “*contribute to efforts to improve the accessibility at the international level of information on recognized higher education institutions/providers*”

Further conclusions of the second drafting session included:

- consensus on the need for a “searchable portal” at the international level
- consensus to launch a “pilot study” with 8-12 countries from different regions and economic development levels as a first step.
- agreement that the “list of recognized higher education institutions” will only be updated at the national level.

The attached document proposes a process for the pilot study on an international information tool. This pilot information tool would be based on the basic principles agreed upon in the previous drafting meetings¹. These principles are summarized as follows:

- The international information tool would include a comprehensive list of all higher education institutions recognized by a competent body as a priority. In addition, further supplementary information may be provided to support. The information to be included in the list would be provided voluntarily by countries.
- The pilot international information tool will be under the responsibility of the competent national authorities of the co-operating countries and the reliability of information would be guaranteed by each country. It would be the responsibility of each country to provide accurate and appropriate information and no information would be modified or added at the international level.
- The international information tool would build on existing relevant initiatives both at the national and international level.

¹ Reference summaries of expert meetings on the information tool available at :
www.unesco.org/education/amq/guidelines and
www.oecd.org/edu/internationalisation/guidelines

- The international information tool would be free of charge, easy to access, simple, user friendly, provided online and searchable.

Pilot Project Partners

It is foreseen that 8-12 member states of UNESCO and OECD ('National Partners') which represent differing levels of economic development, and regions will take part in the pilot study. (Countries will be asked to express their interest to take part in the pilot study once a more detailed proposal concerning the scope of the pilot information tool is put forward.) In addition to the member states taking part in the pilot study, a Steering Group which is composed of IGOs and NGOs as well as representatives from Member States which have experience in the development of information systems for higher education will be established to monitor the pilot study. The Steering Group Members will be appointed by UNESCO and OECD Secretariats. UNESCO will take a lead co-ordinating role in this initiative. This project proposal responds to the needs expressed for capacity building of some developing countries to compile and provide the appropriate information for the international information tool.

Pilot Project Overview

Objective

The overall objective is to protect students from misleading guidance and information, low quality provision, rogue providers, and qualifications of limited validity by helping their informed decision making. This tool will primarily provide information for students, but is of value for other higher education stakeholders, namely governments, higher education institutions/providers, quality assurance agencies, recognition bodies and professional bodies.

The specific objective of the pilot project is to ascertain the feasibility of an international information tool on recognized higher education institutions. It is foreseen that the pilot study of an international information tool on recognised higher education institutions will consist of five main steps

1. Launching of the project and preparation of methodology (February to June 2005)
2. Reflection of national strategies (June to October 2005)
3. Training for national information inputs (November 2005 to June 2006)
4. Finalization of national information inputs (November 2005 to June 2006)
5. Evaluation (June to December 2006)

Annex I. provides an overview of activities foreseen in this pilot study.

Funding

In view of the fact that UNESCO does not have funds earmarked for this activity, extrabudgetary funds are necessary to launch the 'pilot phase' of this project. Consolidation of fund raising for this project is necessary in order to ensure its successful outcome. A detailed costing of the attached study will be prepared in February 2005 together with an elaborated proposal on the pilot study.

Annex I. Activities

Activities

1. *Launching of the project and preparation of methodology*

1.1 Project Preparation

This activity will consist of :

- consolidating extrabudgetary funding for the project
- finalizing the project outline
- identifying the participating National Partners
- nominating the Steering Group for the Project

The UNESCO Secretariat will coordinate the above actions in collaboration with the OECD Secretariat .

1.2 Proposal for the Pilot Information Tool Structure

This activity will include the assembly and/or elaboration of reference documents on:

- Systems for categorization types of higher education institutions (international and national)
- Quality assurance mechanisms (international and national)
- Levels of information to be included (e.g. issues such as the inclusion of programme or course level information etc.)
- Technical structures of existing information systems in higher education (including issues such as their target users, and their needs, cost of development and maintenance, funding system)

UNESCO will coordinate and lead this activity. Based on the above documents, a proposal for a pilot international information tool technical structure will be elaborated, taking into account all above-named factors. The background research and project proposal development will involve contracts established with IGOs and NGOs experienced in the development of information systems in higher education .

1.3 Inventory of National Frameworks

National Partners will prepare a national inventory which will focus on :

- higher education systems
- quality assurance systems
- definition of different statutes for the recognition of cross-border and national providers (e.g. registration, licensure)
- identification of competent legal bodies involved in the recognition of higher education institutions.
- existing listings of national recognized higher education institutions

1.4 Conception and Elaboration of the Tools of Communication for the Pilot Project

UNESCO will establish a project website and electronic mailing list for communication of information concerning this project with all participants and to provide public information on the outcomes of this project to all Member States

1.5 Establishment of Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy

UNESCO will propose a monitoring and external evaluation strategy for the project. This strategy will be developed in collaboration with experts in the area of evaluation and information tool development.

1.6 First Steering Group Meeting

The Steering Group will hold its first meeting to review the documents for the project rationale for the project and prepare its recommendations for modifications to the proposal. The Steering Group will also review and finalize the project methodology as well as the monitoring and evaluation proposal for the pilot project. This meeting will be held in conjunction with activity 2.1

2. *Reflection on National Strategies*

2.1 Seminar on National Strategies for the Development of the Information Tool

National Partners will present their national inventories and comment on necessary modifications for the proposal in light of these inventories. The objective of the seminar will be to determine the scope, content structure of the international information tool, identify capacity building needs for national partners, and establish the workplan for the technical development of the pilot information tool in the project period.

2.2 Establishment of National Plans for the International Information Tool

Building on the decisions of Seminar, National Partners will launch the organisation and collecting of necessary information to contribute to the international information tool. Particular attention will be given to:

- further reflection at the national level of the discussion launched during the Seminar and the dissemination of the above-mentioned seminar conclusions
- preparations of workplans for the national contribution to the international information tool
- nomination of participants to participate in capacity building workshops for the collection, organization and presentation of information at the national level

3. Finalization of National Information Inputs

3.1 Preparation of the Pilot International Information Tool Technical Structure

UNESCO in collaboration with IGOs and NGOs experienced in the development of information systems in higher education will develop the pilot information tool platform.

3.2 Workshop on the Collection, Organization and Presentation of Information

Building on the decisions of the Seminar, UNESCO will organize a Workshop for national partners to build necessary capacity for compiling information at the national level. Topics addressed will include procedures, schedules and means for collecting, providing, quality assuring and publishing information. National Partners will also comment on the prototype technical platform with a view to establishing a tool which responds to the national needs.

3.3 Second Steering Group Meeting

The Steering Group will review the outcomes of the Workshop and provide inputs for the modification of the prototype technical platform. The Steering Group will also review all monitoring reports to date and plan the Final Workshop. This Steering Group Meeting will be held in conjunction with activity 3.2

3.4 Advancement of the Pilot International Information Tool Technical Structure

The prototype technical platform will be reviewed in light of the outcomes of consultations of the Second Steering Group Meeting

3.5 Contributions of National Partners to the International Information Tool

National Partners will further pursue the preparation of their national contributions to the international information tool in light of the consultations of the Second Steering Group Meeting.

4. Evaluation

4.1 Final Conference

All project partners will meet to:

- Report on the progress of the workplans for national contributions to the international information tool
- Elaborate a follow up to the activity further to the results of the project
- Provide inputs for the final evaluation of the project.

4.2 Steering, Progress and Evaluation of the Project

UNESCO will prepare the final report with the support of the Steering Group, and based on the final external evaluation of the project. This report will be submitted for further inputs and validation to the National Partners. The External Evaluator will present the first draft of this evaluation during the Final Conference of the project, with a view to its use in the elaboration of the follow up to this project.