

REPORT ON OVERSEAS VISIT

UNESCO-Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research Conference "Globalization and Higher Education: Implications for North-South Dialogue", Oslo, Norway, 26-27 May 2003

1 Biographical details

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| 1.1 | Name: | Michael Cosser |
| 1.2 | Title: | Mr |
| 1.3 | Designation: | Chief Research Specialist |
| 1.4 | Research Programme: | Human Resources Development |
| 1.5 | Project: | Student Choice Behaviour, Phases 1 and 2 |

HSRC RESEARCH OUTPUTS

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2 Areas of research

I was invited by the conference organizers to present a paper on the Student Choice Behaviour project (Phases 1 and 2) as part of a workshop entitled "Empowering Learners: Students' Choice Behaviour". The aim of the workshop was to consider ways in which "to empower students to better navigate in the new higher education space" – a theme which emerged from the first "Global Forum on International Quality assurance, Accreditation and the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education" held at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris from 17-18 October 2002. The Paris conference identified the empowerment of higher education stakeholders for better-informed decision-making in higher education as a major theme, initiatives flowing from which would aim to provide decision-makers at the governmental and institutional levels with information and skills to better navigate in the new higher education space. Findings from the HSRC study on Student Choice Behaviour would facilitate such decision-making – hence the issue of the invitation to me to set the tone for the ensuing discussion.

3 Countries and institutions visited and contacts established

The only country I visited was Norway, where I presented the paper at the "Globalization and Higher Education" conference. The conference attracted 176 participants from 58 countries, including ministers of education, higher education and science and technology, and representatives of councils for higher education, quality assurance and accreditation bodies, universities, UNESCO committees, and student bodies.

The purpose of the conference was to attempt to flesh out the action plan adopted at the 2002 UNESCO conference in Paris, with a particular emphasis on trade in education between countries of the "North" – i.e., developed countries – and countries of the "South" – i.e., developing countries. The following statement from the organizers provides the context within which the discussions took place:

The need for a flexible and versatile workforce, one that is constantly learning and upgrading its skills, has led to a continual demand for courses in which employees are re-trained and updated on a lifelong basis. Students now have to be prepared for a labour market in which they can be expected to change jobs many times, and they need to acquire appropriate skills that are transferable and portable across sectors, countries and cultures.

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In some countries, higher education has already changed from elite to mass or even universal education. In other countries, the demand for higher education is increasing much faster than the growth in educational capacity. Crossing national borders to obtain a degree has been part of higher education for a long time. Recently, private higher education institutions have been set up in many countries to meet the demand, some are branches of foreign institutions or private companies, and some are transnational operations. They may or may not co-operate with the educational authorities in the country.

Higher education institutions have to take account of the strategies and activities of new highly competitive suppliers, both nationally and internationally. In addition, new forms of information and communication technology are eroding the national borders of higher education systems with important consequences for quality assurance, the protection of consumer and intellectual property rights, cultural maintenance and national identity.

Services in higher education are a growing activity which is branching out into: (1) the new providers of higher education (2) new modes of delivery, such as distance learning via the Internet, radio, and television; and (3) new activities, such as educational support services and educational testing services. Other changes in the domestic and international structure of higher education markets have promoted the development of "other" higher education services that support educational processes or systems, such as educational testing services, student exchange program services, and study-abroad facilitation services. In 1999, the international market for global higher education was estimated at U.S. \$30 billion. Currently, more than 1.5 million students study abroad and this number is growing.

Until recently higher education was largely neglected in the debates on the consequences of trade liberalisation and the establishment of regional trade agreements. Initially this was also the case in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) negotiations on services. However, more and more higher education stakeholders have become aware of the possible effects of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). A main emphasis in the debates has been on the consequences of WTO/GATS for individual institutions. However, in addition to the institutional interests also the national or public interests should be discussed publicly.

What are the challenges for individual institutions and national higher education systems in this global environment? How can the role of education in economic, cultural and social development be secured in both the industrialised and the developing nations? How can the pressures from an emerging knowledge-based society and economy be met? How do trade agreements, global as well as regional ones, affect the control of national governments on their higher education system? How should quality assurance and accreditation issues be addressed at the national, regional, supranational and global levels? How can policy makers and higher education institutions develop a common platform on policy guidelines, frameworks and instruments, and what should be UNESCO's role? (Information Note published at <http://www.ldv.no/unesco/>).

In addition to presenting a paper at the conference, I met with one of the supervisors of my PhD thesis, Dr Peter Maassen, at the University of Oslo on 28 May to discuss the framework for the thesis which I shall be submitting to the University of Twente (Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies - CHEPS)

3 Outcomes

The broad outcomes of the conference as a whole were agreement that higher education should form part of GATS (General Agreement on Trade in Services), since higher education is a tradable commodity, and that all stakeholders in higher education – governance, funding, development, staff and student bodies – should work together to ensure that such trade is fair and equitable across the North-South and other divides.

The outcomes of the conference are to be drafted by UNESCO rapporteurs in association with the organizers of the conference and posted on the UNESCO web-site.

Materials collected at the conference – the conference programme and related documentation – are filed in my office (941N) and are available to interested parties.

4 Recommendations

The only specific recommendation arising from my participation in the conference is that the HSRC should maintain contact with UNESCO, particularly with a view to lobbying UNESCO to endorse proposals submitted to funding agencies. The key person to contact in this regard is Zeynep Varoglu (z.varoglu@unesco.org), who is based at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris.

5 Follow-up activities

The paper presented at the conference will be refined in the light of comments received during the presentation and revised for publication in an accredited journal.