

PART II. PRIMER

A. Introduction

Cross-border higher education, at times also referred to as transnational education, is a phenomenon that covers a variety of ways in which either people, courses, programs or in some cases the whole institutional framework, move in order to make education available beyond national borders. In the face of continuously growing demand for higher education and given the scope of opportunities for different approaches to be tried and tested, it is not surprising that discussions on cross-border education have multiplied. Higher education leaders and policy makers alike feel the need to examine and better understand the various reasons that act as push and pull factors for the growth of cross-border activities, the potential benefits and risks as well as the longer-term impacts these developments may have on the rest of the educational system.

In this two-part event – a Global Meeting of Associations of Universities and an International Conference open to all stakeholders in higher education, the International Association of Universities (IAU) pursues several goals, including to:

- provide a global forum for examining the current trends and new developments of cross-border higher education;
- enable national, regional and international associations of universities and higher education institutions to reflect on the challenges that cross-border education poses for their members, for them and globally;
- disseminate, gain support for and begin implementing, the declaration: *Sharing Quality Higher Education Across Borders – a Statement on behalf of Higher Education Institutions Worldwide*;
- review and discuss the implementation of other policy initiatives such as the guidelines developed by UNESCO and OECD to ensure that rules of good conduct are applied to cross-border education;
- determine what concrete steps and specific actions can be taken by associations and institutions, on an individual basis and collectively, to ensure that benefits of cross border education are maximized, most particularly for learners;
- debate, whether and if so how, on-going monitoring and other follow-up activities should be envisaged by university associations acting collectively and possibly with other stakeholders.

The Global Meeting of Associations

The Global Meeting of Associations will, naturally, place more emphasis on how cross-border education impacts on their work, what new expectations it may raise among their members and what new services and expertise may be required. Associations will be able to compare notes in terms of the importance of the phenomenon in their regions and to discuss whether and how it is understood by their membership. Policy development, research, advocacy and new or on-going member services will be among the possible areas of action to be considered.

Associations will be asked, especially in smaller Working Groups to deliberate on questions such as:

- Is there a common understanding of what is covered by cross-border education?
- Why are policy statements and guidelines such as those being discussed in the international arena needed?
- What are the main challenges that cross-border education poses and to whom?
- Is a voluntary system of guidelines and statements of principles sufficient to ensure that negative impacts are minimized and risks avoided?
- To what extent do such policy frameworks offer an alternative for further negotiations of higher education within GATS?
- Who must be involved in developing policies, strategies or action plans for managing higher education across borders?

The International Conference

Many aspects of cross-border education are well-known and form part of an old tradition of international academic cooperation, of research collaboration and capacity building to fill gaps or lacunae in partner institutions. Often, cross-border education is at the heart of institutional efforts to internationalise by increasing two-way mobility of students and faculty, by setting up joint teaching and research programs etc. Frequently though, cross-border education is developed outside the institutional internationalisation strategies, and undertaken more for financial rather than academic reasons and by institutions that do not share the same commitment to partnership and collaboration. At times, cross-border education providers may serve to attract faculty members with better conditions and salaries, but do so at the expense of local, public education. In situations of unmet demand for access to higher education, cross-border education can offer the answers, but it can also exacerbate already difficult conditions and even undermine national development or linguistic policies.

During the International Conference open to all institutions and other stakeholders of higher education, participants will consider issues and questions that have to do with the optimal conditions under which cross-border education offers solutions to real problems and what types of cross-border provision are most appropriate in what contexts. Among the questions that will be addressed during the Conference by speakers and in Working Groups are:

- Must cross border education fit into an institutional internationalisation strategy?
- How can cross-border education reconcile academic excellence, cost recovery, mutuality of benefits and competition?
- Who are the stakeholders that need to be involved in developing a cross border education strategy for the institution, for the country?
- Can the principles in the ‘*Sharing Quality Cross-border Education*’ Statement be adopted and applied at the institutional level? Can and should they be monitored?
- How can the recommendations of the OECD/UNESCO guidelines be implemented and monitored?
- In what ways are Statements and Guidelines, or other *soft law* instruments, more appropriate in the area of higher education and to what extent can they be a substitute to trade agreements?
- Can we, and if so how, avoid the polarisation of the debate between the proponents of regulation by policy frameworks and those in favour of economic liberalism where market and trade regimes set the rules?

IAU is convinced that associations of universities at all levels, together with pro-active, well-informed and mobilized institutions of higher education, can play an important role in ensuring that university leadership, students, policy-makers and other stakeholders are aware of the importance of these questions, make sense of the trends, and develop informed policy and programs to ensure that cross-border education remains a positive development in the years to come. In Alexandria, IAU invites participants to play an active role in moving the academic community forward from policy statements, declarations and guidelines towards specific strategies and actions that can be adopted and implemented at the institutional and organizational levels.

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