Robin Middlehurst

University of Surrey, United Kingdom

Quality Assurance Implications of New Forms of Higher Education

Part 1: A Typology

ENQA Occasional Papers 3

European Network for Quality Assurance
in Higher Education • Helsinki

The views expressed in this Occasional Paper are those of the authors. Publication does not imply either approval or endorsement by the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education or any of its members.

Cover: Jussi Hirvi / Green Spot Media Farm
Layout: Anja Kauppi / Pikseri Julkaisupalvelut

ISBN 951-98680-3-8
ISSN 1458-1051

Printed by Multiprint
Helsinki, Finland 2001

Foreword

Higher education in Europe is faced with many new challenges with implications for institutions as well as for systems of quality assurance. There is a significant growth in the number of new providers of higher education linked to the development of new ways of delivering higher education. This process is again assisted by the very visible increase in available information and communication technologies.

Other important processes are changes in public focus on the responsibilities and relevance of higher education institutions in relation to political priorities, such as lifelong learning and increasing national and transnational mobility of individuals and learning.

The nature of studies in higher education is also changing. Transnational education and lifelong learning are examples of trends that have moved higher education institutions towards taking an active role in the search of new education applications.

The Steering Group of ENQA decided therefore to initiate a project with the aim to review these various issues mentioned above. This report is the result of the first stage of the project. The report is primarily an identification and typology of the new forms of higher education, and their implications for current approaches to internal and external quality assurance.

On behalf of the Steering Group it is my pleasure to extend our thanks to professor Robin Middlehurst who undertook to make this report in cooperation with an advisory group headed by Peter Williams from the Steering Group.

Christian Thune
Chairman
ENQA Steering Group

Contents

1 Introduction

1 The Steering Group of the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) commissioned a project to identify and understand:

- The principal forms and distinctive characteristics of new forms of higher education;
- The implications of new forms for current approaches to internal and external quality assurance;
- The implications of these new forms for institutional, national, regional and international recognition of qualifications.

2 The project is divided into three stages. In its first stage, of which this is the report, the project's terms of reference are to:

- Develop an outline typology to describe new forms of provision; and
- Identify the quality assurance issues associated with these new forms of provision.

3 It is anticipated that there will be two further stages of the project, if Stage 1 is successful:

- The next stage will seek to illuminate the QA issues identified and test the outline typology through a series of cases studies, examining different forms of new provision and their implications in different countries;
- The third stage, following refinement of the typology and QA issues, will offer more specific guidance and advice on international QA models for new forms of provision and on the issues arising for recognition of qualifications.

1.1. Context and rationale for the project

4 The need for ENQA to commission and undertake this project arises because higher education institutions and systems are already, or may in the not-too-distant future, experience significant change. The kinds of changes that are occurring include:

- The emergence of new providers of higher education, creating a more complex and competitive environment for universities, colleges and institutes;
- The development of new ways of delivering higher education with opportunities to enhance the quality and quantity of learning, assisted by advances in information and communications technologies;
- The development of 'education and educational services' as a large and growing business sector, driven by globalisation, knowledge expansion and technological change. Education is now viewed (by the World Trade Organisation, WTO, and by some providers) as a service that can be traded and by business as a source of intellectual capital that can provide competitive advantage. Individuals and society at large also view education as a public and private good;
- Economic, social and political agendas that emphasise life-long learning, accessibility, regional development and social cohesion. Governments and state agencies increasingly perceive universities as instruments of public policy for achieving these goals;
- Increasing mobility of individuals;
- The blurring of national boundaries, the development of regional policies, alliances and zones: the European political map remains in a state of flux.

5 Together, these changes are beginning to have an impact on the structure and forms of higher education that already exist (at this stage, more in some countries than others) and are leading to questions about the purposes, outcomes and funding of existing institutions. The changes and the ensuing public debates about higher education also have implications for the parameters of 'quality' in education and for the principles and procedures that underpin quality assurance arrangements. Recent reports provide more detail about the kinds of changes that are occurring and their policy implications for higher education.[1]

6 Not all the developments described in the following paragraphs have yet made their appearance widely in Europe, others are not entirely novel but still reflect a dimension of change. Some are limited to a small number of locations; many are at present restricted to one or two countries elsewhere in the world (principally the USA). But experience suggests that technological advances and moves towards the internationalisation and globalisation of many areas of human endeavour spread fast. Today's strange idea is often tomorrow's innovation and next year's orthodoxy. We believe it is useful to include within the typology as comprehensive a coverage as possible of known and existing innovatory activities, even though some may be as yet unknown within member countries and others may never reach them.

7 It should also be noted at the outset that the issues and dimensions covered in this report are likely to have a different level of resonance in different European countries. For example, what counts as (official) 'higher education' will vary, as will the extent of commercial pressures on universities and levels of demand from students. Some of the issues outlined will also be of greater relevance in some subject areas than in others (for example, business and management, languages, IT, healthcare) and in some countries these subjects are part of specialist institutions rather than being part of universities. And in any report that focuses on international higher education, there will be differences of definition and structure. However, given the collective impact of globalisation, all countries need at least to be aware of the variables included in the report and quality assurance agencies will need to come to a view as to how they should respond to the regulatory and quality assurance issues that are outlined below.

[1] See for example, Cunningham S et al (1998) *New Media and Borderless Education: A Review of the Convergence between Global Media Networks and Higher Education Provision*, EIP Report 97/22, Canberra, DEETYA; Cunningham S et al (2000) *The Business of Borderless Education*, EIP Report 00/3, Canberra, DEETYA; Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals *The Business of Borderless Education: UK Perspectives*, vols 1–3, London, CVCP.

2 Definitions: new variables in the provision of higher education

8 It is not sufficient to define these developments simply in terms of 'new modes of delivery' of higher education since there are also developments in the type of provider offering higher education and in forms of provision. In addition, categories of provider, provision and delivery mechanism overlap. At present, we are witnessing a blurring of boundaries between existing forms of higher education and the emergence of new forms of provision generated both from within and from outside the traditional, public and private higher education sectors. It is perhaps clearer (and more helpful for the development of a typology) to consider the range of new variables that are affecting the provision of higher education. These new variables include any one or a combination of the following:

- new *providers* (single providers or consortia; public, private and for-profit providers; multi-agent providers);
- new *media* used for the delivery of programmes (technology-mediated delivery, multi-media modes and delivery that is synchronous or asynchronous in time);
- provision that is *cross-sectoral* (offered by HE providers and companies together through a variety of arrangements, or offered by universities and other post-secondary providers);
- provision that is *transnational and multinational* (offered across countries through a variety of different arrangements);
- *varied locations* for the delivery of higher education (learning centres, homes, offices, shops and libraries as well as formal educational institutions or educational settings – this is not widespread across the whole EU, but is a growing feature in the UK);
- *new curricular forms and content* (competence-based education, accredited work-based learning, inter-disciplinary provision; formal or informal experiential learning);
- *new or changing qualifications* (practitioner doctorates; professional and vocational certification, 'integrated degrees', revised Bachelor's and Masters' awards emerging in Europe, following from the Sorbonne and Bologna Declarations).

9 The typology seeks to take account of this variety of developments by focusing on some significant 'new variables' in higher education. In some cases, one may argue about the novelty or significance, in QA terms, of some of the variables or developments identified, and indeed, they may be of more significance at this stage in one country than in another (eg competence-based awards or accreditation of prior experiential learning). However all developments that deviate from the model of a single subject academic degree offered by one 'traditional' provider are included at this stage to provide an overview of the potential range of challenges for existing QA systems.

3 Quality Assurance: scope and challenges arising

10 By adopting a wide-ranging focus for the typology, we also need to adopt a broad definition of the scope of quality assurance. The notion of 'internal' and 'external' arrangements for quality assurance will have different connotations, for example, in relation to for-profit providers, e-learning or accredited work-based learning. The quality assurance issues that arise are also different depending on whether the reference point is 'the provider', 'the provision', the 'medium of delivery', the 'output' or the 'receiver' of education. The purpose, scope and focus of quality assurance will also be viewed differently by different constituencies, for example, staff, students, institutions, agencies, employers, professional associations and governments. For the purposes of this project, the scope of the term 'quality assurance' will be taken to include the following dimensions:

- regulation (legal frameworks, governance, responsibilities and accountabilities etc)
- educational process (admissions, registration or enrolment, curriculum design and delivery, support for learning, assessment etc)
- curriculum design and content (validation and approval frameworks, levels and standards etc)
- learning experience (consumer protection, student experience, complaints and appeals etc)
- outcomes (qualifications, certificates, transcripts and Diploma Supplement; security, transferability, recognition/currency and value etc)

11 The range of new variables poses potential challenges for current quality assurance arrangements. These challenges are discussed in more detail below, but some examples are given here:

- for-profit education businesses may pose regulatory and consumer protection challenges for public-sector QA systems;
- technology-mediated learning may challenge conventional assumptions about the 'quality of the student experience';
- transnational arrangements may raise issues of comparability, equivalence of level and flexibility in the transfer of credit;
- new curricula, content and qualifications may challenge existing qualification frameworks and recognition arrangements;
- the sheer range, complexity and diversity of provision raises the question of whether it is possible and desirable to have a single (public) quality assurance framework that fits all provision;
- all these challenges create a need for increased transparency and reliability of information about quality, for students, institutions, agencies and society at large.

12 Wherever possible, real examples are given within the elements of the typology. The QA issues are intended to be indicative rather than comprehensive. Further refinement is necessary to address priority development areas.

4 Outline Typology and Quality Assurance issues arising

13 The typology is divided into four sections. In order to illuminate the elements within the typology, at the beginning of each section, some of the distinctive characteristics of the 'new variables' are discussed. The sections on the left side of the typology that highlight the 'new variables' are:
Types of provider and provision
Delivery: modes, media, locations
New curricula and content
New qualifications and outcomes

14 On the right-hand side of the framework, a series of quality assurance issues are set out. There is not a precise alignment between the 'new variables' on the left and the QA issues on the right-hand side of the framework; in some cases, the QA issues are similar for different variables. The right-hand side attempts, as far as possible, to identify the full range of QA issues (from regulatory matters to quality of outcomes) that need to be taken into account in relation to new developments in higher education. Clearly these issues will need further analysis and refinement if the typology is to become useable in practice.

4.1 Types of provider and provision

15 Five forms of 'provider' are identified in the typology. The first group includes individual providers that offer the traditional range of educational processes that may include enrolment, design and teaching of curricula, assessment and award. (In some countries in Europe, some of these functions will be under state control and others under institutional control). Within this first group of so-called individual providers, the distinctive characteristics include the legal and financial status of the different providing institutions or organisations. This may affect their governance arrangements, ownership of the curriculum, approaches to marketing and to customers (students), their choice of staff (practitioners rather than academics) and their responsibilities for and approaches to quality assurance. Where national or sectoral boundaries are crossed, these matters become more complex.

16 The second group includes consortia that also offer the 'full' educational process. The distinctive characteristics of this group arise from the nature of the consortium and its purposes. Particular features will include the types of provider involved, the nature of the collaborative arrangements (their formality and legal/financial implications), the governance arrangements where relevant, the scope of the consortium (eg across sectors and countries) and the balance of responsibilities across the consortium (eg for joint programmes and awards).

17 The third group and the fourth group are broadly similar. They have been included separately to illustrate the types of collaboration that can exist and the range of providers that may be involved. A key characteristic of these two groups is the potential 'dis-aggregation' or 'unbundling' of the educational process. This may mean that different agents are responsible for different parts of the process: marketing of provision, student administration, curriculum design, delivery of teaching, student support and guidance, assessment and award. Not all the agents involved will be academic institutions or state agencies, some may be commercial organisations. It may be necessary in future to consider different forms and criteria for quality assurance to suit different educational functions. For example, quality standards for teaching may need to be different from quality standards for certification. The fragmen-

tation of previously unified educational functions and services could have quite profound consequences for current quality assurance arrangements.

18 The distinctive characteristics of the fifth group, 'self-assembly', lies in the design/determination of the curriculum. Curriculum content and 'delivery' of the curriculum may not be done by academics, but by learners themselves, in negotiation with academics, or by companies/groups. A key issue is the form of the negotiation and the resulting agreements; these will need to specify the responsibilities of participants, as well as the ownership of, and authority over, curricular coherence, integrity and outcomes.

Types of provider and provision	Quality assurance issues
1 *Individual (full) providers*: • public (University of Helsinki) • private (University of Buckingham; International University, Germany; many Hogescholen and Catholic Universities in different parts of Europe) • for-profit (University of Phoenix) • public – distance (Open University, UK/US) • mixed status (public/for-profit: Universities of Melbourne, New York, Cornell) • mixed location (multi-campus/unit: RMIT, Deakin University) • local /regional focus (Chalmers University..) • international focus (University of Leiden, …)	*Regulatory framework*: • laws (domestic/overseas/international; organisational status: company/charity/trust; importing or exporting rules) • licensing/recognition arrangements • contractual arrangements • intellectual property rights (IPR) • accreditation arrangements: who accredits/what is accredited/what criteria are used/full or partial accreditation/time-scale/level of education accredited; • national/international awarding authority • review procedures: responsibility, authority, scope, timing, transparency/disclosure • information requirements: transparency, scope, currency, accuracy
2 *Consortia (full) providers* • public (Innovative Universities) • public federal (University of London) • private • for-profit • mixed status (public/for-profit education: Global University Alliance) • mixed (cross-educational sectors: Derby, Virtual Open College- NW England) • mixed (education and other sectors, Ford; UNext.com; FT Knowledge + University of Michigan Business School) • local collaboration (CADISE) • regional collaboration (Umea Regional Group; Oresund Science Region; Dutch and Flemish Consortium for Innovation in Higher Education; University of the Arctic) • transnational collaboration (Universitas 21; World-wide University Network; Coimbra Group)	*Funding framework:* • stakeholder/public accountability requirements • shareholder/customer accountability requirements • student funding and payment arrangements • balance/priority in forms of accountability • investment and evaluation criteria (including programme maintenance/viability) • reporting criteria and arrangements (level of transparency/ disclosure) • performance measures *Governance framework:* • membership of councils/boards: forms of representation (lay/non-executive; students/employers/clients; teachers/ practitioners) • awarding procedures/authority *Management/operational arrangements:* • responsibilities and liabilities for quality control and assurance • structures/procedures for design, assembly of systems and programmes, marketing, registration of students, assessment, progression/credit transfer, awarding, complaints/appeals etc • infrastructure reliability and back-up

	• student privacy arrangements • recruitment, accreditation, management and development of staff • management of collaborative activity
3 *Part or joint providers*: (examples of forms of collaboration) • partnership (Duke University/Deutsche Bank) • joint venture (FT Knowledge/Excelsior' College; Educavia) • sub-contract or franchise • out-source (UNext.com > Heriot-Watt) • articulation (Higher education institutions with polytechnics or other post-secondary institutions) • twinning • branch campuses (Monash, RMIT) • brokerage (Western Governors' University; Ufi Ltd) • consultancy (LSE > Unext.com)	Legal frameworks and liabilities, including commitments to students Financial arrangements Quality criteria and monitoring arrangements Responsibilities of each party (for programme maintenance, quality control and assurance) Management of collaborative activity (may require 'meta-level' structure) Validating/licensing agent & authority Awarding authority National/international accrediting agencies Issues of consumer protection, access, equal opportunity Privacy and security arrangements
4 *Multi-agent providers:* (range) • corporations (private and public: corporate universities) • publishers (Thompson Learning, Pearsons + FT Knowledge, McGraw Hill) • media/telecoms (Newscorp, BBC) • professional associations (APESMA; IMCA) • educational institutions (public: Nottingham Trent University, Judge Institute, Cambridge) • educational service companies (PowerEd; Blackboard.com) • brokers (Scottish Knowledge, Open Learning Company)	As above (similar to part or joint providers)
5 *Self-assembly:* • individual learner-assembled • company designed/provided • group designed/assembled	Criteria/quality standards for validation/certification: independent credentialling? (coherence; progression; validation – who decides?) Management of validation/certification arrangements Awarding authority Monitoring systems Review of arrangements

4.2 Delivery: modes, media, locations

19 The distinctive characteristics of new modes of delivery include the co-location (or otherwise) of students and tutors and the amount and type of interaction between learners and tutors, between groups of learners or between learners and resources for learning. Levels of expectation about the degree of independence of learners in relation to the curriculum and learning resources are also important. The support systems (technical, academic and professional) to which learners have access are critical aspects of quality assurance. Different delivery modes, media and locations may be associated with any of the provider models listed in the first section of the typology, above.

20 A key feature of new technologies is that they can extend the range of possible media that may be incorporated into a learning experience/opportunity. An important quality issue is whether the media used add value to the learning experience in particular ways (for example in terms of accessibility for particular styles of learning or for forms of disadvantage in relation to learning). As the boundaries between knowledge, information, entertainment and learning shift, verification of the purpose and outcomes of using particular media is important. A more subtle issue particularly related to technology-mediated delivery is that some forms of software (or hardware – such as the calculator) can replace some of the activities associated with particular skills or levels of learning. An example is the potential impact of Autonomy software on the literature searches expected in post-graduate degrees. As technology advances, the requirements that underpin qualification levels may need to shift.

21 The choice of location for the delivery of learning (or engagement in learning) raises other quality assurance issues. These include accessibility to and extent of learning support, learning materials and specialised equipment. There may also be implications for the form and quality of assessment (for example in work-based learning).

Delivery	**Quality assurance issues**
1 *Interactive mode:*	Design of learning environment: for engagement, for learning, for achievement and progression
• Face-to-face	Accessibility of learning environment (for all students/learning styles and culturally appropriate)
• At-a-distance (learning/examining)	Information for students/investors: sufficient, fair, accurate
• Virtual (synchronous)	Qualifications of designers/managers of learning/tutors (who accredits?), continuing professional development
• Virtual (asynchronous)	Amount and level of inter-activity (as an aspect of standards and quality of experience: student-student; student–tutor; 1:1, 1:many)
• Mixed mode	Assessment: variety, flexibility, security, timeliness of response
	Recording attainment
	Evaluation – student feedback, staff feedback
	Amount and nature of learning support
	Monitoring and review mechanisms
2 *Type of media:*	
• Text/print	Learning design (as above)
• Visual (pictures, films, symbols)	Learning rationale for use of media (aims, objectives, outcomes)
• Sound/voice	Accessibility and competence (students, staff)
• Multi-media	Examples of good practice/guidelines

• Technology-mediated	Evaluation: student and staff feedback Security, privacy, safety, reliability Technical standards, capacity, support Ownership: Intellectual Property Rights & copyright issues Costs: level, value for money, updating requirements
3 *Location:*	
• Home	Accessibility
• Work	Privacy, security
• Learning Centre	Access to learning support (technical, academic, professional)
• Overseas campus	Access to materials and specialist equipment
• Franchised operation	Flexibility
• Public institution	Costs
• For-profit institution	

4.3 New curricula or content

22 Distinctive characteristics of new curricula or content relate to the agent that is responsible for design (academics or others), ownership of the content (in terms of its use, refinement and renewal), educational level of the content and the authority that governs its use for educational or professional/occupational purposes. A curriculum needs to be fit for purpose and verified as such in advance of 'use' as well as through engagement with it. Content and curricula also need to offer value for money, either for the direct client or for the indirect purchaser (state or employer). Given the increasing variety of suppliers of content beyond traditional academics, issues of level, recognition, currency and equivalence are also important. Not all curricula are linked to qualifications; the degree of regulation may need to be related to the existence and purpose of a qualification (eg as a licence to practice).

23 New curricula and content emerge from several sources, for example: advances in knowledge in specific areas, socio-economic requirements for new 'knowledge in application', combining subjects to form new areas of learning. The continuing expansion of knowledge, combined with the use of communication and information technologies and trends towards 'customisation' in learning, suggest that the demand for new content for programmes of learning will continue. The academic world does not have a monopoly on the generation of new knowledge or on determining the particular requirements of 'knowledge in application'. The authority to design and determine 'content' (and assure its currency and credibility) is likely to become more widely shared – with implications for standards, assessment and qualification frameworks.

New curricula and content	Quality assurance issues
1 *Competence-based education:*	
• professional education	Standards/level – design criteria & equivalences
• vocational education	Eligibility criteria
• continuing professional development	Approval/validation agent
• skills' acquisition (foundation, advanced)	Entry/progression expectations/criteria
	Curriculum design: balance, focus, purposes, level, currency, authority etc
	Assessment principles, arrangements and authority
	Credit arrangements (including Accreditation of Prior Learning)
	Progression criteria
	Review arrangements and time-scale
2 *Work-based learning:* (fully or partly accredited)	
• individual, work-based experience	Learning agreements/contracts
• in-house training/education	Purposes and outcomes of learning
• mixed/integrated programme	Assessment arrangements, authority and security
	Student supervision and support
	Availability/accessibility of learning materials
	Standards and level equivalence
	Credit arrangements: granting, mapping, recording and storing, transfer (including Accreditation of Prior Learning and Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning)
	Integration and articulation rules
	Progression criteria
	Review arrangements and time-scale
3 *Problem-based learning:*	
• institution designed	Curriculum design
• learner designed	Learning resources and support
	Mapping and recording attainment
	Assessment criteria and procedures
	Progression criteria
4 *Experiential learning:*	
• prior experience	Standards, levels and equivalences
• current/formative experience (action learning, work experience)	Accreditation of Prior learning and Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning: criteria and credit arrangements
	Validation/approval frameworks
	Assessment processes, reference points and 'authority', integrity, security
	Ownership of content: Intellectual Property Rights, copyright
	Monitoring and review arrangements
5 *Inter-multidisciplinary learning:*	
• thematic	Curriculum balance and assessment criteria
• flexible	Rules/procedures for choice
• structured pathways/tracks	Mapping and recording attainment
	Progression criteria

4.4 New qualifications

24 Some of the distinctive characteristics associated with new content are also linked to new qualifications. Ownership and authority for the award are key issues; in some cases the authority is statutory, in other cases it rests on charters or other instruments. The qualification is important in terms of what it signifies: competence, range of knowledge and skill, or license to practice. Quality agencies may or may not have responsibility for qualifications' frameworks (in terms of design, review or recognition arrangements). Many professions design and regulate their own qualifications/certification structures; an interesting phenomenon at present is the certification systems in the IT industry. Here, many of the IT suppliers are involved in the design of programmes and in the certification process at different levels; this new system is operating largely outside national QA arrangements.[2] Perhaps a key issue for the future is whether new qualification frameworks will emerge in Europe alongside academic ones, or whether academic frameworks will be able to incorporate new forms of award with different standards. To some extent, both kinds of development are visible in the UK, in Spain, Germany and the Netherlands. The European National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARICs) and the European Network of Information Centres (ENICs) (see www.cepes.ro or www.coe.fr) are actively engaged in research and discussion of recognition and mobility issues.

25 Although not included in the typology, it is worth mentioning non-certificated learning as an educational 'output'. Among corporate and for-profit providers of education and in publicly provided adult education, there is a large amount of short course provision. Some of this is credit-rated, some not, and some may count as 'prior learning' for which credit is awarded. Some institutions also give (academic) credit for experiential learning. The quality assurance of both kinds of inputs and outputs needs to be recognised and addressed.

New qualifications	Quality assurance issues
1 Practitioner/professional doctorates	Standards and levels – which qualification framework applies? International comparators? Eligibility criteria Professional accreditation: national/international
2 Professional/occupational certification	Purpose of qualification Equivalences/comparators Eligibility criteria Responsible agent: curriculum and assessment (validation arrangements) Professional accreditation: national/international Licensing providers/tutors Assessment modes Responsibility for the award Monitoring and review arrangements
3 'Integrated' degrees	Balance of curriculum, assessment, credit; equivalences National/international recognition
4 Dual/multiple awards	Responsible agents for QA principles and procedures – memoranda of agreement Monitoring arrangements Progression Equivalences: curriculum, assessment, credit Recording attainment National/international recognition
5 Joint degrees	As above

[2] See report: Adelman, C (2000) *A Parallel Postsecondary Universe: The Certification System in Information Technology,* Office of Educational Research and Improvement, US Dept.of Education.

5 Quality assurance challenges and implications

26 A number of quality assurance challenges have already been highlighted. In this section, four particular 'cross-border' challenges are considered. The first arises from learning that crosses national borders (transnational education). The second relates to learning that crosses sector or borders of educational level (eg university/industry or further/higher education). The third arises from crossing functional boundaries (where the education process is designed and delivered by different agents in a supply chain). The fourth relates to borders of time and space – the particular challenges associated with 'online' education.

5.1 Crossing national borders

27 The Global Alliance for Transnational Education (GATE) in 1999 reported on a number of barriers to transnational educational trade, building on work done by the World Trade Organisation and the US National Committee for International Trade in Education.[3] These barriers include:

- National legislation in general and in relation to higher education policies in particular.
- Qualification authorities and their policies.
- Customs regulations.
- Visa regulations.
- Telecommunications' laws.
- Intellectual property rights.
- Bureaucratic over-regulation by quality and funding agencies.

28 In a commissioned paper for the International Association of University Professors (IAUP) on the topic of Internationalization and Quality Assurance, Van Damme (1999)[4] elaborates on some of the above:

- Administrative problems hinder the smooth functioning of internationalization schemes: there is a need for clear and simple student application systems and evaluation procedures.
- Recognition of degrees and credit is often based on complicated tests of equivalence; one solution is for professional associations to validate degrees/programmes in foreign countries as equivalent to domestic ones; this model already operates in the UK, for example, in relation to professions such as Architecture (RIBA) and Electrical Engineering (IEE).
- Some countries are protectionist through their state-led QA systems, others balance state and market-driven QA approaches. Most national systems are reluctant to cede power to supranational agencies; in the short term, mutual recognition between quality agencies may be a solution.
- There are variations between QA systems in different countries in terms of definitions of quality, purposes and functions, methods, focus and agents responsible. In the short term, networks of agencies and exchange of information and expertise may lead to greater convergence.
- Self-evaluation as the central methodology in external quality assurance falls short in a context where several partners are involved, transcending national borders, evaluation cultures and QA policies. Alternative methods that focus on agreements, contracts and outcomes may be more appropriate.

[3] (http://www.edugate.org/tradesurvey.htm). A further reference is also worth noting in this context: the recent US Communication to the Council of Trade in Services, 18.12.2000.

[4] Van Damme D (1999) "Internationalization and quality assurance: towards worldwide accreditation?" Paper commissioned for IAUP XIIth Triennial Conference, Brussels, 11–14 July, 1999.

- Quality agencies (and institutions) are struggling to monitor and control profiteering and deception as education becomes more market-driven and global.[5] It is also worth noting that most of the perpetrators are not within the education sector and are therefore often outside the control of the educational quality agencies.

29 In addition to these challenges, we would add the need to be aware of different jurisdictions for the resolution of disputes with opportunities for redress, varied cultural contexts for curriculum design and assessment practices and potential differences in infrastructure and support for students in different countries. These may lead to different kinds of student experiences and/or different pre-requisites for courses. In some countries, governments have established particular regulations to cover educational imports, some of which involve special licensing arrangements. These may be more stringent where distance learning is involved in that this form of learning is not always regarded as of equivalent value to conventional forms of education.

30 It is also important to remember that transnational collaborations can take different forms, from co-operation between institutions in the form of joint awards, for example, to the establishment of branch campuses in other countries or delivery in another country through local agents. Some transnational arrangements are very complex and raise issues about 'third country' recognition of qualifications.[6] Other kinds of transnational education are not targeted at 'local' students, but are aimed at international, expatriate communities (as in London and Brussels, for example). It may be the case that even if the country in which the programme is delivered does not recognise the award, the home country of a student gaining the award may do so. In the UK, the QAA has alerted institutions to many of these issues through its guidelines and codes of practice; however, there are areas of transnational education and learning services that need to be addressed between (and beyond) national agencies.

31 There are a number of ways in which transnational education is being and should be further regulated since the current picture is patchy. As Adam comments:
"*Current national and international regulation of transnational education takes many forms and is, in consequence, fragmented, disorganised, uncoordinated, often voluntary and ineffective*".[7]

The forms of regulation that Adam and his colleagues list include:

- national systems of regulation and accreditation;
- conventions such as the Council of Europe/ UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in the European Region (Lisbon, 1997);
- Formal Recognition Networks such as the EU National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARIC Network) and the European Network of Information Centres (ENIC Network) and the Admissions Officers and Credential Evaluators (ACE Network) of the European Association for International Education;
- European Union Directives which provide a framework for the recognition of certain qualifications in regulated professions;
- Codes of Practice (including Codes produced by UNESCO/Council of Europe and National Agencies);
- Transparency Mechanisms such as the European Credit Transfer System and the Diploma Supplement;

[5] It is worth noting a possible contradiction in Van Damme's proposals: the very real variations in QA systems in different countries make it unlikely that mutual recognition arrangements would be valid without some streamlining and alignment of systems. Those who rely on recognition or validation arrangements to signify 'equivalence' need to be reassured that valid comparators underpin such arrangements. Any 'international accreditation' model would also face similar difficulties and requirements.

[6] Some examples have been collected by the UK's Quality Assurance Agency for HE: a Swiss college, accredited by a US Regional Accreditation Agency, sets up a campus in Greece and offers a franchised UK degree top-up programme to the US accredited one; a private Belgian college accredited by a US Accreditation Agency, validated by two different UK universities recruits almost exclusively non-Belgian students.

[7] Adam S et al (2001) Transnational Education Project: Report and Recommendations, Confederation of European Rectors' Conferences, Geneva (draft report 18.02.01)

- International Trade Agreements such as the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) of the World Trade Organisation.

5.2 Crossing organisation or sector borders

32 Some issues in this category are similar to those arising from transnational education.[8] For example, different quality criteria and standards may apply, there may be different purposes for the education and different modes of curriculum and evaluation leading to alternative forms of certification. Legal and financial status will vary (as described above) and there will probably be different sets of responsibilities between agents/providers of the education. Tariffs for credit may differ with associated differences in funding. Judgements of performance may differ with consequences for comparative measures of quality (eg 'drop-out rates'). One of the most difficult areas remains that of credit-rating and credit transfer across sectors, levels and forms of learning.

5.3 Crossing functional boundaries

33 The main challenge here is to specify and agree where responsibilities for the delivery and assurance of quality lie and to ensure that appropriate operational structures and systems exist. A number of examples of useful internal and external arrangements already exist, for example the internal quality councils established by Western Governors' University or the external kite-marking system used by the British Association for Open Learning to verify the quality of different functions such as learning centres or guidance systems. In long and complex supply chains, it may be best to adopt quality assurance arrangements that are based around formal contracts for the delivery of services, looking to commercial models for ways of dealing with liabilities. These might be supplemented by quality assurance systems that are similar to those used by corporate or for-profit universities.

5.4 Crossing boundaries of time and space: online learning

34 Some of the specific challenges related to online learning have already been outlined above, for example, assuring the quality of the learning environment (including curriculum design and appropriate and accessible resources for learning) and assuring the quality of interaction with and between students. Other aspects include ensuring appropriate support for learning, both technical and academic. The Internet facilitates access to a huge amount of information; supporting successful navigation to worthwhile resources is a key aspect of online quality systems.

35 The flexibility potentially created by developments in Communications and Information Technologies (C&IT) (for example, the ability to cross borders of various kinds) has brought new expectations and opportunities – both positive and negative. These are already having an impact on quality assurance arrangements. Some specific QA requirements include:

- (International) consumer protection against the public claims of non-authorised providers;
- International conventions to cover the import or

[8] One of the consultants involved in the project on Transnational Education (op cit) initiated by the ENIC/NARIC Networks and sponsored by the Confederation of European Union Rectors' Conferences has noted, informally, that one of the issues in transnational relationships is that, often, both types of borders – national and sectoral – are crossed simultaneously, causing recognition problems.

export of online learning from providers registered in other countries;
- Registration and protection of domain names;
- Security systems of various kinds: from registration/payment of fees to assessment and student records;
- Tracking systems of various kinds (and monitoring of such systems): for student progression, marking and grading of assignments, recording of attainment and transfer of credit;
- Quality standards to govern technical functioning, web-design, content, assessment and learner support;
- Review systems capable of monitoring/reviewing online modules, teaching and learning resources and programmes; peer review systems may need to take on a different form or be replaced;
- Validation systems to review/approve individual or group-designed programmes and learning experiences (these might be agency rather than institution based).

36 The above list is illustrative rather than comprehensive; there are already a number of useful guides to the quality assurance of online learning that could be drawn upon in the creation of new or revised arrangements for existing institutions or new providers.

6 Conclusion

37 This report has sought to outline the variety of 'new variables' that are having an impact on 'conventional' forms of higher education. It has also highlighted the range of quality assurance challenges associated with such developments. The typology presented now requires testing in practice across different kinds of 'higher learning' provision in different countries.

Acknowledgements

38 The author gratefully acknowledges the advice, comment and support of Peter Williams, Director of Institutional Review at the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in the UK who has managed this project. Carolyn Campbell, the QAA's International Officer and a member of the CRE's Transnational Education Project Team was also very helpful. The following members of the Project Advisory Group have provided invaluable comment on the draft report: Birute Mockiene, Andries van Helden and Ko Scheele, Sami Kanaan, Kauko Hamalainen, Matti Sinko and Sergio Machado dos Santos.

R.M.Middlehurst
28 December 2000

References and related bibliography

Adam S et al (2001) *Transnational Education Project: Report and Recommendations,* Confederation of European Rectors' Conferences, Geneva (draft report 18.02.01).

Adelman, C (2000) *A Parallel Postsecondary Universe: The Certification System in Information Technology,* Office of Educational Research and Improvement, US Dept.of Education.

Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals *The Business of Borderless Education: UK Perspectives*, vols 1–3, London, CVCP.

Cunningham S et al (1998) *New Media and Borderless Education: A Review of the Convergence between Global Media Networks and Higher Education Provision*, EIP Report 97/22, Canberra, DEETYA.

Cunningham S et al (2000) *The Business of Borderless Education*, EIP Report 00/3, Canberra, DEETYA.

Van Damme D (1999) "Internationalization and quality assurance: towards worldwide accreditation?" Paper commissioned for IAUP XIIth Triennial Conference, Brussels, 11–14 July, 1999.