



# Higher Education in a Globalized Society

UNESCO Education  
Position Paper



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# Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the on-going discussion on the implications of globalization for higher education. This paper is one in a series of UNESCO's position papers intended to clearly state the Organization's views and thinking on key issues relevant to education today. It provides an overview of debates on the opportunities and challenges posed by globalization to higher education, and identifies the United Nations and UNESCO texts and normative instruments that are relevant to the discussion. The goals of this paper are to further the exploration and understanding of higher education in a more globalized society; to recognize the importance that UNESCO gives to the topic; and consequently to outline UNESCO's position in this regard, based on basic United Nations documents and UNESCO's mandate for action in this field. The aim is to focus UNESCO's standard-setting, capacity building and clearinghouse functions to assist Member States in the formulation of appropriate policies and strategies to meet the challenges posed to higher education by globalization. As this is a rapidly developing field, the outlined position is likely to evolve as the debate progresses and will be subject to subsequent revisions.

The potential implications of globalization for higher education are many and diverse. This paper intentionally addresses specific elements of globalization; namely, the growing importance of the knowledge society/economy, the development of new trade agreements that cover trade in education services, innovations related to information and communication technologies (ICTs), with emphasis on the role of the market and the market economy. These developments have important implications for higher education in terms of quality, access, diversity and funding. The impact of globalization on other aspects of education such as research and knowledge production, governance, reform, intellectual property and academic freedom, while acknowledged, is outside the scope of this paper.

Globalization is a theme that is at the centre of debate by education policymakers, scholars, professionals and practitioners worldwide. It is a concept that provokes intense debate and examination. The discussion, in terms of the nature, causes, elements, consequences and implications of globalization is



prolific, rather controversial and very important.<sup>1</sup> In order to acknowledge, but not oversimplify, the complex topic of globalization, parameters need to be established to frame the discussion. For the purposes of this paper, globalization is described as ‘the flow of technology, economy, knowledge, people, values and ideas .... across borders. Globalization affects each country in a different way due to each nation’s individual history, traditions, cultures, resources and priorities’.<sup>2</sup>

Globalization is a multifaceted process with economic, social, political and cultural implications for higher education. It poses new challenges at a time when nation-states are no longer the sole providers of higher education and the academic community no longer holds the monopoly on decision-making in education. Such challenges not only address issues of access, equity, funding and quality but also those of national sovereignty, cultural diversity, poverty and sustainable development. A further and even more fundamental concern is that the emergence of crossborder higher education provision and trade in education services bring education within the realm of the market and that this may seriously affect the capacity of the state to regulate higher education within a public policy perspective. Declining policy capacity of the state could affect weaker and poorer nations and benefit the more prosperous ones.

It is impossible to discuss the impact of globalization on higher education without referring to the internationalization of higher education. These two terms are often mistakenly used interchangeably. In this paper, globalization is presented as a phenomenon which is having an impact on higher education and internationalization is interpreted as one of the ways in which higher education is responding to the opportunities and challenges of globalization. Internationalization includes a broad range of elements such as curriculum, teaching/learning, research, institutional agreements, student/faculty mobility, development cooperation and many more.<sup>3</sup> However, the clear focus of this paper is on globalization as a complex phenomenon with multiple implications for higher education, and only one aspect of internationalization, that of crossborder education, is discussed.

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1. UNESCO has recently co-published two books on the issue — *Globalization and the Market in Higher Education: Quality, Accreditation and Qualifications* (2002) and *Universities and Globalization — Private Linkages*, Public Trust (2003) edited by G. Breton and M. Lambert.
  2. Knight, J. and H. DeWit (eds.) (1997). *Internationalization of Higher Education in Asia Pacific*. Amsterdam. European Association for International Education p. 8.
  3. Knight, J. (2003). *Internationalization remodeled: Responding to new realities and challenges* (in publication).

Globalization and recent developments in the international delivery of higher education have generated a number of new terms including 'borderless', 'transnational', 'transborder' and 'crossborder' education. Borderless education refers to the blurring of conceptual, disciplinary and geographic borders traditionally inherent to higher education.<sup>4</sup> It is interesting to juxtapose borderless education with these other new terms. Borderless acknowledges the disappearance of borders while the other terms actually emphasize the existence of borders. Both approaches reflect the reality of today. In this period of unprecedented growth in distance education and e-learning, geographic borders would appear to be of little consequence. Yet, borders gain increased importance when the focus turns to regulatory responsibility, especially related to quality, access and funding. Therefore, while full recognition is given to the existence and importance of borderless education, the notion of education moving across national jurisdictional borders is salient to this discussion and the term crossborder will be used. No major distinction is made between the terms crossborder and transborder education.

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4. CVCP/HEFCE (2000). *The Business of Borderless Education: UK Perspectives*. Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals and the National Education Funding Council in England.

# Context and Implications

## 1. *Trends and issues*

In the context of globalization and knowledge economies, higher education in its knowledge producing and disseminating function, is recognized as an essential driving force for national development in both developed and developing countries. At the same time, in its universality and international dimensions, higher education can be seen as both an actor and reactor to the phenomenon of globalization.

The four key elements of globalization relevant to this discussion are

- ▶ the growing importance of the knowledge society/economy;
- ▶ the development of new trade agreements which cover trade in education services;
- ▶ the innovations related to ICTs; and
- ▶ the emphasis on the role of the market and the market economy.

These factors in turn have been the catalysts for new developments in higher education including: *i*) the emergence of new education providers such as multi-national companies, corporate universities, and media companies; *ii*) new forms of delivering education including distance, virtual and new face-to-face, such as private companies; *iii*) greater diversification of qualifications and certificates; *iv*) increasing mobility of students, programmes, providers and projects across national borders; *v*) more emphasis on lifelong learning which in turn increases the demand for post-secondary education; and *vi*) the increasing amount of private investment in the provision of higher education. These developments have important implications for higher education in terms of quality, access, diversity and funding.

One of the issues which is generating an active and at times polarized debate is the liberalization and promotion of commercial trade of education services through trade agreements. The idea of academic mobility, students and scholars moving between countries is not new. However, the movement of students, education programmes and providers across borders for commercial and for-profit purposes is growing and this issue has gained new momentum and importance with the establishment of the

General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). This new international trade agreement is administered by the World Trade Organization (WTO) and is the first multilateral agreement that covers trade in services. Previous agreements, such as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), dealt with trade in products. Within GATS, education is one of the twelve primary services and higher education is one of the five sub-sectors of education. The agreement identifies specific rules and conditions to liberalize and regulate trade, and it is these regulations which are at the heart of the debate about GATS. The inclusion of trade in higher education services within the framework of GATS is a reality and will not change. Each country can determine the extent to which it will permit foreign education service providers to access the domestic market. However, the growing concerns of the education community worldwide stem from the fact that WTO, an organization that aims to promote trade for purposes of economic efficiency, with no competence in education, may negatively affect sustainable developments of education.

There is a great polarization of views and intense polemics on this topic. Some traditional stakeholders in higher education: institutions, teachers' unions, students, and scholars strongly oppose higher education being treated as a commodity and urge their governments not to make commitments in higher education in the context of GATS. Others, sometimes from the very same groupings, advocate that trade in education is happening already and that it has clear benefits and opportunities, as long as it is regulated correctly. However, one of the more critical issues is exactly who has the responsibility for establishing and monitoring the rules and regulations about trade in higher education services, and for whose benefit?

This debate about globalization and a market approach to higher education is gradually being taken up by developing countries and countries in transition. They are particularly exposed to becoming unregulated markets for higher education exporters because of insufficient government capacity to regulate due to political and governance instability<sup>5</sup>. There is concern that the decreasing state funding for higher education will decrease even further and that students will be targeted by private and often expensive providers which will further favour the rich and further disadvantage the poor. At the centre of the debate lies the issue of quality assurance and the need to provide consumer protection from non-reputable providers or 'diploma mills'. The value of the qualifications offered and their acceptance by the labour market are additional concerns for students, employers, the public and the education

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5. Singh, M. 'International Quality Assurance, Ethics and the Market: A View from Developing Countries', in UNESCO/IAU (2002) *Globalization and the Market in Higher Education: Quality, Accreditation and Qualifications*.



community itself. The major policy issue remains: how can new for-profit providers and traditional higher education crossborder providers contribute to the development agenda of a developing country and not weaken it?

The evolving relationship between the State and the market in terms of roles and responsibilities for funding and regulations is another issue connected to the impact of globalization on higher education. Diminishing public funds and the prevailing economic views tend to assign a lesser role to the State and to governments in matters related to higher education while the role and contribution of the private sector have grown considerably. This is contributing to a stronger 'higher education market' both domestically and globally. This raises two key points. The first is the importance of states and governments to maintain their role in defining policies of higher education, assuring its quality and ensuring that it performs all its missions and functions in society, not only economic development. The second is whether education as a public good is the sole responsibility of public and non-profit higher education institutions or, as many advocate, can the responsibility be shared by a mixed system of public and private, for-profit and non-profit providers? Different examples demonstrate that new private providers may, if certain conditions are met, enhance the capacity to meet unmet demand for higher education in countries with decreasing state budgets.

## 2. *Interests and actions of stakeholders*

Linked to the discussion of globalization are the issues of commodification, commercialization and trade of higher education. These issues are deeply intertwined, and often need to be addressed together. This makes for a rich, complex and usually intense debate. There are a variety of stakeholder groups which are actively engaged in the debate and have developed declarations and statements articulating their position on these issues. They include *i*) teachers' unions at the national level and Education International<sup>6</sup>, *ii*) higher education institutions through their associations in Europe, Canada and the United States who have collectively issued a 'Joint Declaration on Higher Education and GATS'<sup>7</sup>, which was later endorsed by the International Association of Universities, and *iii*) student groups such as the National

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6. Education International website available on 1 August 2003 at <http://www.ei-ie.org/>

7. Joint Declaration on Higher Education and GATS, 28 September 2001, Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC), the American Council on Education (ACE), the European University Association (EUA) and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) available on 5 June 2003 at <http://www.aucc.ca/>

Union of Students in Europe (ESIB) who have published a statement on the commodification of higher education<sup>8</sup>. These groups fully understand the benefits of internationalization of higher education and strongly support the notion of education remaining a public good and responsibility. They seriously question the treatment of education as a tradeable service and urge states not to make *further* commitments to GATS. There is a strong belief that education across borders will continue to grow but that it can be monitored through conventions and forums, other than GATS and WTO. According to them, UNESCO and other education-related bodies have a significant role to play in providing policy frameworks for education moving across borders, much of which is not commercial or trade related, but is part of long-standing academic partnerships, exchanges and development cooperation.<sup>9</sup>

Recent meetings have identified UNESCO as the international organization unique in its geographical outreach, its mission and its approach to globalization and higher education based on UN principles. UNESCO is seen as the intergovernmental organization that can act as a facilitator and a discussion forum for the important but complicated set of issues related to the impact of globalization on higher education and can provide assistance to Member States who are responsible for their national policy and regulatory frameworks on these matters.

Latin American academics expressed critical opinions about GATS at regional meetings held in Porto Alegre, Brazil, and in Lima, Peru. The Third Summit of Iberian and Latin American Universities in Porto Alegre in April 2002 adopted *The Porto Alegre Charter* by which they call upon their respective governments not to subscribe any further commitments to liberalizing trade in education through GATS and WTO. The participants invite their governments to respect the Declaration of the World Conference on Higher Education and to adhere to the agreements adopted under UNESCO.

There are other education stakeholders who point to the benefits of trade in higher education. They believe that increased market competition provides a strong motivation for traditional institutions to innovate and establish professional networks. Furthermore, commercial trade through new for-profit providers and traditional higher education institutes can provide more opportu-

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8. ESIB website available on 5 June 2003 at <http://www.esib.org/>
  9. The Brixen/Bressanone Declaration on Cultural Diversity and GATS (2002) is an example of a different group of education actors, the European Ministers for Culture and Education, who have spoken out on the protection of diversity in education, culture and media. The declaration calls for democratically supported services in education, culture and media to be excluded from further GATS involvement.

nities for access to higher education. They recognize that preserving the quality of higher education, assuring equitable access to higher education and protecting/empowering the learner are becoming the key issues in response to the further commercialization and trade of higher education provision.

In addition, intergovernmental bodies such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) are active in the debate on the impact of globalization and GATS on higher education. Education ministers in the OECD framework have asked for the whole education community to be more involved if progress is to be made in the liberalization of trade in educational services. The OECD/United States Forum on Trade in Education (Washington, May 2002), and a second OECD/Norway Forum on Trade in Education (Trondheim, November 2003), aim to bring trade and education communities together both at the international and national level.

### 3. *Regional reviews*

To get a better insight into recent regional developments and debates on issues related to higher education and globalization, a review of crossborder education and new providers of higher education in a number of countries were prepared under the supervision of UNESCO Regional Bureaux in Beirut, Bangkok and Dakar, and the UNESCO International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (IESALC) in Caracas, Venezuela.<sup>10</sup>

Although the reviews demonstrate a great diversity of views and approaches, some common elements can be drawn. All regions report on the prevalence of increased crossborder education in their region. The crossborder provision involves a diversity of providers including new types of providers (i.e., private multinational companies, and media corporations) as well as traditional private and public higher education institutions, who have decided to export their programmes to other countries. It is important to note that while traditional higher education institutions may be public or private institutions in their own country, in most cases, but not all, as soon as they cross a border they functionally become a private entity in terms of legislation in the receiving country. This is why crossborder providers are often referred to as private providers. There is a great deal of confusion about how terms such as new providers, traditional providers, crossborder providers, for-profit, non-profit, private and public providers are used. Serious attention needs to be given to developing a typol-

ogy for these concepts that can be used internationally but that also respects the individual contexts of different countries. In addition, the reviews reported new types of partnership and administrative arrangements (twinning and franchising) with local companies or institutions and new delivery methods (i.e., distance and virtual). A general remark, however, is that it is difficult to provide systematic information on the crossborder providers as sources of information are not centralized, registration or licensing processes are not in place, and definitions and measurement criteria are not standardized.

The majority of the reviews point to some benefits of crossborder providers, such as filling a need to provide training opportunities; flexibility in curriculum development which responds to the needs of the industry (Kenya); enhancing the range of learning opportunities, supporting the innovation of higher education, providing beneficial competition and fostering the widespread of new technologies (Arab States); and enhancing opportunities for access to higher education (China, India, Kazakhstan, Malaysia). The Indian example further states that in spite of initial apprehensions vis-à-vis new and crossborder providers, they are now accepted both by the public and the labour market. In this country, they are not looked upon as a threat to national development issues and seem to fill the gap for relevance in the traditional system of education.

The reviews, however, also point to the risks posed by foreign providers: operating without appropriate government supervision and providing low quality educational services while aiming at maximum profit, undermining the equality of access to higher education and lack of protection of students, including issues surrounding the recognition of qualifications.

The responses related to the implications of trade in higher education services differ. Some reviews report consultations between relevant ministries (India, Kenya, Malaysia) and a generally positive attitude towards liberalizing trade, as well as seeing benefits from exporting higher education themselves (India, Kenya). As stated in the Indian case study, pragmatic approaches are emerging as regards making commitments in higher education with suitable safeguard clauses.

The Latin American review states that with or without GATS and other regional/bilateral trade agreements, trade in education is likely to grow in coming years and the international academic community will have to face the reality that it no longer holds the monopoly on decisions in the area of education.

All reviews agree on the need for an international framework for quality assurance and accreditation in the form of a flexible mechanism with a developmental aspect. Similarly, there is a fairly high degree of convergence on the usefulness of international guidelines of good/ethical practice related to new providers of higher education.

The reviews offer a small sample survey, but more comprehensive research is being conducted which will

provide empirical evidence on regional developments, needs and approaches.<sup>11</sup>

#### 4. *Opportunities and challenges*

The potential impact of globalization on higher education provides both opportunities and challenges, depending on the priorities, policies, resources, strengths and weaknesses of countries.

The potential *opportunities* are many and diverse. They include: increased supply of education and greater access for students, support for the knowledge economy, development of joint degrees, fusion or hybridization of cultures, growing comparability of qualifications, increasing role for market-based approach, economic benefits for education providers, and diversification and generation of new academic environments.

The potential *challenges* are also numerous and varied. They include concern about quality of provision, inequality of access leading to a two-tier system, the growing problem of physical and virtual brain drain on the developed country-developing country axis but also on other routes, homogenization of culture, weakening role of the state in establishing national policy objectives, growth in market-oriented programmes such as business and information technology and decline in some liberal arts and pure science disciplines.

It is true that what might be seen as an opportunity for one country could be a challenge or risk for another. However, what is needed for all to benefit from globalization trends are mechanisms and policies at the national level that regulate and monitor certain aspects of crossborder provision such as registering and licensing of foreign providers, as well as quality assurance or accreditation of new programmes and providers. Good governance and solid economic and social systems are also becoming even more essential in the context of globalization and international trade of higher education. In summary, the most important challenges for UNESCO Member States, and especially developing countries, which arise from the globalization of higher education lie in the challenge to guarantee quality, to preserve national culture and identity, to ensure that governments set national policy objectives for higher education, and to assure equity of access to higher education.

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11. An analytical study, undertaken by the University of Surrey in cooperation with UNESCO and the Commonwealth of Learning, focuses on describing and analysing the extent, impact and regulation of crossborder, private and for-profit provision of tertiary education in a sample of countries (Bangladesh, Bulgaria, Jamaica, Malaysia and Senegal). The ultimate aim of the study is to assess the contribution of new kinds of provision to increasing access to tertiary education.

# United Nations Normative Frameworks

UNESCO's starting position in addressing globalization and higher education is based on United Nations basic texts and normative instruments. The purpose of this section is to illustrate that there are many United Nations and UNESCO instruments, principles, and initiatives that are relevant to the current discussion on the implications of higher education in a more globalized society. Examples are provided in the following three sections.

## 1. *United Nations standard-setting instruments*

The **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** (Article 26.1), one of the fundamental standard setting instruments, states that 'Higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.' As assuring equitable access to higher education is one of the key challenges and concerns in a more globalized society, this article has particular relevance for the debate and is the basis of the UNESCO position.

The **United Nations Millennium Development Goals** call for global partnerships to further development. More specifically, Goal 8<sup>12</sup> refers to the role of new information technologies in establishing global partnership by stating that 'In cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies — especially information and communications technologies.' In addition, Goal 8 highlights the importance of establishing an 'open trading and financial system that is rule-based, predictable and non-discriminatory'. It includes a commitment to good governance, development and poverty reduction — nationally and internationally. The elements in Goal 8 of a 'rule-based, predictable and non-discriminatory' open trading system in all global partnerships, including those in higher education, should be the criteria to guide trade in higher educational services.

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12. UN Millennium Development Goals available on 5 June 2003 at <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

The **Brussels Declaration<sup>13</sup> of the United Nations General Assembly** underlines the importance of equity and equality of opportunities in the knowledge society. It states: 'Guided by the principles set out in the Millennium Declaration and its recognition that we have a collective responsibility to uphold the principles of human dignity, equality and equity and to ensure that globalization becomes a positive force for all of the world's people, we commit to working for the beneficial integration of the least developed countries into the global economy, resisting their marginalization, determined to achieve accelerated sustained economic growth and sustainable development and eradicate poverty, inequality and deprivation.' Equity and equality of opportunities in the knowledge society may be jeopardized by some of the more global provisions of higher education. Therefore, equity and equality of opportunities in higher education should guide the development of policy frameworks as a response to higher education in a global society.

## 2. *International conferences*

Recently, several United Nations international conferences have acknowledged the implications of globalization and concluded that globalization must bring benefits to all, most notably through the key role of equitable access to quality education.

The **World Summit on Sustainable Development** (Johannesburg, 2002)<sup>14</sup> underlined the need to promote exchange of experience and capacity to benefit all partners and support local, national, subregional and regional initiatives to strengthen the knowledge capacity of all countries through international cooperation and exchange. The role of higher education and assuring its quality in promoting access to the knowledge society has been acknowledged as crucial as a means for sustainable socio-economic development. Its contribution to the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development will be further promoted, in particular in the context of a more globalized society.

The **World Summit for Social Development** (Copenhagen, 1995)<sup>15</sup> called for international cooperation and partnership on the basis of equality, mutual respect and mutual benefit, and stressed the need to take appropriate and affirmative steps to close the gen-

13. Brussels Declaration UN General available on 5 June 2003 at <http://www.unctad.org/en/docs/aconf191d12.en.pdf>

14. Report of the World Summit on Sustainable Development available on 5 June 2003 at [http://www.johannesburgsummit.org/html/documents/summit\\_docs/131302\\_wssd\\_report\\_reissued.pdf](http://www.johannesburgsummit.org/html/documents/summit_docs/131302_wssd_report_reissued.pdf)

16 15. Report of the World Summit for Social Development available on 5 June 2003 at <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/conf166/aconf166-9.htm>

der gap in primary, secondary, vocational and higher education. All elements mentioned should be respected in the fast development of higher learning in a global perspective.

The **Hamburg Declaration on Adult Learning of the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education** (Hamburg, July 1997)<sup>16</sup> stressed that because of the transformation of the economy, globalization, changes in production patterns, rising unemployment and the difficulty of ensuring secure livelihoods there is a strong need for more active labour policies and increased investment in developing the necessary skills to enable men and women to participate in the labour market and income-generating activities. Developing new skills in the perspective of lifelong learning is one of particular focus to address the wide range not only of new providers of higher education in a global society but also the variety and diversity of learners and their respective needs in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The contribution of UNESCO to the upcoming **World Summit on the Information Society** (December 2003)<sup>17</sup> highlights three main challenges posed by the construction of knowledge societies : *i*) to narrow the digital divide that accentuates disparities in development, excluding entire groups and countries from the benefits of information and knowledge; *ii*) to guarantee the free flow of and equitable access to, data, information, best practices and knowledge in the information society; and *iii*) to build international consensus on newly required norms and principles. UNESCO states that equal access is one of the principles essential for the development of an equitable knowledge society, including higher education provision in a more globalized society.

### 3. *UNESCO declarations, conferences and guiding documents*

There are references in UNESCO's founding and guiding documents which offer relevant statements and principles for the current debate on the opportunities and challenges posed by globalization for higher education. The following section highlights texts on issues such as ICTs, brain drain, cultural diversity, the knowledge society, funding, and role of the state, all of which are key to the discussion on higher education in a more globalized society.

UNESCO's **mission** as stated in the Constitution is 'believing in full and *equal opportunities for education for all*, in the unrestricted pursuit of objective truth, and in the free exchange of ideas and knowledge, ... to develop and to increase the means of communica-

16. **Hamburg Declaration on Adult Education** available on 5 June 2003 at <http://www.unesco.org/education/uie/confintea/declaeng.htm>

17. **UNESCO's contribution to the World Summit on the Information Society** available on 5 June 2003 at <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001295/129531e.pdf>



tion between their peoples and to employ these means for the purposes of mutual understanding and a truer and more perfect knowledge of each other's lives.' This mission as articulated in 1945 has particular relevance to the role of today's knowledge society/economy in a more globalized society.

The **UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity** (2003)<sup>18</sup> emphasizes the importance of fostering access by developing countries to the new technologies and ensuring access by those countries, to *inter alia*, educational resources available worldwide.

The **Dakar Framework for Action** (2000)<sup>19</sup> aims to ensure 'Education for All' and stresses that the learning needs of all young people and adults need to be met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes. The improvement of all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence is at the centre of the Dakar follow-up.

The **World Declaration on Higher Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**, (article 14) issued in 1998, and supported again in 2003, by the participants at World Conferences on Higher Education<sup>20</sup> (WCHE) (1998) agreed that 'The funding of higher education requires both public and private resources ... and the role of the state remains essential in this regard.' Furthermore, 'The diversification of funding sources reflects the support that society provides to higher education and must be further strengthened to ensure the development of higher education, increase the efficiency and maintain its quality and relevance. Public support to higher education and research remains essential to ensure a balanced achievement of educational and social missions.' This statement has direct relevance to the globalization trends of increased private investment in higher education and the role of the market and in shaping education policy.

The number and diversity of stakeholders and actors in higher education were also addressed:

'Society as a whole must support education at all levels, including higher education, given its role in promoting sustainable economic, social and cultural development. Mobilization for this purpose depends on public awareness and involvement of the public and private sectors of the economy, parliaments, the media, governmental and non-governmental organizations, students as well as institutions, families and all the social actors involved with higher education.'

18. UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity available on 5 June 2003 at [http://www.unesco.org/confgen/press\\_rel/021101\\_clt\\_diversity.shtml](http://www.unesco.org/confgen/press_rel/021101_clt_diversity.shtml)

19. Dakar Framework for Action available on 5 June 2003 at [http://www.unesco.org/education/efa/fr/ed\\_for\\_all/dakfram\\_eng.shtml](http://www.unesco.org/education/efa/fr/ed_for_all/dakfram_eng.shtml)

20. World Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty-first Century: Vision and Action, Article 14 available on 5 June 2003 at <http://www.unesco.org/education/wche/declaration.shtml>

As a follow-up to the WCHE, UNESCO in cooperation with the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency has launched a **Forum on Higher Education, Research and Knowledge** (2002). The Forum provides a platform for scholars, policymakers and experts to interact and engage critically with higher education and research issues through five Regional Scientific Committees and at the international level, through a Global Scientific Committee. The Forum is committed to social equity and change through the advancement of knowledge production and aims to bridge the gap between developed and developing countries in relation to capacity building and research.

The **UNESCO Recommendation on the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel** (1997) clearly addressed the issues related to labour mobility and brain drain of higher education teachers. It states that 'Member States and higher education institutions should, nevertheless, be conscious of the exodus of higher-education teaching personnel from the developing countries and, in particular, the least developed ones. They should, therefore, encourage aid programmes to the developing countries to help sustain an academic environment which offers satisfactory conditions of work for higher-education teaching personnel in those countries, so that this exodus may be contained and ultimately reversed.' (Article IV, paragraph 15).

Furthermore it calls for the encouragement of 'international academic co-operation which transcends national, regional, political, ethnic and other barriers, striving to prevent the scientific and technological exploitation of one state by another, and promoting equal partnership of all the academic communities of the world in the pursuit and use of knowledge and the preservation of cultural heritages.' (Article V, paragraph 22(n)).

Finally, the **UNESCO Medium-Term Strategy (2002-2007)**<sup>21</sup> places a focus on challenges posed by globalization: 'A new challenge today is to build consensus on newly required norms and principles to respond to emerging ethical challenges and dilemmas as a result of globalization. The growing commercialisation of many spheres previously considered as public goods, such as education, culture and information, jeopardizes weaker, economically less powerful mechanisms of control and demands new approaches to the protection of the rights of the individual. Overall there is a need to agree on universally accepted mechanisms to ensure equitable participation in and management of globalization. There are currently very few rules of the game and unless universally agreed frameworks can be defined, the poor and the weak will continue to be denied the benefits of globalization. Globalization must be made to work for all.'

21. UNESCO Medium-Term Strategy 2001-2007 available on 5 June 2003 at <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/>

Assuring quality in higher education, promoting equal access to higher education and empowering learners for informed decision-making are key challenges for higher education in a more globalized environment. To respond to this challenge, UNESCO launched a **Global Forum on International Quality Assurance, Accreditation and the Recognition of Qualification in Higher Education** in October 2002. It serves to promote international cooperation in higher education by providing a platform for dialogue between different stakeholders and building bridges between intergovernmental organizations. Participants at the forum proposed that ‘UNESCO’s challenge is to provide a structured agenda for new developments and offer an international policy framework for dealing with globalization and higher education, reconciling the interests of national governments, the traditional public higher education sector, for-profit providers and the needs of students and the general public interest.’

As a follow-up to this initiative, the UNESCO/Norway Forum on ‘**Globalization and Higher Education: Implications for North-South Dialogue**’ (Oslo, May 2003) took the debate further, by giving more voices to the developing countries, placing higher education at the centre of social sustainable development, underlining the notion of ‘fair trade’, calling for crossborder provision, including ICT-assisted higher education, to strengthen and not weaken national capacity for higher education.<sup>23</sup>

The **World Conference on Higher Education Partners Meeting +5** (Paris, June 2003) reasserted the importance and validity of the basic principles of the 1998 World Declaration on Higher Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Conference participants also proposed UNESCO declarations and legal instruments as important educational frameworks that should guide development of national policy frameworks related to globalization and higher education. The 1997 Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel and the UNESCO Conventions on the recognition of studies, degrees and qualifications in higher education were identified as particularly relevant educational agreements in the context of globalization, borderless higher education and liberalization of trade in education. In addition, endorsement was provided for the development of Guiding Principles for the provision of crossborder higher education, based on relevance, ethics and mutual respect.<sup>24</sup>

22. Van Damme, D. “Higher Education in the Age of Globalization” in UNESCO/IAU (2002) *Globalization and the Market in Higher Education: Quality, Accreditation and Qualifications*.

23. Papers available available on 1 August 2003 at <http://www.ldv.no/unesco/>

24. Final Report and papers available on 1 August 2003 at: [http://portal.unesco.org/education/ev.php?URL\\_ID=1935&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201](http://portal.unesco.org/education/ev.php?URL_ID=1935&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201)

# UNESCO Regional Conventions on the Recognition of Qualifications

This section of the paper focuses specifically on the role of the UNESCO Regional Conventions on the recognition of qualifications given their relevance and application to the growing movement of students and teachers, education programmes and providers, across national jurisdictional borders in a more globalized society.

## 1. *Purpose of Conventions*

These UNESCO Regional Conventions on the recognition of qualifications are legally binding instruments which to date have been ratified by more than 100 Member States from all regions of the world. The main objectives of the conventions are to promote international cooperation in higher education and to reduce obstacles to the mobility of teachers and students by a mutual recognition of degrees and qualifications between the countries that have ratified them.

## 2. *Evolution of Conventions*

Conventions on the mutual recognition of degrees in higher education between ratifying countries worldwide date from the 1960s when they were initiated by UNESCO. During the 1970s and 80s, five regional conventions on the recognition of studies, diplomas and degrees in higher education were developed: Latin America and the Caribbean (June 1975), the Arab States (1978), Europe (1979), Africa (1981), Asia and the Pacific (1983). An International Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the Arab and European states bordering the Mediterranean (the Mediterranean Convention) was adopted in December 1976 and remained the only one to address inter-regional cooperation.

In 1992, a joint meeting of the five regional and one inter-governmental committee was convened to explore the feasibility of adopting a Universal Convention on the Recogni-

tion of Studies and Degrees in Higher Education. However, consensus could not be reached and it was concluded that the action should continue to be pursued at regional levels. The aspirations towards a world-wide instrument resulted in a normative instrument of a lesser binding nature: the International Recommendation on the Recognition of Studies and Qualifications in Higher Education adopted by the 27th session of the General Conference of UNESCO (November 1993).

### 3. *Update and revision of Conventions*

The Europe Convention (1979) has been the first to be updated. It is now known as the 1997 'Lisbon Recognition Convention for the Europe Region' and is a joint document of the Council of Europe and UNESCO, a first of its kind. It will gradually replace the other existing European conventions. It represents a significant landmark in recognition practices in Europe through the introduction of key concepts listed below; and is closely related to subsequent developments such as the Bologna Process, the most important reform process of higher education in Europe, developed regionally.

The key concepts of the Lisbon Convention (1997) are the following: 1) it shifted the focus in favour of the applicant in the process of recognition by entitling them to a fair recognition of their qualifications within a reasonable time limit, according to transparent, coherent and reliable procedures; 2) one of the basic principles put forward was that recognition should be granted unless substantial differences can be shown; 3) it also emphasized the importance of information and networking at the expert level, in particular through national information centres and the ENIC network that meets annually; 4) though it offered a solid legal framework, it also promoted recognition practices through instruments of a lesser binding nature such as codes of good practice or recommendations and guidelines.

A key aspect of these conventions is that ultimately they contribute to 'preserving and strengthening the cultural identity and diversity of their peoples, respecting the specific character of their educational systems' (Arusha Convention, Africa, 1981).

25. The text of the Conventions available on 5 June 2003 at: <http://www.unesco.org/education/studyingabroad/index.shtml>
26. The European Network of National Information Centres (ENIC Network) was formally established in Budapest, in June 1994, merging the existing UNESCO network of the National Information Bodies (NIBs) and the Council of Europe network of the National Equivalence Information Centres (NEICs). It promoted strong cooperation links to the related network of National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARICs) of the European Commission.

They acknowledge that ‘the right to education is a human right and that higher education represents an exceptionally rich cultural and scientific asset for both individuals and society’ (Lisbon Recognition Convention, Europe, 1997).

At present, the conventions refer to the mutual recognition, by States Parties, of qualifications issued by institutions part of the educational system of a Member State. They are implemented through regional committees that act as statutory bodies. Every two years they bring together higher education representatives of governments party to the conventions. One of their functions is to ‘undertake necessary studies required to adapt the objectives of (this) Convention in accordance with the evolving requirement of social, cultural and economic development in the Contracting States’ (Arab States Convention). This is an important function as it provides the opportunity to invite the Convention committees to examine the implications for qualification recognition and quality assurance related to the emergence of new providers, new delivery means and new qualifications in crossborder education.

In fact, two of the six existing conventions have already taken steps in this direction. The 1997 Lisbon Recognition Convention (European Region) adopted a Code of Good Practice for Transnational Education (Riga, June 2001). The Code defines transnational education as when the learner is in a different country than the institution providing the award that covers much, but not all of the new crossborder education arrangements. The Code puts forward eleven principles on transnational arrangements that relate to issues such as academic quality and standards, cultural context, qualifications of staff, and admission of students.

The 1981 Arusha Convention (Africa Region) is currently being revised to address new needs posed by assessing the qualifications earned through distance education. A study prepared as the basis for the revision process, underlines the need to establish quality assurance mechanisms specific to the needs of open and distance learning, to assure the credibility of the learning outcomes and to ease the transfer of credits within and between national borders. Trust and credibility are key to this process.

These two examples illustrate the ability of regional conventions to be updated and respond to the recent developments in crossborder education. It could be possible that by extending this revision process to the other four conventions in Asia and the Pacific, Arab States, the Mediterranean, Latin America and the Caribbean, the regional conventions could constitute the basis for the development of a regulatory framework for the recognition of qualifications and quality assurance.

The conventions have been the subject of discussions at the recent UNESCO/Norway Forum on ‘Globalization and Higher Education: Implications for North-South Dialogue’ (Oslo, May 2003) and the World Conference on Higher Education +5 meeting (Paris, June 2003). It was agreed that they need to

be revised to respond to the challenges and opportunities of globalization and to facilitate the recognition of qualifications and transparent arrangements for quality assurance. Secondly they need to be drawn together to ensure coherence while still recognizing the diversity of countries and regions. The conventions are at different stages of development and therefore require support in the revision and implementation stages. Finally, consideration needs to be given to the role of the conventions as regulatory tools that are complementary to other international agreements such as GATS.

UNESCO can provide a platform for dialogue and action at the international level to ensure that the education community is cognizant and proactive regarding the implications of globalization for higher education. It is important that UNESCO, the United Nations agency with the competence in education, address through and with its Member States, the implications of new international trends, developments and agreements and in particular, examine the expanded role that updated UNESCO Regional Conventions on the recognition of qualifications can play.

# UNESCO's Position and Actions

## The UNESCO Global Forum on International Quality Assurance, Accreditation and the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education

In light of the issues raised in the overview of debates on the opportunities and challenges posed by globalization to higher education, UNESCO's position in this field is that higher education in a globalized society should assure equity of access and respect cultural diversity as well as national sovereignty. In addition, UNESCO is committed to assuring the quality of global provision of higher education in an increasingly diverse higher education arena and raising the awareness of stakeholders, especially students, on emerging issues in this field. This position aims to establish the conditions under which the globalization of higher education benefits all.

To implement this position, the Global Forum on International Quality Assurance, Accreditation and the Recognition of Qualifications was launched in 2002 to serve as a platform for exchange between the various partners and stakeholders in international and crossborder higher education and to address the social, political, economic and cultural dimensions underpinning globalization and higher education. This forum is designed to work in a complementary fashion with other UNESCO initiatives of the Medium-Term Plan 2002-2007.

Following the inaugural meeting of the Global Forum in October 2002, an Action Plan for 2004-2005 was developed focusing on UNESCO's standard-setting, capacity building and clearinghouse functions.

The Action Plan aims to provide a framework to assist Member States in developing their own policy frameworks. It is based on UN documents and UNESCO's specific mission and functions.



## 1. *Standard-Setting Activities*

Three initiatives are proposed within this category of activities:

- ▶ the establishment of a set of guiding principles,
- ▶ a review of the Regional Conventions, and
- ▶ research on the concept of public good and the impact of crossborder higher education on widening access.

In terms of developing a set of guiding principles it is stated that: 'the higher education community needs to develop a policy framework and guiding principles for the provision of crossborder higher education, based on relevance, ethics and mutual respect, similar to those that exist increasingly in the business world. These principles will aim to be inclusive to allow and encourage all institutions of the diversified higher education sectors to adhere to them.' They will aim at inspiring crossborder responsible and sustainable partnerships between higher education, business and society by developing an international policy framework covering the conduct and practice of higher education institutions (private and public), taking in particular consideration the context of developing countries with regard to higher education/business partnerships. These principles shall primarily aim to inspire and provide guidance, particularly in the UNESCO context, rather than seeking to regulate. They will be based on existing principles, codes, and declarations.

The proposed review of Regional/Intergovernmental Conventions on the recognition of qualifications is designed to ensure that they are updated and responsive to current challenges. It is stated in the Action Plan that 'the aim of the revision of conventions on the recognition of qualifications is to respond to new needs and to represent international standards in the GATS framework.' The specific focus of this revision will be on addressing issues of recognition of crossborder higher education provision, strengthening mechanisms to assure quality and emphasizing reliable, transparent and coherent criteria for the assessment of qualifications. In addition, the feasibility of establishing an international framework will be explored that will cover both the issues of the recognition of qualifications and quality assurance and accreditation.'

More research on the issue of 'public good' is called for, given the complexity of the concept and the importance of having a clear articulation of what is meant by the term in the context of a more globalized environment. It was agreed that further research and data about the impact of crossborder higher education and trade in services on access to higher education are needed to provide empirical evidence as the basis for developing policy frameworks.

## 2. *Capacity building and information activities*

A need for capacity building at the regional and national levels, to promote quality assurance and accreditation mechanisms within a strengthened international framework was recognized. In this regard it was highlighted that national quality assurance frameworks should not discriminate against new providers while at the same time the quality of all educational provisions should be optimal. This initiative will adopt a gradual approach, taking into account activities/projects under way to increase transparency and information.

Secondly, a need to empower higher education stakeholders for better-informed decision-making in the new world of higher education was highlighted. This initiative aims to provide information to protect students from inadequate learning resources, low-quality provisions, degree mills and bogus institutions. This initiative also aims to provide decision-makers at the governmental and institutional level with information and skills necessary to better navigate in the new higher education space.

To be responsive to new developments in higher education provision, the *Study Abroad* publication, a key resource of UNESCO to promote student mobility, needs to address new forms of learning, and new types of learners. The need for effective student input in this publication was stressed. The publication will be revised to include courses offered through open and distance learning. In addition, it will include a guide for potential learners multiple entry points and diversity of learning (e.g. age, culture, geography, need). For the first time, all key information provided in this publication will be provided free of charge on the UNESCO website, including access to the database.

Finally, in view of the need expressed for greater information on new developments, the need for an electronic space to share information on activities of the Global Forum was identified.



# Conclusion

It is clear that new opportunities and new challenges face higher education in its role as actor and reactor to a more globalized society. In response to these developments and trends, international and supranational frameworks are being reviewed or developed by different intergovernmental bodies. It has been acknowledged however, that UNESCO, as the specialized agency of the United Nations with the competence for education, has a critically important role to play. UNESCO has the responsibility to help develop appropriate frameworks for higher education based on the principles of the United Nations and, in partnership with Member States, serve to build capacity and facilitate the implementation of these policy and regulatory frameworks at the national and international level.