Annex 1
Guidelines[1] for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education (OECD, 2005)

I. Introduction

Purpose of the Guidelines

The Guidelines aim to support and encourage international cooperation and enhance the understanding of the importance of quality provision in cross-border higher education.[2] The purposes of the Guidelines are to protect students and other stakeholders from low-quality provision and disreputable providers[3] as well as to encourage the development of quality cross-border higher education that meets human, social, economic and cultural needs.

Rationale for the Guidelines

Since the 1980s, cross-border higher education through the mobility of students, academic staff, programmes/institutions and professionals has grown considerably. In parallel, new delivery modes and cross-border

[1] These Guidelines are not legally binding and member countries are expected to implement the Guidelines as appropriate in their national context.

[2] In these Guidelines, cross-border higher education includes higher education that takes place in situations where the teacher, student, programme, institution/provider or course materials cross national jurisdictional borders. Cross-border higher education may include higher education by public/private and not-for-profit/for-profit providers. It encompasses a wide range of modalities, in a continuum from face-to-face (taking various forms such as students travelling abroad and campuses abroad) to distance learning (using a range of technologies and including e-learning).

[3] In this context "'disreputable providers"' refer to degree and accreditation mills.

providers have appeared, such as campuses abroad, electronic delivery of higher education and for-profit providers. These new forms of cross-border higher education offer increased opportunities for improving the skills and competencies of individual students and the quality of national higher education systems, provided they aim at benefiting the human, social, economic and cultural development of the receiving country.

While in some countries the national frameworks for quality assurance, accreditation and the recognition of qualifications take into account cross-border higher education, in many countries they are still not geared to addressing the challenges of cross-border provision. Furthermore, the lack of comprehensive frameworks for co-ordinating various initiatives at the international level, together with the diversity and unevenness of the quality assurance and accreditation systems at the national level, create gaps in the quality assurance of cross-border higher education, leaving some cross-border higher education provision outside any framework of quality assurance and accreditation. This makes students and other stakeholders more vulnerable to low-quality provision and disreputable providers[4] of cross-border higher education. The challenge faced by current quality assurance and accreditation systems is to develop appropriate procedures and systems to cover foreign providers and programmes (in addition to national providers and programmes) in order to maximise the benefits and limit the potential drawbacks of the internationalisation of higher education. At the same time, the increase in cross-border student, academic staff, researcher and professional mobility has put the issue of the recognition of academic and professional qualifications high on the international cooperation agenda.

There is therefore a need for additional national initiatives, strengthened international co-operation and networking, and more transparent information on procedures and systems of quality assurance, accreditation and recognition of qualifications. These efforts should have a global range and should emphasise supporting the needs of developing countries to establish robust higher education systems. Given that some countries lack comprehensive frameworks for quality assurance, accreditation and the recognition of qualifications, capacity building should form an important part of the overall strengthening and co-ordination of national and international initiatives. In this light, UNESCO Secretariat and the OECD have worked closely together in the development of these Guidelines for quality provision in cross-border higher education ("*Guidelines*"). The implementation of these Guidelines could serve as a first step in the capacity building process.

[4] See footnote 3.

The quality of a country's higher education sector and its assessment and monitoring is not only key to its social and economic well-being, it is also a determining factor affecting the status of that higher education system at the international level. The establishment of quality assurance systems has become a necessity, not only for monitoring quality in higher education delivered within the country, but also for engaging in delivery of higher education internationally. As a consequence, there has been an impressive rise in the number of quality assurance and accreditation bodies for higher education in the past two decades. However, existing national quality assurance capacity often focuses exclusively on domestic delivery by domestic institutions.

The increased cross-border mobility of students, academic staff, professionals, programmes and providers presents challenges for existing national quality assurance and accreditation frameworks and bodies as well as for the systems for recognising foreign qualifications. Some of these challenges are described below:

- National capacity for quality assurance and accreditation often does not cover cross-border higher education. This increases the risk of students falling victim to misleading guidance and information and disreputable providers, dubious quality assurance and accreditation bodies and low-quality provision, leading to qualifications of limited validity.

- National systems and bodies for the recognition of qualifications may have limited knowledge and experience in dealing with cross-border higher education. In some cases, the challenge becomes more complicated as cross-border higher education providers may deliver qualifications that are not of comparable quality to those which they offer in their home country.

- The increasing need to obtain national recognition of foreign qualifications has posed challenges to national recognition bodies. This in turn, at times, leads to administrative and legal problems for the individuals concerned.

- The professions depend on trustworthy, high-quality qualifications. It is essential that users of professional services including employers have full confidence in the skills of qualified professionals. The increasing possibility of obtaining low-quality qualifications could harm the professions themselves, and might in the long run undermine confidence in professional qualifications.

Scope of the Guidelines

The Guidelines aim to provide an international framework for quality provision in cross-border higher education that responds to the above-mentioned challenges.

The Guidelines are based on the principle of mutual trust and respect among countries and on the recognition of the importance of international collaboration in higher education. They also recognise the importance of national authority and the diversity of higher education systems. Countries attach a high importance to national sovereignty over higher education. Higher education is a vital means for expressing a country's linguistic and cultural diversity and also for nurturing its economic development and social cohesion. It is therefore recognised that policy-making in higher education reflects national priorities. At the same time, it is recognised that in some countries, there are several competent authorities in higher education.

The effectiveness of the Guidelines largely depends on the possibility of strengthening the capacity of national systems to assure the quality of higher education. The development and implementation of the UNESCO regional conventions and further support to the ongoing capacity building initiatives of UNESCO, other multilateral organisations and bilateral donors in this area will sustain and be complementary to the Guidelines. These initiatives should be supported by strong regional and national partners.

The Guidelines acknowledge the important role of non-governmental organisations such as higher education associations, student bodies, academic staff associations, networks of quality assurance and accreditation bodies, recognition and credential evaluation bodies and professional bodies in strengthening international co-operation for quality provision in cross-border higher education. The Guidelines aim to encourage the strengthening and co-ordination of existing initiatives by enhancing dialogue and collaboration among various bodies.

Cross-border higher education encompasses a wide range of modalities that range from face-to-face (taking various forms such as students travelling abroad and campuses abroad) to distance learning (using a range of technologies and including e-learning). In implementing the Guidelines, consideration should be given to the variety of provision and its different demands for quality assurance.

II. Guidelines for Higher Education Stakeholders

With due regard to the specific division of responsibilities in each country, the Guidelines recommend actions to six stakeholders:[5] governments; higher education institutions/providers including academic staff; student bodies; quality assurance and accreditation bodies; academic recognition bodies;[6] and professional bodies.

Guidelines for governments

Governments can be influential, if not responsible, in promoting adequate quality assurance, accreditation and the recognition of qualifications. They undertake the role of policy coordination in most higher education systems. However, it is acknowledged throughout these Guidelines that in some countries, the authority for overseeing quality assurance lies with sub-national government bodies or with non-governmental organisations.

In this context, it is recommended that governments:

- Establish, or encourage the establishment of a comprehensive, fair and transparent system of registration or licensing for cross-border higher education providers wishing to operate in their territory.
- Establish, or encourage the establishment of a comprehensive capacity for reliable quality assurance and accreditation of cross-border higher education provision, recognising that quality assurance and accreditation of cross-border higher education provision involves both sending and receiving countries.
- Consult and coordinate amongst the various competent bodies for quality assurance and accreditation both nationally and internationally.
- Provide accurate, reliable and easily accessible information on the criteria and standards for registration, licensure, quality assurance and accreditation of cross-border higher education, their consequences on the funding of students, institutions or

[5] In the Guidelines, the distinctions among these stakeholders are made based on the functions and it is recognised that the different functions do not necessarily belong to separate bodies.

[6] Academic recognition bodies include qualification recognition bodies, credential evaluation bodies, and advisory/information centres.

programmes, where applicable and their voluntary or mandatory nature.

- Consider becoming party to and contribute to the development and/or updating of the appropriate UNESCO regional conventions on recognition of qualifications and establish national information centres as stipulated by the conventions.
- Where appropriate develop or encourage bilateral or multilateral recognition agreements, facilitating the recognition or equivalence of each country's qualifications based on the procedures and criteria included in mutual agreements.
- Contribute to efforts to improve the accessibility at the international level of up-to-date, accurate and comprehensive information on recognised higher education institutions/providers.

Guidelines for higher education institutions/providers

Commitment to quality by all higher education institutions/providers is essential.[7] To this end, the active and constructive contributions of academic staff are indispensable. Higher education institutions are responsible for the quality as well as the social, cultural and linguistic relevance of education and the standards of qualifications provided in their name, no matter where or how it is delivered.

In this context, it is recommended that higher education institutions/providers delivering cross-border higher education:

- Ensure that the programmes they deliver across borders and in their home country are of comparable quality and that they also take into account the cultural and linguistic sensitivities of the receiving country. It is desirable that a commitment to this effect should be made public.
- Recognise that quality teaching and research is made possible by the quality of faculty and the quality of their working conditions that foster independent and critical inquiry. The UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher Education

[7] An important and relevant initiative for this is the statement "Sharing Quality Higher Education across Borders" by the International Association of Universities, the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, the American Council on Education and the Council on Higher Education Accreditation on behalf of higher education institutions worldwide.

Teaching Personnel[8] and other relevant instruments need to be taken into account by all institutions and providers to support good working conditions and terms of service, collegial governance and academic freedom.

- Develop, maintain or review current internal quality management systems so that they make full use of the competencies of stakeholders such as academic staff, administrators, students and graduates and take full responsibility for delivering higher education qualifications comparable in standard in their home country and across borders. Furthermore, when promoting their programmes to potential students through agents, they should take full responsibility to ensure that the information and guidance provided by their agents are accurate, reliable and easily accessible.

- Consult competent quality assurance and accreditation bodies and respect the quality assurance and accreditation systems of the receiving country when delivering higher education across borders, including distance education.

- Share good practices by participating in sector organisations and inter-institutional networks at national and international levels.

- Develop and maintain networks and partnerships to facilitate the process of recognition by acknowledging each other's qualifications as equivalent or comparable.

- Where relevant, use codes of good practice such as the UNESCO/Council of Europe *Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education*[9] and other relevant codes such as the Council of Europe/UNESCO *Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications*.[10]

- Provide accurate, reliable and easily accessible information on the criteria and procedures of external and internal quality assurance and the academic and professional recognition of qualifications they deliver

[8] Available at: *http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=13144&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html*

[9] Available at: *http://www.coe.int/T/DG4/HigherEducation/Recognition/Code%20of%20good%20practice_EN.asp#TopOfPage*

[10] Available at: *http://www.coe.int/T/DG4/HigherEducation/Recognition/Criteria%20and%20procedures_EN.asp#TopOfPage*

and provide complete descriptions of programmes and qualifications, preferably with descriptions of the knowledge, understanding and skills that a successful student should acquire. Higher education institutions/providers should collaborate especially with quality assurance and accreditation bodies and with student bodies to facilitate the dissemination of this information.

- Ensure the transparency of the financial status of the institution and/or educational programme offered.

Guidelines for student bodies

As representatives of the direct recipients of cross-border higher education and as part of the higher education community, student bodies bear the responsibility of helping students and potential students to carefully scrutinise the information available and giving sufficient consideration in their decision making process.

In this context, it is recommended that the emergence of autonomous local, national and international student bodies be encouraged and that the student bodies:

- Be involved as active partners at international, national and institutional levels in the development, monitoring and maintenance of the quality provision of cross-border higher education and take the necessary steps to achieve this objective.

- Take active part in promoting quality provision, by increasing the awareness of the students of the potential risks such as misleading guidance and information, low-quality provision leading to qualifications of limited validity, and disreputable providers. They should also guide them to accurate and reliable information sources on cross-border higher education. This could be done by increasing the awareness of the existence of these guidelines as well as taking an active part in their implementation.

- Encourage students and potential students to ask appropriate questions when enrolling in cross-border higher education programmes. A list of relevant questions could be established by student bodies, including foreign students where possible, in collaboration with bodies such as higher education institutions, quality assurance and accreditation bodies and academic recognition bodies. Such a list should include the following questions: whether the foreign institution/provider is recognised or accredited by a trustworthy body and whether the qualifications delivered by the

foreign institution/provider are recognised in the students' home country for academic and/or professional purposes.

Guidelines for quality assurance and accreditation bodies

In addition to internal quality management of institutions/providers, external quality assurance and accreditation systems have been adopted in more than 60 countries. Quality assurance and accreditation bodies are responsible for assessing the quality of higher education provision. The existing systems of quality assurance and accreditation often vary from country to country and sometimes within the countries themselves. Some have governmental bodies for quality assurance and accreditation, and others have non-governmental bodies. Furthermore, some differences exist in the terminologies used, the definition of "quality", the purpose and function of the system including its link to the funding of students, institutions or programmes, the methodologies used in quality assurance and accreditation, the scope and function of the responsible body or unit, and the voluntary or compulsory nature of participation. While respecting this diversity, a co-ordinated effort among the bodies of both sending and receiving countries is needed at both the regional and global level, in order to tackle the challenges raised by the growth of cross-border provision of higher education, especially in its new forms.[11]

In this context, it is recommended that quality assurance and accreditation bodies:

- Ensure that their quality assurance and accreditation arrangements include cross-border education provision in its various modes. This can mean giving attention to assessment guidelines, ensuring that standards and processes are transparent, consistent and appropriate to take account of the shape and scope of the national higher education system, and adaptability to changes and developments in cross-border provision.

- Sustain and strengthen the existing regional and international networks or establish regional networks in regions that do not already have one. These networks can serve as platforms to exchange information and good practice, disseminate knowledge, increase the understanding of international developments and challenges as well as to improve the professional expertise of their staff and quality assessors. These networks could also be used to improve awareness of disreputable providers and dubious quality assurance and accreditation bodies, and

[11] See footnote 2.

to develop monitoring and reporting systems that can lead to their identification.

- Establish links to strengthen the collaboration between the bodies of the sending country and the receiving country and enhance the mutual understanding of different systems of quality assurance and accreditation. This may facilitate the process of assuring the quality of programmes delivered across borders and institutions operating across borders while respecting the quality assurance and accreditation systems of the receiving countries.

- Provide accurate and easily accessible information on the assessment standards, procedures, and effects of the quality assurance mechanisms on the funding of students, institutions or programmes where applicable as well as the results of the assessment. Quality assurance and accreditation bodies should collaborate with other actors, especially higher education institutions/providers, academic staff, student bodies and academic recognition bodies to facilitate the dissemination of such information.

- Apply the principles reflected in current international documents on cross-border higher education such as the UNESCO/Council of Europe *Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education*.[12]

- Reach mutual recognition agreements with other bodies on the basis of trust in and understanding of each other's professional practice, develop systems of internal quality assurance and regularly undergo external evaluations, making full use of the competencies of stakeholders. Where feasible, consider undertaking experiments in international evaluation or peer reviews.

- Consider adoption of procedures for the international composition of peer review panels, international benchmarking of standards, criteria and assessment procedures and undertake joint assessment projects to increase the comparability of evaluation activities of different quality assurance and accreditation bodies.

Guidelines for academic recognition bodies

The UNESCO regional conventions on the recognition of qualifications are important instruments facilitating the fair recognition of higher education qualifications, including the assessment of foreign qualifications

[12] Available at: *http://www.coe.int/T/DG4/HigherEducation/Recognition/Code%20of%20good%20practice_EN.asp#TopOfPage*

resulting from cross-border mobility of students, skilled professionals and cross-border provision of higher education.

There is a need to build on existing initiatives with additional international action to facilitate fair processes of recognition of academic qualifications by making systems more transparent and comparable.

In this context, it is recommended that academic recognition bodies:

- Establish and maintain regional and international networks that can serve as platforms to exchange information and good practice, disseminate knowledge, increase the understanding of international developments and challenges and improve the professional expertise of their staff.
- Strengthen their cooperation with quality assurance and accreditation bodies to facilitate the process of determining whether a qualification meets basic quality standards, as well as to engage in cross-border cooperation and networking with quality assurance and accreditation bodies. This cooperation should be pursued both at regional and cross-regional level.
- Establish and maintain contacts with all stakeholders to share the information and improve the links between academic and professional qualification assessment methodologies.
- Where appropriate, address the professional recognition of qualifications in the labour market and provide necessary information on professional recognition, both to those who have a foreign qualification and to employers. Given the increasing scope of the international labour markets and growing professional mobility, collaboration and co-ordination with professional associations are recommended for this purpose.
- Use codes of practice such as the Council of Europe/UNESCO *Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications*[13] and other relevant codes of practice to increase the public's confidence in their recognition procedures, and to reassure stakeholders that the processing of requests is conducted in a fair and consistent manner.
- Provide clear, accurate and accessible information on the criteria for the assessment of qualifications, including qualifications resulting from cross-border provision.

[13] Available at: *http://www.coe.int/T/DG4/HigherEducation/Recognition/Criteria%20and%20procedures_EN.asp#TopOfPage*

Guidelines for professional bodies[14]

Systems of professional recognition differ from country to country and from profession to profession. For example, in some cases, a recognised academic qualification could be sufficient for entry into professional practice, whereas in other cases, additional requirements are imposed on holders of academic qualifications in order to enter the profession. Given the increasing scope of international labour markets and growing professional mobility, the holders of academic qualifications, as well as employers and professional associations are facing many challenges. Increasing transparency – *i.e.*, improving the availability and the quality of the information – is critical for fair recognition processes.

In this context, it is recommended that professional bodies responsible for professional recognition:

- Develop information channels that are accessible both to national and foreign holders of qualifications to assist them in gaining professional recognition of their qualifications, and to employers who need advice on the professional recognition of foreign qualifications. Information should also be easily accessible to current and potential students.
- Establish and maintain contacts between the professional bodies of both sending and receiving countries, higher education institutions/providers, quality assurance and accreditation bodies, as well as academic recognition bodies to improve qualification assessment methodologies.
- Establish, develop and implement assessment criteria and procedures for comparing programmes and qualifications to facilitate the recognition of qualifications and to accommodate learning outcomes and competencies that are culturally appropriate in addition to input and process requirements.
- Improve the accessibility at the international level of up-to-date, accurate and comprehensive information on mutual recognition agreements for the professions and encourage the development of new agreements.

[14] This section refers to institutions with legal competence in the field of regulated professions and professional recognition. In some countries, these institutions are professional bodies; in other countries, this role is being performed by other competent authorities, such as governmental ministries.

List of Acronyms

AAU	Association of African Universities
ABET	American Board for Engineering Training
AIR	Association for Institutional Research
AMBA	International Association of MBAs
APQN	Asia Pacific Quality Network
CAMES	Conseil Africain et Malgache pour l'Enseignement Supérieur
CCA	Consejo Centroamericano de Acreditación
CSUCA	Consejo Superior Universitario Centroamericano
DAC	Development Aid Committee of the OECD
DGF	Development Grant Facility (World Bank)
EAIR	European Association for Institutional Research
EEA	European Economic Area
EFMD	European Foundation for Management Development
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQUIS	European Quality Improvement System
FEANI	Fédération Européenne d'Associations Nationales d'Ingénieurs
FIMPES	Federación Mexicana de Instituciones Particulares de Educación Superior
GATS	General Agreements on Trade in Services
GIQAC	Global Initiative for Quality Assurance Capacity
GTZ	German Agency for Technical Cooperation
IAAB	International Accreditation Advisory Board

INQAAHE	International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
IOM	International Organisation for Migrations
MFN	Most-favoured-nation
MoU	Memoranda of Understanding
MRA	Mutual Recognition Agreements
OBHE	Observatory on Borderless Higher Education
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PIFI	Institutional Enhancement Integral Programme
RIACES	Latin America Quality Network for Higher Education
SAAIR	Southeast Asian Association for Institutional Research
SAAIR	Southern African Association for Institutional Research
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SANSA	South African Network of Skills Abroad
TQM	Total Quality Management
TRIPS	Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
WEI	World Education Indicators of the OECD/UNESCO
WTO	World Trade Organisation

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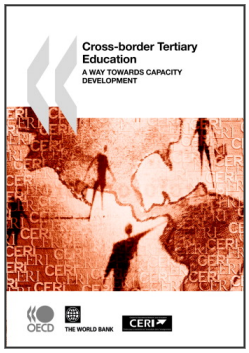

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