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Enhancing quality and combating corruption in higher education:

A global perspective

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Introduction

Ladies and Gentlemen, Colleagues, dear friends,

What a joy to be in Windhoek again! I was here in May 2010 when I was still at UNESCO to attend two QA events, the INQAHE Conference and the GIQAC Steering Committee. I said to myself, "I have to come back!" And here we are!

Sir John and I are delighted to attend this 8th session of the International Conference on Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Africa. It seems but yesterday that we attended one of the early conferences of this consortium, organized in 2007 by the Open University of Tanzania in Dar-Es-Salaam back to back with the UNESCO Global Forum on QA. Since then ICQAHEA has grown significantly under the strong leadership of Peter Okebukola and Juma Shabani and has joined forces with partners to make it a truly Pan-African event. It is so nice to see so many familiar faces again.

It is a special personal pleasure for me to thank you for the great honour that was bestowed on me by this Consortium last year. I was humbled by the award that you gave me. It means more to me than any other and I was so proud to be the first woman to receive it.

The title of our presentation is "*Enhancing quality and combating corruption in higher education: a global perspective*". Sir John and I will cover five topics. I shall present the first three and then hand over to him:

- Adapting QA to new needs
- CHEA/CIQG Quality Platform
- Guides to Quality in Online HE
- 7 International Quality Principles
- Combating corruption in HE

How quality assurance is changing: from inputs to outputs

First then, how is quality assurance adapting to new needs? QA evolved and developed strongly through the 1990s. By the 2000s a general model of quality assurance had emerged with the following elements:

- Regulations and guidelines produced by the QA agency
- A self-evaluation prepared by the institution

- Appointment of a peer group to review the institution or programme, starting by reviewing the self-evaluation
- Site visits by the peer group
- Publication of the report or, in some cases, only the decision.

This basic model is now spreading throughout the world, with some variations, aided by the development of international and regional quality assurance networks, demonstrating convergence or what some call “the spread of the familiar”.

But while QA methods may be converging, the focus of quality assurance is shifting. Not very long ago quality was judged by inputs – grades of incoming students, qualifications of teaching staff, number of books in the library and so on. Today the assessment of quality focuses more on the outputs: students' learning outcomes. What have the students really learned?

Multilateral organisations are supporting this development with international initiatives. One example is the OECD project AHELO (Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes), which aimed to assess what graduates **know and can do** at the global level across cultures, languages and institutions. So far AHELO has not progressed beyond a feasibility study.

A similar project has now emerged in the European Union. It focuses on Measuring and Comparing Achievements of Learning Outcomes in Higher Education in Europe and has the acronym CALOHEE.

A Quality Platform for Innovative Providers: Focus on Learning Outcomes

Students’ Learning Outcomes also provide the most solid basis for assessing the quality of alternative providers of higher education. A new sector of higher education is emerging with offerings from private companies, often online, an example being MOOCs. We call this “post-traditional higher education”

In order to assist such alternative providers and the traditional institutions that might receive requests for credit recognition from their learners, the Council for Higher Education Accreditation/International Quality Group (CHEA/CIQG) developed a Quality Platform in 2013. It is a type of external review of quality tailored to the situations of alternative providers of higher education that are not part of the traditional higher education systems and their quality assurance frameworks (CHEA, 2015).

The primary intent of the Quality Platform is to assure and improve quality as this sector develops and serves more and more students. It is an outcomes-based review using standards established by the Platform, a self-review by the provider and peer (expert) review. If successful, the provider is designated as a “Quality Platform Provider” by CHEA/CIQG for a three-year period.

The Quality Platform is based on four simple standards, summarized as follows:

- Learning outcomes are articulated and achieved.

- Learning outcomes meet postsecondary expectations.
- Curricula provide opportunities for successful transfer of credit.
- Transparency is maintained and comparability is established.

The self-review by the provider uses a template requiring evidence that each of the four standards has been met. This is the basis for an external review and a site-visit by a team of experts.

The acceptance of the report by CHEA/CIQG is the basis for the award of the Quality Platform Provider Certificate.

Colleges and universities could use this Quality Platform designation as an indicator of quality when considering the award of credit or recognition. Quality assurance agencies could refer to the Quality Platform in reviews of these providers that they might conduct.

The Quality Platform was pilot-tested in 2015 with the DeTao Masters Academy in Shanghai, China. DeTao is a private company set up in 2011 with the aim of developing innovative educational programmes, which are not part of the traditional higher education system in China. The programmes are designed and implemented with the guidance of teaching staff, most of whom are from outside China (designated as “Masters” by DeTao) and have distinguished academic or industry backgrounds in a wide variety of disciplines.

DeTao works in partnership with the Shanghai Institute of Visual Arts (SIVA) by providing Advanced Classes to selected groups of students. Since DeTao Advanced Classes do not lead to a degree, but are really enriched majors in SIVA programmes, the traditional QA frameworks in China do not cover them.

After reviewing the report of the external review last year, CHEA awarded the DeTao Masters Academy a Quality Platform provider certificate at a ceremony during its Annual Conference in January 2016 (CHEA, 2016).

Following this experience, the CHEA/CIQG Quality Platform is now being piloted by the US Department of Education (USDE) as part of a new experimental programme, EQUIP (Educational Quality through Innovative Partnerships), designed to counterbalance the “inflexible and unaffordable options” of traditional higher education for those who need it most: working adults and other non-traditional students.

CHEA will also be the evaluator for a partnership between the Dallas County Community College System and the company StraighterLine that provides low-cost courses across several disciplines.

A Guide to Quality in Post-Traditional Online Higher Education

Many alternative providers offer courses online.

In 2013 the company Academic Partnerships published a *Guide to Quality in Online Learning* prepared by Neil Butcher and a South African colleague (Butcher et al., 2013).

The editors then asked Neil Butcher and another colleague to prepare a second *Guide to Quality in Post-Traditional Online Higher Education*, because innovative or 'post-traditional' approaches to higher education continued to multiply and included MOOCs, OER, Open Badges, Experiential Learning, etc. (Butcher et al., 2014).

We shall use the quality assurance of MOOCs and OER as examples.

QA and MOOCs

The quality assurance of MOOCs is a topical question in developing countries. Countries want to know which of these free MOOCs would be of greatest value for to their citizens. However, because MOOCs do not offer credit and do not lead to qualifications, traditional quality assurance frameworks do not include them in their reviews. How do MOOCs – and online learning generally – challenge traditional practices of internal and external quality assurance and accreditation?

There is bad news and good news.

The bad news is that since most MOOCs are short and do not offer credit, most universities have only skimpy academic procedures for approving them. Moreover, since they essentially by-pass internal QA processes, external QA systems have also taken little interest in them – at least so far. The good news, of course, is these 'light-touch' approval processes give institutions a chance to test innovations without having to submit them for approval to conservative academic governance bodies.

A recent publication by UNESCO and COL (2016), *Making Sense of MOOCs: A Guide for Policy-Makers in Developing Countries* addresses the issue of QA and MOOCs. It recommends including them in existing QA frameworks, especially those designed for ODL. Some European tools such as e-Excellence, OpenupEd and MOOQ are put forward as possible models. However, it is clear that this area remains a challenge.

Quality and OER

Assuring the quality of OER is an even greater challenge.

Sir John and I were closely involved in the drafting of the Paris Declaration, which came out of the 2012 UNESCO World Congress on OER. It urged stakeholders to 'promote quality assurance and peer review of OER and encourage the development of mechanisms for the assessment and certification of learning outcomes achieved through OER.'

David Wiley reminds us that an open licence does not necessarily guarantee that an OER will be 'fit for purpose'. The decentralised nature of OER creation creates it own difficulties. Key issues are how to make the development process more transparent and how quality can be maintained over time as OER are modified and re-used.

Various bodies have tried to address the quality assurance of OER. On the webpage of OERAfrica, which is a veteran of the OER movement, you will find a list of resources related to quality assurance.

One key requirement for quality seems to be the development of relationships of trust between the producers and the users of OER. Another solution, used by the UK Open University, is to release “beta content” and revise the OER after feedback. Others argue that creating collaborative communities to improve quality and relevance of OER is an efficient way of assuring quality through peer review.

Aligning OER with common learning standards used in educational systems is another approach being used. These are some organisations that have based OER on standards.

Despite such practices, concerns about quality remain a barrier to using OER. There is an urgent need to rethink quality assurance mechanisms so as to make them more open. This will doubtless be an important topic at UNESCO's 2nd World Congress on OER that will be held in Slovenia next year.

Sharing a common understanding of quality: The CHEA Seven Quality Principles

CHEA, the US Council for Higher Education Accreditation, has an International Quality Group, CIQG. Peter Okebukola chairs the CIQG Advisory Council.

In an attempt to reach a common understanding of quality across the world CHEA/CIQG has articulated seven fundamental international quality principles that underpin all forms of higher education, whatever the curricula or delivery modes. They are available on the CHEA/CIQG website (<http://www.cheainternational.org/members/index.asp>) in English, Arabic, Chinese, French and Spanish.

A series of essays on each of the principles, written by experts from around the world, explores each principle in more detail.

The seven principles are:

1. ***Quality and higher education providers:*** Assuring and achieving quality in higher education is the primary responsibility of higher education providers and their staff.
2. ***Quality and students:*** The education provided to students must always be of high quality whatever the learning outcomes pursued.
3. ***Quality and society:*** The quality of higher education provision is judged by how well it meets the needs of society, engenders public confidence and sustains public trust.
4. ***Quality and government:*** Governments have a role in encouraging and supporting quality higher education.
5. ***Quality and accountability:*** It is the responsibility of higher education providers and quality assurance and accreditation bodies to sustain a strong commitment to accountability and provide regular evidence of quality.

6. ***Quality and the role of quality assurance and accreditation bodies:*** Quality assurance and accreditation bodies, working with higher education providers and their leadership, staff and students, are responsible for the implementation of processes, tools, benchmarks and measures of learning outcomes that help to create a shared understanding of quality.
7. ***Quality and change:*** Quality higher education needs to be flexible, creative and innovative; developing and evolving to meet students' needs, to justify the needs of society and to maintain diversity.

Quality and Corruption in Higher Education

We conclude with some remarks on the issue of corruption in higher education, to which quality assurance processes should pay greater attention.

CHEA and the International Institute for Educational Planning at UNESCO are committed to ensuring the integrity of higher education because it is the foundation for quality assurance. However, the increasing frequency of press articles about corruption in higher education all over the world led these two bodies to convene an expert meeting on corruption in Washington in March this year. Stamenka and I were closely involved and Peter Okebukola represented Africa on the group.

We published a report that is readily available and we commend it to you. The report includes examples of good and bad practices and a matrix listing actions that the various higher education stakeholders can take to ensure that good practice prevails. In essence the key to avoiding corruption is to verify regularly that all steps in the processes of teaching, learning, assessment and certification are conducted with integrity. This boils down to a question of institutional will at all levels.

Governments should take pride in the integrity of their higher education systems by ensuring due process and transparency in appointments to regulatory bodies. Institutions must make ethical practices a central focus of their internal quality assurance processes. Protection for 'whistle blowers' (the people who find and publicise corrupt practices) is particularly important and administrators must avoid the temptation to sweep rumours of unethical practices under the carpet.

Conclusion

To conclude, we began by emphasising the importance of ensuring that the evolution of quality assurance keeps pace with the expansion and diversification of higher education providers. We then explored four examples of how quality assurance is being adapted to new circumstances. We have both been closely involved in these four initiatives and we hope that you have found our descriptions and reflections interesting.

