THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION AND PROCESSES OF ACCREDITATION FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE AT UNESCO LEVEL

A short overview

Source: Higher Education in the World 2007
Accreditation for Quality Assurance: What is at stake?
GUNI series on the social commitment of universities
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UNESCO ACTIVITIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

- 1998 First UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education (WCHE)
  - World Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty First Century: Vision and Action
  - "Developing quality in higher education and mechanisms for its assurance is crucial for the future of education in the 21st century"
  - *"Quality in higher education is a multidimensional concept, which should embrace all its functions, and activities: teaching and academic programmes, research and scholarship, staffing, students, buildings, facilities, equipment, services to the community and the academic environment, internal self/evaluation and external review, conducted openly by independent specialists, if possible with international expertise, are vital for enhancing quality" (Art. 11)*

- 2003   Follow-up conference on Higher Education in the   World in Paris: UNESCO Report on Higher Education in Asia and Pacific (1998-2003), UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, Paris

- 2004 First International Barcelona Conference on higher Education: The social commitment of Universities, organized by GUNI (Global Universities Network for Innovation, a network created by UNESCO and the University Politecnica de Catalunya in Barcelona)

- 2005 Second UNESCO Word Conference on Higher Education (WCHE+5)
  - Higher Education in the World 2007 – Accreditation for Quality Assurance: What is at stake?
  - (Higher Education in the World 2007 Report)

GLOBAL TRENDS IN HIGHER EDUCATION ACCODING TO UNESCO

- Explosion in the number of higher education students (enrolment increased from 72 millions in 1999 to 133 million in 2004: excluding US and EU enrolment in the world more than doubled in five years from 41.1 million to 99.1 million): increase of 8-11% average annual growth of enrolments in several Asian countries)

- Diversification and increased social demand for higher education

- National states have no longer the capacities to finance this high education explosion (alone)

- New and different kinds of providers for higher education emerge both from public and private sector – diversification of higher education markets

- Enormous increase in degree mills, academic fraud and corruption in higher education

- Increase in demand and supply for cross-border higher education schemes

- Urgent needs for proper governance concerning quality assurance in terms of quality audit, quality assessment and accreditation

UNESCO CRITERIA FOR ACCREDITATION OF HEIS

- Note: According to GATS (General Agreement on Trade in Services) the general accreditation requirements should be similar to both public and private providers of higher education (HEIs)

- International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), Secretariat in Ireland is collecting and disseminating information on current and developing theory and practize of accreditation for quality assurance in higher education on international level

- General and specific accreditation criteria of INQAAHE (11ff):

- 1) Mission statement of the HEI

- 2) Governance and administration

- 3) Human resources

- 4) educational programmes

- 5) academic standards

- 6) quality of learning opportunities

- 7) quality management and enhancement

- 8) research and other scholastic opportunities

- 9) community involvement

- 10) consolidated development plans of a HEI

- -"SWOT analysis" of HEI is process of self-assessment (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats)

DIFFERENT LEVELS OF ACCREDITATION PROCESSES

- Accreditation at sub-national level (7ff)
- Accreditation at national level
- Accreditation at the regional level
- Accreditation at the international level

(two major standardization instruments developed by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) in Geneva: ISO 9000 and ISO 14000)

Different forms of accreditation agencies:

a) Accreditation agencies as government agencies (ministry unit)
b) Accreditation agencies largely independent from government, but to serve governmental functions
c) Accreditation agencies with national relevance but no government ties
d) Professional Accreditation agencies as voluntary private organizations

ACCREDITATION OF HEIS IN THE ASIAN-PACIFIC REGION

- There are some 25 major national quality assurance organizations at work in this region (see overview 224ff)
- Examples:

  - Singapore Higher Education Accreditation Council (SHEAC)

  - Indonesia: National Accreditation Board for Higher Education (BAN-PT)

  - India: National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC)

  - Malaysia: Malaysian Qualifications Authority (MQA)

  - Thailand: Office of the National Education Standards and Quality Assessment (ONESQA)

  - Cambodia: Accreditation Committee of Cambodia (ACC)

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN CROSS-BORDER HIGHER EDUCATION

- International student's mobility and percentage of cross-border higher education (outbound mobility ratio) is increasing steadily (see map p. 128f)

- The International Association of Universities (IAU) which is under UNESCO, had been instrumental to develop a declaration of principles and recommendations for the growing phenomenon o cross-border education which is a response to the market driven growth of HEIs which operate cross-border and the diversification of higher education providers.

- The document "Sharing Quality Higher Education Across Borders: "A Statement on Behalf of Higher Education Institutions Worldwide" is available on the unesco website under iau, it also offers a check-list for Good Practice in cross border education:

- http://www.unesco.org/iau/p_statements/index.html

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN CROSS-BORDER HIGHER EDUCATION

- 1) Cross-border higher education should strive to contribute to the broader economic, social and cultural wellbeing of communities

- 2) Cross-border higher education can flow in many different directions and take place in a variety of contexts. However it should strengthen developing countries higher education capacity in order to promote global equity

- 3) In additional to providing disciplinary and professional expertise, Cross-border higher education should strive to instil in learners the critical thinking that underpins responsible citizenship at the local, national and global levels

- 4) Cross-border higher education should not only be accessible to students who can afford to pay, but also to qualified students with financial needs

- 5) Cross-border higher education should met the same high standards of academic and organizational quality no matter where it is delivered

- 6) Cross-border higher education should be accountable to the public, students and governments

- 7) Cross-border higher education should expand the opportunities for international mobility of faculty, researchers and students

- 8) Higher education institutions and other providers of Cross-border higher education should provide clear and full information to students and external stakeholders about the education they provide (130ff)

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN CROSS-BORDER HIGHER EDUCATION

- Other guidelines (141f):

1) UNESCO/OECD Guidelines on Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education

   http://www.unesco.org/education/hed/guidelines

   http://www.unescobkk.org/index.php?id=1492

   - "these guidelines aim to protect students and other stakeholders from low-quality higher education programmes, accreditation and degree mills, and other disputable providers. These Guidelines are not legally binding but countries are encouraged to use them in the manner which is most appropriate in their national contexts"

2) Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN) and UNESCO:

   Toolkit on Regulating Quality Assurance in Cross-Border Education (UNESCO Bangkok 2006)

   APQN is located in Melbourne with the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) and brings together the National Assessment and Accreditation Council of India (NAAC) and the Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation (HKCAA)

   http://www.unescobkk.org/fileadmin/user_upload/apeid/Documents/

   Example Malaysia:

   Guidelines of the Malaysian Qualifications Authority

   http://apps.emoe.gov.my/qad/main.html

3) See also the UMAP Credit Transfer System (UCTS) which was developed for the Asia-Pacific region aiming at ensuring credit transfer for studies on exchange programmes to facilitate greater mobility between the UMAP countries (University Mobility in the Asian Pacific region), (p. 232f)

RCOGNITION OF ACADEMIC DEGREES AND CERTIFICATES

- See: UNESCO (2003): Handbook on Diplomas, Degrees and Other Certificates in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific, 2nd edition, UNESCO Bangkok

- See: International Association of Universities (IAU) see major article in 165ff (Higher Education in the World-Report 2007)
  http://www.unesco.org/iau/onlinedatabases/list

  (OECD called for "an international database listing all degree-granting higher education institutions that are recognoized, egistered, authorized, licensed, accredited and so on"

- Also See: International Colleges and Universities Directory
- http://www.4icu.org/link-to-us

QUESTIONS AT THE END

- 1) What can theological education institutions in South Asia learn or benefit from the international debate on quality assurance and accreditation standards in the secular field and disciplines within UNESCO systems?

- 2) Is more interaction possible between regional associations for HEIs on TE and the UNESCO debates on the future of HEIs in general?

- 3) What is preventing institutions of TE from seeking and getting (regional, international, state-endorsed?) recognition for their degrees?

- 4) Can the WCC/churches participate more proactively in the international debate on the future of higher education worldwide?

- 5) Can a revised shape of SEAGST program become a contribution to proper and recognized model of cross-border higher education in this region?