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Changing education – QA and the shift from teaching to learning

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Short bio (150 words max):

Judith Eaton

Dr. Judith S. Eaton is president of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), the largest institutional higher education membership organization in the United States. A national advocate and institutional voice for self-regulation of academic quality through accreditation, CHEA is an association of 3,000 degree-granting colleges and universities.

CHEA works with the presidents and chief academic officers of colleges and universities, accreditors, policy makers and higher education leaders around the world, providing authoritative information and leadership on issues related to accreditation and quality assurance, the federal government-accreditation relationship and enhancing public confidence in accreditation. CHEA is the only private sector body in the United States that recognizes U.S. institutional and programmatic accreditors for quality, scrutinizing these organizations and affirming that they meet CHEA quality standards. At present, 60 accreditors are CHEA-recognized.

Stamenka Uvalic-Trumbic

Former Chief of the Higher Education Section of the United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture (UNESCO), Ms. Uvalic-Trumbic is an international expert in education reform, innovation, quality assurance and accreditation with more than 20 years of higher education experience.

Prior to joining UNESCO in 1990, Ms. Uvalic-Trumbic was Secretary-General of the Association of Universities in Yugoslavia. Her major achievements include developing the 2005 UNESCO-OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education, initiating the UNESCO-World Bank partnership for capacity-building in quality assurance for developing countries and being the Executive Secretary of the 2009 World Conference on Higher Education.

Ms. Uvalic-Trumbic continues to work as an independent consultant. She is Senior Advisor to the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) International Quality Group,



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After the Forum, the full text of all papers presented at the Forum will be published on the Forum website. If you do not wish your paper to be published, please indicate so here. This has no consequences on the selection of the papers.

Proposal

Title:

An international approach to quality assurance of new providers in higher education: the CHEA Quality Platform

Abstract (150 words max):

Higher education is undergoing deep transformations driven by increasing demand, high youth unemployment, rising costs and new uses of technology. These have triggered an unprecedented diversification of provision and greater flexibility and autonomy in learners' paths.

Fresh approaches to quality assurance are needed for the emerging innovations in higher education. Higher learning is now provided from different sources, MOOCs, OERs, competency-based education, experiential learning, shorter courses. Learners need the assurance that these innovative forms of higher education are based on systematic processes, authentic content and credible assessment.

This paper will review some of the transformations of higher education in the US and globally; present the mission of CHEA's international quality group (CIQG) and its focus on quality implications of these innovative developments and finally, it will describe a new international tool, the CHEA Quality Platform—which is presently piloted to review the quality of innovative and technology-mediated providers of higher education.

Text of paper (3000 words max):

Introduction

Higher education globally is undergoing unprecedented transformations. There are four main drivers of these changes: increased demand, youth unemployment, rising costs and new uses of technology.

The predominant trend is increasing demand even though for reasons of demography, cost and maybe poor links between study programmes and the job market. Some US institutions are experiencing dips in enrolment. However, since tertiary enrolment rates vary widely, demand remains unmet in much of the developing world.



At the same time we are seeing the emergence of new curricula and shorter qualifications whose main purpose is to address the crisis in the relationship between higher education and the labour market.

What are the issues?

To highlight that crisis *The Economist* in one of its 2013 issues titled its cover story 'Generation Jobless' and presented some alarming figures. OECD data demonstrate that youth unemployment has risen by 30% since 2007. The International Labour Organization reports that 75 million young people are looking for work. World Bank surveys suggest that 262 million young people in emerging markets are economically inactive. Yet at the same time employers complain that they cannot find graduates with the right skills and competences. There is a serious gap between education and the job market.

The example of public higher education in the United States, which faces seven major challenges, illustrates these issues.

1. Enrolment declined in 2013 for the first time in 15 years . down by 2.3%. A 2.3% decline means a quarter of a million fewer students.
2. Tuition fees have increased at more than five times the inflation rate for 30 years. This has been an accelerating process. So far American parents and students have meekly accepted these steep fee increases but some can do so no longer.
3. Nevertheless, in 2012 institutions raised tuition fees by a record 8.3% making a 46% increase over the last ten years.
4. As a result of decreasing state support tuition fees, as a share of total public university revenue, rose 62% over the last decade. Increasing tuition fees is a seemingly easy way to try to balance the books. However, in June 2013, the total of discounts given for tuition fees exceeded the total amount paid by parents. This is a 50% reduction from posted rates.
5. Notwithstanding these discounts, student debt has doubled since 2007. This is a now huge element in the US economy. Student loans have topped one trillion dollars, more than all the credit card debt, total car loans or total household debt in America. Furthermore, in the spring of 2013 default rates on student loans reached a high of 17%. In the US a student loan is one form of debt that you cannot wipe out by declaring bankruptcy. Some students will drag this debt to their graves.
6. A record percentage of recent college graduates are unemployed, 53.6%. Therefore to save money 45% of recent college graduates are now living at home with their parents. This figure



is unchanged from 2001, but for graduates in the age range 18-34 the numbers living at home have grown from 13% to 21% in the last decade.

7. And to cap it all: 46% of U.S. college students do not graduate. Yet in the US the extra income you can secure by having a degree is higher than in almost any other country.

In response to such challenges a whole range of new providers of higher education, some with fresh approaches, is emerging to meet the diverse needs of learners. The approaches include competency-based education, experiential learning and online learning in dynamic and diversified forms, both structured and less structured. The private for-profit sector is developing new business models for such approaches, which have as their common aim to bridge the growing gap between education and work.

In parts of the rest of the world some of these developments have gone further than in the US. In Brazil, for instance, private institutions represent more than 88% of all institutions and attract 73.7% of all enrolments at the undergraduate level. While the for-profit education sector in the US may be in decline, Brazil is now home to both the world's liveliest for-profit sector and also its biggest for-profit higher education enterprise. Public institutions there are in a crisis and cannot respond adequately to the rising demand.

In India, where accreditation is voluntary, there is a proliferation of higher education institutions of low quality. The response has been to give greater autonomy to quality assurance bodies while also increasing the involvement of government in accreditation.

China has seen breakneck expansion of its university system in the last decade, but the focus of attention in higher education is now shifting to lifelong learning and skills development, because graduate unemployment is a serious concern.

In Africa open, distance and online learning are much talked about and in this context, where mobile technology is more ubiquitous than landlines, mobile learning is set to develop strongly. Plans for increasing digital higher education in Kenya, for example, are well advanced.

Around the world cross-border higher education continues to develop. Overseas branch campuses come and go but online learning is becoming the predominant means of cross-border learning. A telling example comes from Bangladesh, where a 16-year old pre-university student completed 32 university-level MOOCs in a single year to establish his identity as a world record breaker in learning MOOCs.

The Arab world has been slow to move into online learning because distance education has



historically had a poor reputation in that region. In recent years, especially in the Gulf countries, overseas branch campuses have been a particular focus of development. However, a multi-country Arab Open University has been operating for ten years with good credibility. Now a not-for-profit Arab MOOCs platform, Edraak, has been launched. It will be powered by the US Open edX system. The aim is to deliver high quality online education from leading Arab instructors and academic institutions and also give learners access to courses in Arabic developed at top tier institutions overseas. All courses will be free.

What are the answers?

All jurisdictions are preoccupied by the challenge of enabling students to find work that will provide them with livelihoods. Higher education can respond by giving them more flexibility, cutting the cost of study, and giving them better access to knowledge and skills that are useful in the labour market.

In this context the free availability of a huge pool of quality academic content makes it easier and cheaper for students to design learning curricula to suit their particular needs. Moreover, new technology provides new tools for learning. Alongside the steady growth of online learning in regular courses there has been an effervescence of new developments, sparked by the emergence of the open education movement in 2001, when MIT first posted its course material free of charge on the Internet and thereby launched the concept of Open Educational Resources (OER).

A more recent development, which first arose out of the OER movement in Canada, is Massive Open Online Courses, MOOCs. US universities such as Harvard and Stanford then adapted the model to a more conventional pedagogy and the scale of their courses gave rise to much media hype. 2012 was proclaimed the year of the MOOC+ in the United States. The fashion then caught on in Europe and an eMOOCs Conference in Lausanne in early 2014 revealed the emergence of a multitude of European providers of MOOCs: FutureLearn, OpenupEd, France Université Numérique (FUN) and Iversity. The École Fédérale Polytechnique de Lausanne is developing MOOCs for Africa.

However, the hype around MOOCs shows how the media can present the role and functions of higher education in distorting ways. MOOCs are not really higher education because the vital component of rigorous student assessment is missing. Higher education is not just about teaching and learning. Its essential feature is the awarding of credits or credentials to student after appropriate assessment. Whereas the power to award credentials is the most



important responsibility that societies give to their higher education institutions, MOOCs do not generally lead to credentials.

Learning should be recognised if learners so wish. The challenge today is to recognise learning that has been acquired through processes that, in the spirit of greater openness, are inherently flexible and changeable. And, some MOOC providers are responding, with Coursera offering %Coursera Certificates,+Academic Partnerships offering a new Global Specializations Credential and Udacity launching %NanoDegrees.+

But recognising learning does not mean that everyone has to get degrees. Indeed, at the 2012 conference of the European Association for International Education, Allan Pall, then president of the European Students Union, talked about the death of the degree. He argued that higher learning should focus more on validating students learning outcomes so that employers have access to the right mix of skills and competences to match labour market needs.

In Europe, the Strategy 2020 places a special emphasis on education and training. The quality of teaching and learning is at the core of the EU Higher Education Modernisation Agenda, which emphasise curricula that deliver relevant, up-to date knowledge and skills . knowledge which is globally connected, which is useable in the labour market, and which forms a basis for graduates on-going learning.

In this context of global and European developments, this year's EQAF 2014 has chosen %Changing Education: Quality Assurance and the shift from Teaching to Learning+as its theme, with an emphasis on more autonomous student learning and new modes of delivery in higher education.

Quality assurance and recognition

The challenges posed by the recognition of these manifestations of more innovative providers of higher education link into the wider trend of the unbundling of higher education. Different organisations can now take responsibility for the various components of the process of higher education. Teaching content is now widely available as Open Educational Resources and MOOCs, various organisations offer learning support, both in person and over the Internet, while a wide range of institutions provide credentials in recognition of competence.

New types of awards are also emerging. One example is Open badges, which are placed on the Web, and carry more information about what was studied and how it



was assessed than the usual university transcript. They allow learners to get recognition for short-cycle studies on economically relevant topics and to aggregate a series of badges into a conventional qualification such as a degree or a diploma.

Obviously this process of diversification in higher education poses challenges for quality assurance. How can students be sure that the services they are paying for are reputable and effective?

A survey recently conducted in the United States demonstrated that the traditional quality assurance/accreditation bodies are not . or not yet . interested in these new offerings. The situation is similar in Europe, although the UK QAA has a working group on MOOCs and a multitude of quality labels are being developed, one of them being E-Xcellence by the European Association of Distance Teaching Universities.

However, if new providers are to play a significant role in higher education, we need criteria for quality in this emerging sector. We need agreement on who should make judgements about quality. There are several options. One alternative is for current accreditation and quality assurance to expand their purview and review these offerings. Another alternative is to rely on colleges and universities to examine quality as they make judgments about the credit-worthiness of offerings from institutions outside their usual networks. A third alternative is to develop a capacity for a separate quality review process, focused explicitly on the non-institutional sector.

The CHEA-CIQG Quality Platform

The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), with the input of the recently created CHEA International Quality Group (CIQG), is exploring this third alternative by examining the feasibility of developing a quality platform, that can be used to review the performance and effectiveness of such providers.

CHEA launched the CIQG in 2012. Its primary mission is to promote policy dialogue, from an international perspective, on emerging challenges in quality assurance. It has a global outreach and is open to membership from a wide range of higher education stakeholders worldwide.

The CIQG conducts surveys, publishes a newsletter *Quality International*, develops policy briefs and commissions papers on topical issues. Through its annual meetings, which are organised as a back-to-back event with the CHEA Annual Conference, CIQG offers a dynamic forum for exchange on cutting edge QA issues around the world. In 2013 the meeting addressed current global quality practices and future trends in quality assurance as well as emerging issues such as OER, MOOCs



and Open Badges. The 2014 annual meeting had the theme *Imperatives for quality assurance: international standards and innovation* and one highlight was a session devoted to quality assurance of newer forms of higher education. The session revealed that such non-institutional higher education features more individualised study trajectories for students that require institutions to show greater openness.

A Quality Platform that CHEA-CIQG have been discussing will benefit students and society in a number of ways. First, the non-institutional sector is attracting interest from students as a low-cost or free and convenient means to obtain a higher education experience. Second, at present, none of the providers are being reviewed for quality by external parties. Third, external quality review can protect students and society from any substandard providers that may emerge. Fourth, government and employers are increasingly looking to these providers as part of the solution of sustaining access and improving affordability.

The Quality Platform review would be open to non-institutional providers of higher education, organizations that offer courses, collections of courses or badges, independent of traditional colleges or universities. A CIQG Quality Platform review would begin by judging a provider against its primary purposes, whether offering education that can ultimately form part of a degree or education or that satisfies the interest of a student independent of degree acquisition.

The review could then include standards developed for this sector that would examine, first and foremost, the success of the provider with regard to student learning. Standards, in addition to student achievement, might address the capacity of provider, its transparency and how well it performs in relation to other comparable providers. Peers with significant expertise in this sector would conduct the reviews. A provider that successfully completes the review would be identified as a *Quality Platform Provider*.

For example, the following types of standards for a review might be used:

1. *Learning Outcomes are Articulated and Achieved*. The provider organizes its work, determines the content of offerings and sets expectations of rigor based on anticipated and actual results for students who enrol, i.e., information about gain in skills, competencies or other attributes resulting from a learning experience.



2. *Student Learning Outcomes Meet Collegiate-level Learning Expectations.* The provider demonstrates that the articulated and achieved student learning outcomes are consistent with expectations of student learning at degree-granting colleges and universities.
3. *Curricula Provide an Opportunity for Successful Transfer of Credit.* For the provider's offerings intended to be used for credit or credentialing at a college or university, the provider:
4. *Transparency is Maintained and Comparability is Established.* The provider develops and provides reliable, easily accessible and readily understandable information to the public, at least annually, about its performance, including aggregate descriptions of student achievement, the results of comparisons among similar types of providers and aggregate descriptions of the uses to which students or applying their educational experiences, e.g., educational goals or employment.

In addition, as part of the Quality Platform review, the provider might submit the following:

1. Documentation of legal status.
2. Most recent external financial audit.
3. Current information about the provider's purpose, its offerings and credentials offered (e.g., certificates).
4. Current student enrolment.
5. Description of current practices to assist and support students: faculty, advisors and other academic professionals working with students who undertake offerings.

The key features of the Quality Platform Process are (1) a self-review of the non-institutional provider based on Quality Platform standards and (2) an external review conducted by a team of experts that also makes a judgment about whether the provider meets the standards. The review would take place periodically, every three years. Over time, the provider's performance would be compared to other similar providers. The results of the review and the judgment of the expert team would be public.

The information that a provider has met the test of a CHEA-designed Quality Platform would be useful to colleges, universities and quality assurance bodies as well as the national and international stakeholders mentioned above. Colleges and universities could use the Quality



Platform designation as an indicator of quality when considering the award of credit.

Accreditation and quality assurance organizations could rely on the Quality Platform if they choose to review non-institutional providers. The Quality Platform is still in its pilot phase, which will bring new insights.

However, as technology-mediated higher education becomes increasingly available and attractive to students and the public, conceptualizing a capacity for rigorous quality review will be essential. The CHEA-CIQG Quality Platform can provide it.

We very much look forward to the discussion and to the feedback from European stakeholders on how to develop this tool further to make it fit for purpose for a more international audience.

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Questions for discussion:

1. Will QA bodies seek to expand their remit to take in non-institutional providers and look more closely at technology-mediated learning?
2. Do QA bodies have the capacity to extend their work beyond traditional higher education providers?
3. Do new quality assurance and accreditation tools need to be developed to address the unbundling of higher education?
4. How should internal quality assurance respond to these new developments?
5. Is the CHEA Quality Platform a valid and useful alternative and how can it be improved?
6. If quality review processes are not developed for the non-institutional sector, how will the quality of these providers be judged?
7. What is the role, if any, for governments in assuring quality in the non-institutional sector?