

UNESCO and COL: Two Complementary Organisations



*Regulation of Cross-Border Higher Education: Issues and Trends
Workshop co-organised by UNESCO and the Ministry of HRD*

*New Delhi, India
21-22 September 2006*

Remarks by

*Sir John Daniel
Commonwealth of Learning*

It is a great pleasure to join the distinguished colleagues representing the Ministry of Human Resource Development and UNESCO and to bring greetings from the Commonwealth of Learning.

I was already a regular visitor to India during my time as Assistant Director-General for Education at UNESCO but have come here even more frequently since joining the Commonwealth of Learning. India is the country in which COL is most active, partly because of the scale and diversity of the development challenges that it faces but also because India is a leader in the application of technology to education at scale. One aspect of our work is to facilitate the transfer of know-how from India to Africa in areas such as teacher training, open schooling and the development of farming.

My pleasure in being involved in this workshop on Issues and Trends in the Regulation of Cross-Border Higher Education is personal as well as institutional. It was during my time as ADG at UNESCO that the Section for Reform, Innovation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education, under the dynamic and determined leadership of Ms Stamenka Uvalic-Trumbic, conceived and implemented the Global Forum on International Quality Assurance, Accreditation and the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education. The popularity of this Forum, which will hold its third meeting next year, testifies to the timeliness of the idea of creating a neutral space in which all the stakeholders with an interest in international higher education could discuss the topical issues.

I well remember the first meeting of the Global Forum and the 'buzz' that was created by having so many and diverse stakeholders together. It was an example of UNESCO at its best, for the work of the Global Forum brings together all five of UNESCO's functions: to be a catalyst for international cooperation, a capacity builder, a laboratory of ideas, a clearing house and a standard setter.

The role of standard setter has come to the fore since that first meeting as UNESCO and the OECD have jointly developed Guidelines on Quality Assurance in Cross-Border Higher Education. This work has also showed UNESCO at its most effective, working collaboratively to create a global public good of real significance. COL was proud to play a role at the margins.

It is, of course, a travesty to suggest that OECD countries are all gung-ho about globalisation and eager to export education, whereas UNESCO stands for the states that are sceptical about globalisation and doubtful of the benefits of importing education. It is a travesty - but that is how the two organisations on the left and right banks of the River Seine are sometimes perceived and having them work together on the Guidelines was a brilliant move.

The Commonwealth of Learning is also very pleased to be working with UNESCO on issues of cross-border education because our roles complement each other particularly well. UNESCO is a large organisation involving all the world's countries, with a mandate that takes in all aspects of education and extends into science, culture and communications. COL is a tiny organisation working for the 53 countries of the Commonwealth with a mandate focused tightly on the application of technology to education, training and learning generally.

You could say that UNESCO looks at the bigger picture, the global public good, whereas we operate at the grassroots with national priorities, institutional challenges and individual problems. UNESCO looks at the recognition of qualifications regionally and globally, COL worries about recognition for purposes of employability and why people qualified as surgeons in their own country are driving taxis past our offices in Vancouver.

In his hard-hitting book *The White Man's Burden*, development economist William Easterly makes a distinction between planners and searchers. Planners develop global schemes and solutions whereas searchers try to find out what works on the ground. The differences between COL and UNESCO echo that distinction. UNESCO plans world-wide movements, such as the drive towards Education for All. COL seeks models for the use of technology in learning that can be transferred from one country to another. This means that UNESCO deals with ministerial conferences, international summits and global frameworks. COL deals more with ministries, institutions and individuals.

Our interests come together in cross-border higher education in various ways. First, our organisations are both concerned that education should be a driver of development. Cross-border education presents both opportunities and threats in that regard and we must work to maximise the opportunities and minimise the threats.

Second, technology-mediated learning in general and open and distance learning in particular are facilitating the growth of cross-border education in response to demography and demand. This is COL's area of expertise and we have extensive experience in quality assurance for open and distance learning.

Third, Commonwealth countries play a disproportionate role in cross-border education both as exporters and importers, partly because of the common use of English, but also because of similarities between educational systems. Cross-border education is a live issue for many Commonwealth countries, both large and small, from India to St. Vincent and the Grenadines, from South Africa to Seychelles.

So what can we do together?

First, I hope that we can continue to build on the research that UNESCO and COL have already done jointly in order to get a proper handle on the phenomenon of cross-border higher education in different parts of the world. We have studied the situations in Bangladesh, Malaysia, Jamaica, Bulgaria and Senegal and a second phase is extending that study to Uganda, Egypt, India and Russia. We are both working with the University of West Indies on case studies of Foreign Providers in the Anglophone Caribbean.

Related to research are our joint publications in areas relevant to cross-border education. We put out a book on *Lifelong Learning and Distance Higher Education* last year. More recently our two organisations have just published a report on *Higher Education Crossing Borders: A Guide to the Implications of GATS for Crossborder Education*. Its aim is to heighten awareness and knowledge about crossborder higher education and GATS so that both policy makers and practitioners can make informed decisions in the light of their own priorities and goals.

Another area where we have worked together well and must continue to do so is in capacity building, especially here in Asia where COL's only centre outside Vancouver, the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), is located here in New Delhi. I would like to see more joint work on capacity building between CEMCA and UNESCO and there is considerable potential in several areas. First, we need policy dialogue in Asia on regulatory mechanisms for cross-border higher education. Second, there continues to be demand for capacity building in quality assurance. COL has worked with the National Assessment and Accreditation Council here in India to produce a course assessors' handbook and other materials. There is also need for training in implementing quality assurance guidelines for open, distance and eLearning.

Finally, COL would very much like to work with UNESCO on the new Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth. I shall talk more about this very exciting project tomorrow. We have nicknamed it 'criss-cross' border higher education because it involves the joint development, adaptation and use of courses by 25 countries - with more likely to join. We hope that UNESCO can help us develop a qualifications framework for this venture and also facilitate the involvement of Non-commonwealth States such as Comoros, which is already involved.

Meanwhile, I am delighted to be here and COL is pleased to contribute to UNESCO's important work in cross-border higher education.