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International Trends

Global Trends in Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Dr. Marjorie Peace Lenn

The decade of the 1990s has begun and will likely conclude with "quality" as a major theme. The assessment and enhancement of quality, and attempts to define and measure quality, are major issues for higher education in many countries.

Why such a concern for quality? Globally, there is a growing demand for better higher education with fewer resources. Because a primary source of institutional support is derived from taxation, society is calling for greater accountability in the use of public funds to preserve the cultural heritage through higher education, to assure that professional competence is achieved and to serve the general welfare of society, including matters of national labor needs.

Definitions:

For purposes of this brief global tour of practice, quality assurance in higher education is defined as a process by which an institution is evaluated at least in part by an external body for a level of quality in its educational offering.

In most countries, this process is carried out by the government. Two or three countries worldwide have non-governmental processes, and several countries have none.

Common elements of quality assurance processes would include: educational standards, a self-critical process by the institution, an external assessment and a final decision which

typically is made public. Even with these common elements, it is generally agreed that quality can finally only be assured by the institution itself.

Trends and Practices:

At the same time as the United States faces the prospect of fewer gaining access to its institutions of higher education, other countries are moving toward or have entered a period of mass education.

While the American process of non-governmental quality assurance, accreditation, stands against formidable state and federal governmental challenges to its self-regulatory posture, many other countries are creating quality assurance processes independent of government.

Hong Kong and France now count themselves among those with independent processes, the former having shed its formal evaluative ties with the United Kingdom in 1990 and the latter having created its first national process in 1985.

In preparation for its takeover by the People's Republic of China in 1997, Hong Kong is rapidly expanding its publicly funded tertiary education system. In response to both growth and governmental transition, the quality assurance process in Hong Kong currently focuses on

the validation and revalidation of individual degree courses with periodic institutional reviews. Unique to the Hong Kong process is the use of an international pool of educational specialists and the appointment of an international council with final accreditation decision-making.

France has a government-appointed autonomous body with responsibility for quality assurance in higher education. Emphasizing qualitative peer judgment based on quantitative indicators, the French process does not have formal sanction over institutions; however, the government is likely to take its findings into account for funding purposes.

With the dissolution of their binary systems, the United Kingdom and Australia are both moving rapidly toward alternative processes to centralized governmental evaluation. In each country, the university sector has developed its own approach to quality assurance, involving external scrutiny but controlled by the institutions themselves.

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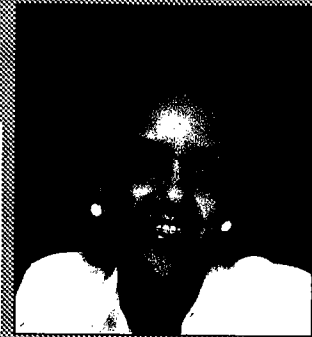
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Publisher's Corner**Implications of
Changes in
Commonwealth
Caribbean Education**

In their timely and authoritative article, Carmen Redhead and Irene Walter bring us up to date on major changes which have taken place in education in the Commonwealth Caribbean in the 1980s. The changes also raise fundamental questions about the evaluation of foreign educational credentials in the United States.

One of the major developments in the Caribbean has been the creation of American-inspired community colleges entrusted with multiple tasks, including offering post-secondary programs and bridging the gap between secondary school and the University of the West Indies, which remains largely attached to its British roots.

These community colleges are attempting to provide simultaneously a course of study leading to the British GCE A-level examination—the standard mode of entry into UWI degree courses—and US-patterned associate degree programs. What is the true nature of the programs offered at Caribbean community colleges and how will they be evaluated in the United States? By grafting the American community college onto what remains an educational system largely patterned on the British, the Caribbean authorities have blurred the comfortable distinction between secondary and higher education. What should have been an easy articulation with US programs is complicated by the continued existence of the GCE A-levels, whose assessment must remain consistent whether earned in Britain, Asia or the Caribbean.

If evaluators in the US stress the purpose of the Caribbean community college program, and that purpose is seen as granting access to UWI degree courses, then it will be regarded as the traditional lower and upper form VI leading to the A-level examinations, essentially secondary level. If, on the other hand, the evaluation places more weight on the associate degree, it will be seen as post-secondary and yield up to two years of credit when transferring into degree programs in the US.

Decisions on credential evaluation and education equivalencies have broad implications which cut across educational systems. A coherent and systematic evaluation method is essential to ensure academically sound decisions which will place students at the appropriate level at US institutions.

▲ *Mariam Assefa*

ERASMUS DIRECTOR RESPONDS

Dear Editor:

It is gratifying to see the effort undertaken by WENR to acquaint its readers with ERASMUS. Mr. Usnik's article ("Understanding ERASMUS," WENR, Winter 1991) provides a useful overview in this regard. Nonetheless, it also contains a number of misconceptions and errors of which your readers should be made aware. The most fundamental of these is the wholly misleading belief that the objective of ERASMUS is the "harmonization" of European higher education. Quite the contrary. For while we seek to achieve greater *cooperation*, increasing *understanding* and improved *recognition* of study carried out elsewhere, these goals are dictated precisely by the *diversity* of systems across Europe--a diversity which we regard as an asset.

Secondly, while it is true that most cooperation within ERASMUS is department- or discipline-based, it should be recognized that a substantial degree of "institutionalisation" is now emerging, as the numbers of programmes and students grow (we have upwards of 40,000 students in the ERASMUS system this year). One of the results of this process is the establishment on a far wider scale than hitherto of offices for the management of international links. Such offices, together with the general increase of experience of and interest in international exchanges resulting from ERASMUS, are also having a clearly beneficial effect on exchanges beyond ERASMUS (or Europe in general).

Thirdly, not all academic recognition of study performance abroad within ERASMUS is based on formal credit transfer. This is just one model, in a collection which also includes jointly awarded "double degrees," en bloc recognition of study years abroad and so on.

Fourthly, a sin of omission: the article fails to mention the existence of support within Action 3 of ERASMUS for the EC-wide network (from 1992 extended to the 7 EFTA countries) of "National Academic Recognition Information Centres" (NARIC). The NARICs are in many ways the "natural partners" for WES, being the national bodies responsible for providing advice, recommendations and in some cases decisions on the evaluation of foreign education creden-

tials. Information on the NARIC network is enclosed.

More minor points with which I would take issue include the following:

- the minimum period of study abroad within ERASMUS is 3 months, not 6;
- the student grants are normally channelled from NGAs via the universities;
- free-mover grants are not available in all Member States;
- study visit grants for academics and administrators are part of Action 1, not Action 3 (except for NARIC visits);
- extension of ERASMUS to other countries is certainly not dictated by a "wait-and-see approach," but is far more formalised. It applies only to the EFTA countries (from 1992/93).

The discussions between EC and US government authorities relate to the possible creation of a separate programme for cooperation, not an extension of ERASMUS.

Finally, I am rather taken aback by the assertion that ERASMUS participants "tend to be from financially comfortable families, white, and Judeo-Christian." Surveying on ERASMUS does not contain questions on students' skin colour or religious affiliation, and Mr. Usnik's views are therefore purely his personal opinions and not based on any survey data of which I am aware. We are required by the terms of the ERASMUS Council Decision to provide for equality of opportunity, but it is probably true that we face many of the same problems in this regard as US institutions' study abroad programmes, to judge from the recommendations of the recent US Task Force on undergraduate study abroad. Avoidance of elitism is a constant concern, but one which, it must be recognized, it is not always easy to address when the demand for funds, as Mr. Usnik's article rightly points out, so markedly outstrips supply and when the amount of money awarded to grantees is therefore often less than we would ideally wish.

Alan Smith
Director, ERASMUS Bureau



Australia

The Federal Government has reached agreement with the Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee (AVCC) for a pilot project in the controversial area of credit transfer.

The pilot scheme will operate next year and is the first step in putting in place a national system of credit recognition between Technical and Further Education (TAFE) and other training systems and universities.

The Government wants the scheme to be extended to recognize industry-based training and expanded to other fields of study from 1994.

The voluntary pilot program to be run by the AVCC will give students automatic credit for prior studies when they enroll in some university courses next year. Universities have agreed to recognize study completed at other universities or TAFE colleges for students applying to enroll in business, computing and engineering courses from 1993. Because the scheme is voluntary, it is not known how extensive the coverage will be. (*The Australian* 2/19/92)

Australian science and technology faces a grim future because of the low numbers of secondary students taking science and mathematics at year 12, according to a national investigation. Top students are opting for careers in law and medicine rather than the technological professions.

The report shows that enrollments in year 12 increased by 90 percent between 1980 and 1990, yet the number of students taking biology rose by only 27 percent and those for chemistry and physics increased by 40 percent. In geology, enrollments actually fell by 32 percent.

The study concludes that reform of the science and mathematics curriculum is necessary, but this alone will not be sufficient to boost enrollments. Action is needed from professional associations and from scientists and engineers. (*The Australian* 1/30 - 2/5/92)

Cameroon

On October 1, 1991, the Catholic University of Central Africa opened its doors in Yaounde, Cameroon, enrolling 120 students from 15 African countries.

Founded with the help and participation of Episcopal Conferences in six countries, it is a Pontifical University which includes the faculties of theology, social sciences and management.

European Catholic Universities, particularly in France, will be greatly involved in an intellectual collaboration with the university. (*Nouvelles Brèves* 1/92)

China

China is working to raise the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language to a higher level to meet the increasing demand of foreigners wishing to master the language.

More than 14,000 foreigners and minority ethnic groups in China have taken the Chinese language proficiency test, HSK, since it was introduced in 1985. Those who pass the test qualify to teach Chinese to foreigners. The test was administered in Singapore, Australia and Japan last year, and authorities are considering introducing it in more countries.

To date, courses in Chinese language are provided at more than 120 universities, colleges and 30 other organizations across the country, with 11,000 foreigners enrolled. About 1,000 Chinese teachers have been sent to some 60 countries to teach Chinese in universities in the past 40 years.

Experts are now working on a compilation of new bilingual test books for foreigners and trilingual ones for overseas Chinese who know only southern dialects, which are very different from Mandarin. The latter will contain English as well as local dialects such as those used in Fujian, Guangdong and Taiwan, and Mandarin. (*China Daily* 1/22/92)

By 1995, all technical personnel in Beijing will spend at least 12 days annually on continuing education courses if an ambitious plan mapped out by the municipal government is successful.

Between 1987 and 1990 more than 210,000 scientists and technicians received continuing education aimed at renewing, extending and deepening their knowledge.

Spurred on by economic reform and a worldwide, technological revolution, continuing education now has a participation rate of 60 percent of senior and middle-ranking technicians, compared with 30 percent in 1987. The content of continuing education has shifted from foreign languages and general computer knowledge to technical know-how and management. (*China Daily* 2/19/92)

Commonwealth of Independent States (formerly the USSR)

The dissolution of the USSR is adversely affecting research institutes and academies formerly funded by the central government as the individual states rush to transfer Soviet institutions on their territory to their own jurisdiction, without considering the financial consequences. In Ukraine, for example, the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences, the All-Union Institute of Gerontology in Kiev, the Institute of Endocrinology and many other institutes which formerly received generous grants from the State Committee of Science and Technology, must now be fully subsidized from the Ukrainian budget.

In Kazakhstan, the Epidemiology and Anti-Plague Institutes, formerly funded by the Soviet Union Ministry of Health, must now be locally funded. Georgia acquired the All-Union Center for Primates in Sukhumi and a number of epidemiology and parasitology institutes established by the Soviet Union Ministry of Health.

Even Moscow University has been forgotten in the heat of the political battle: no one knows where it will get its half-billion ruble budget for 1992.

In the past, the prestige-oriented Soviet government treated theoretical science extremely well. Many privileged science towns were built to foster talent and

produce discoveries. Some became internationally reputable such as Akademgorodok near Novosibirsk, with its university and 47 research institutes.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union is likely to destroy a very sophisticated research and development infrastructure constructed over many decades. And this will limit the possibilities of reconstructing and modernizing the industrial base when the political storm has ended. (*The Australian*, 1/8/92)

The Patrice Lumumba People's Friendship University in Moscow, founded on April 12, 1961 to offer scholarships to students from the Third World, also faces an uncertain future.

There is no longer an ideological battle for the hearts and minds of the people from non-aligned countries, and no longer any encouragement from the state for the university to offer free scholarships to people from poor, developing countries. As the University struggles to survive, it has adopted new tactics, seeking Western, fee-paying students, and offering special courses for minority ethnic groups in Russia. (*The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 12/20/91)

Côte d'Ivoire

Côte d'Ivoire's veteran leader, President Felix Houphouët-Boigny, faces a new crisis on campus after a wave of student demonstrations in Abidjan.

The University of Abidjan was closed by government decree on February 3 and 4 after disturbances the previous week had seen faculty buildings attacked and vehicles belonging to university administrators set on fire. Dozens of riot police were sent in to restore order.

Higher education in Côte d'Ivoire has been notoriously volatile in recent years, with students taking a prominent role in the opposition movements which have challenged Houphouët's monopoly of power.

The activism has carried a heavy price, with the worst incident taking place in May 1991 when government troops launched a nighttime raid on the *cité universitaire* in the Yopougon district of Abidjan. Witnesses claimed four students died in the attack. An investigation into the incident confirmed that three women students had been raped by government troops, while other students were beaten with rifle butts and truncheons. Houphouët's Chief of Staff was named as the instigator of the raid, but the President refused to sack him. This has prompted continued agitation. (*The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 2/14/92)

Cyprus

The Republic of Cyprus is to establish its first university in Nicosia this year, opening its doors to about 440 students in September. An interim governing board of professors of Cypriot origin is to steer the project, performing the duties of council and senate.

The new University of Cyprus is expected to expand to more than 4,000 students by the mid-1990s, 10 percent of them from overseas. Greek, Turkish and English are to be the languages of instruction; the University will consist of three schools and 11 departments.

Because construction is expected to take five years to complete, courses will be held initially in the former Pedagogical Academy in south Nicosia.

The republic's education authorities hope the new university will stop the exodus of Cypriot youth to universities abroad. Some 10,000 Greek Cypriots are currently pursuing higher education courses abroad, mainly in Greece, the United Kingdom and the United States. (*The Times Higher Education Supplement* 1/31/92) ▶

