HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE AGE OF GLOBALISATION:

The need for a new regulatory framework for recognition, quality assurance and accreditation

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1   Globalisation

Although internationalisation is not at all new to universities and higher education policies, the forces and tensions understood by the umbrella concept of 'globalisation' constitute a dramatically different environment for higher education institutions and policy makers to operate in. The changes to which higher education all over the globe increasingly is exposed, are complex and varied, even contradictory, and the comprehensive concept of globalisation are far from clear and well defined. Nevertheless, the concept of globalisation indicates that the various changes are somehow interrelated and creating new forms of interdependencies between actors, institutions and states. For the sake of this introductory paper, we stress the following tendencies within the overall force of globalisation:

- the *rise of the 'network' society*, driven by technological innovation and the increasing strategic importance of information, and symbolised by the expansion of the Internet;

- the *restructuring of the economic world system*, with the transformation to a post-industrial knowledge economy in the core, the emergence of newly industrialised nations, and the growth of new forms of dependency in the developing world; the rapid integration of the world economy with increasingly liberalised trade and commerce, resulting in new opportunities but also in relocation of production;

- the *political reshaping of the post-Cold War world order*, with strategic shifts in power balances and the emergence of new regions challenging the hegemony of the 20th-C superpowers, but also with increasing global insecurity and an endless list of regional and local conflicts;

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- the *growing real but also virtual mobility* of people, capital and knowledge, possible because of new transport facilities, the development of the Internet and an increasingly integrated world community, but also provoked by the will among the hopeless to escape poverty, new mass migrations and refugees escaping war and insecurity;

- the *erosion of the nation-state* and its capacity to master the economic and political transformations, together with the weakness of the international community and its organisations, widening the gap between economic activity and socio-political regulation, and leading to unbound global capitalism but also to new international forms of crime;

- the very *complex cultural developments*, with on the one hand aspects of homogenisation such as an increasing cultural exchange and multicultural reality, but also the worldwide hegemony of the English language and the spread of commercial culture, and on the other hand elements of cultural differentiation and segregation such as fundamentalisms of various kinds (including new nationalisms), regressive tendencies, intolerance and a general feeling of loss of identity.

These forces and tendencies are not the only ones which define the social environment in which higher education has to operate at the start of the 21st century; reference has to be made as well to the demographic challenges, the spread of aids, endemic poverty or religious conflicts, just to name a few. Globalisation also means that institutions and even states no longer can give their own answers to all these challenges, but that they also have become interdependent in their policy-making processes.

2   The impact of globalisation on higher education

The impact of the various trends and challenges related to globalisation on higher education institutions and policies is profound, but also diverse, depending on the specific location in the global arena. There is a danger of generalisation and oversimplification when dealing with globalisation; diversity has to be recognised but also to a certain extent promoted. Nevertheless, an attempt can be made to define some general tendencies in higher education that in one way or another relate to globalisation:

1. Globalisation and the transition to a knowledge society seem to *create new and tremendously important demands and exigencies* towards universities as knowledge-centres. Scientific research and development of technologies are crucial activities in a knowledge and information driven society and will become even more important in the future. Not only in the core countries of the developed world, but increasingly also in other parts of the globe will research and development activities become the motor of economic growth and social development. Because there is a move away from the traditional scientific research paradigm and towards more 'Mode 2' (Gibbons) oriented research, and because of the fact that also outside the fields of natural sciences research becomes strategically important for corporations and governments, the role and importance of science and technology will continue to grow. Since long, scientific research is intrinsically internationally oriented, but the

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internationalisation of research has accelerated strongly during the last years. International communication (publishing, conferences, electronic networking) within the scientific community and quality norms for scientific personnel benchmarked to international standards have to be developed by universities that aspire the quality label of research universities. As a side effect of the globalisation of research and development, the academic profession itself becomes more mobile and an highly competitive international market of researchers is emerging, with organised migration of researchers and brain drain as one of the consequences. The new role of universities as 'knowledge centres' stretches out to other functions than science and research however. Universities are called upon to take up responsibilities in society and culture at large, to act as mediators in conflicts, to deepen democracy, to dynamise cultures, to function as centres for critical debate and ethical conscience. The high demands placed upon universities worldwide create tensions in institutions, and at the same time stimulate other organisations to engage also in those kinds of activities, sometimes with the idea in mind that traditional universities will not be able to meet those new demands.

2. Many observers expect _an increase in the demand for higher education worldwide_. In the developed world the knowledge society will ask for even more highly qualified knowledge workers. Economic development, modernisation and demographic pressure will fuel the demand for higher education also in other parts of the world, only limited by the inability of the poor to finance the cost of higher learning. Local institutions nor governments will have enough resources to deal with this massification of demand in many countries, leaving an unmet demand in the upper and middle classes of many countries in the ex-Soviet Union and the southern hemisphere to international and virtual providers. The demand for higher education will not only grow quantitatively but will also become more diverse. Despite some decline in their value as credentials on the labour market in the developed world, traditional qualifications (degrees and diplomas) will remain the most important product of higher education institutions, but they will be supplemented by specialised programmes, vocational and competency-oriented training and modular courses adapted to a new lifelong learning demand, even if higher education institutions are not the main providers in these fields in many countries. In other parts of the world however, credentialism still is on the rise, sometimes leading to a kind of 'paper chase', fuelled by the (sometimes overrated) expectation that degrees and diplomas are the gateway to economic prosperity and social security by promising a job in the public sector. New communication technologies and the Internet provide new opportunities for a more flexible delivery of higher education, thereby creating a new demand in some countries and meeting demand in others where traditional institutions are incapable to do so. _All together, these developments underpin the assertion that higher education will become one of the booming markets in the years to come. This expansion and massification will not be matched by a proportional rise in public expenditure, leading to an increase in private and commercial provision and creating huge problems of access and equity._

3. Internationalisation and globalisation lead to an _erosion of the national regulatory and policy frameworks_ in which universities are embedded. Most modern higher education institutions are product of national developments and policies and are fully integrated in national educational systems. In an increasingly international

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environment – marked by a globalised and liberalised marketplace, globalising professions, mobility of skilled labour, an international arena of scientific research and academic personnel, and international competition between universities and between universities and other institutions and companies –, the national character of policy frameworks creates more and more tensions. Institutions already acknowledge this and are developing partnerships, consortia and networks to strengthen their position in the global arena. Mobility programmes, such as ERASMUS/SOCRATES or UMAP, and schemes such as the European credit transfer system have tried to stimulate internationalisation in higher education with full respect to the various national policy frameworks. Globalisation challenges this more or less voluntaristic policy and asks for more thorough international harmonisation of policy frameworks, higher education structures, degree systems and even curricula. The process started with the Bologna-Declaration (1999) in Europe is a clear example of this, but in the context of free-trade agreements, like for example NAFTA or MERCOSUR, similar tendencies of international harmonisation of higher education systems exist also in other parts of the world. In the longer run this eventually will lead to the generalisation of the bachelor/master-degree structure, the hegemony of English as the lingua franca in higher education and scientific research, the development of compatible credit transfer and accumulation systems to recognise, transport and validate teaching and learning experiences, the international recognition of degrees and diplomas, a negotiated consensus on core knowledge and competencies and their place in curricula, especially in specific professional fields, etc. Like in other social fields, globalisation will create resistance and countertendencies in the field of higher education, asking for the recognition of the importance of the national language, the specific degree architecture, the cultural embeddedness of curricula, etc. Such tendencies are not always to be seen as retrograde or counterproductive to globalisation. Globalisation in higher education does not necessarily imply international standardisation and uniformity, but asks for policies balancing the global and the local. To a large extent resistance to globalisation in higher education is also motivated by a rejection of the marketisation perceived to be inherent in globalisation and a defence of a 'public good' approach to higher education. However, many make the error to identify a 'public good' perspective towards higher education with an exclusively national policy framework. *An international regulatory framework is needed to transcend the eroded national policy contexts and to some extent to steer the global integration of the higher education systems. Without such a framework the globalisation of higher education will be unrestrained and wild, generating a lot of resistance and protest.*

4. One of the most visible manifestations of globalisation is *the emerging 'borderless' higher education market*. The huge increase in the worldwide demand in higher education, the budgetary and capacity problems of many nations to meet this demand, and the opportunities created by new communication technologies and the Internet, shape an environment in which new, mostly for-profit providers successfully can expand the supply of educational services. Universities from North America, Europe and Australia take initiatives to reach out their educational provision to this international higher education market, by active recruitment of international, fee-paying students to the home institution, by establishing branch campuses or franchising and twinning agreements with local institutions, or via

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distance education and e-learning and other transnational activities. The international demand for higher education has also invited new providers from outside the higher education sector to enter the scene. The 'business of borderless education' comprises various forms and developments, among which also combinations are possible, such as new for-profit private universities, corporate 'universities', media companies delivering educational programmes, professional associations becoming directly active in higher education, and companies with high training needs establishing their own training facilities. Many of these new providers extensively use the Internet as delivery channel; in some cases they develop into real 'cyber-universities' with a very limited physical presence. Drifting away from the old academic culture of traditional universities – and sometimes even openly questioning it –, and blurring the distinctions between academic, research-driven education and vocational training, they defy the age-old identity of universities. In some niches, such as business administration studies, their substantial growth poses a direct threat to the market position of existing traditional universities, although in many other sectors of mass delivery of initial higher education degrees their capacity to compete with the publicly funded institutions is very limited. However, in some countries, mainly in Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union and the developing world, their presence even on this level is substantial, due to insufficient domestic public supply and the growth of demand in middle classes willing to pay for higher education. Although there are also less reputable initiatives and real 'diploma mills', the reaction of national governments and traditional universities in some countries to these new providers is sometimes exaggerated. To some extent their development even enriches the higher education sector, awakes innovation also in the old institutions and challenges productively the academic tradition. Still, important issues of access and equity on the one hand and quality on the other are raised by the global rise of private, for-profit higher education.

3   The need for a new regulatory framework

The developments described above surely will have a profound impact on the higher education system worldwide, even if there are many unknown elements and the exact size of some trends remains unclear. The massive character of the developments and the fact that they escape the well-known regulatory frameworks at institutional and national policy levels impede the development of a coherent position from the higher education community. However, the impact of globalisation on higher education generates a number of crucial challenges, which ask for a new and international regulatory framework.

1. A first challenge concerns *the regulation of new providers and the various forms of transnational higher education*. There are huge differences in the way countries are dealing with private universities, for-profit providers and transnational higher education. In some countries – Greece and Israel can stand as examples – there is an almost total refusal to include those non-national providers in the national higher education system or to recognise their diplomas and degrees. Other countries, especially in the developing world – Malaysia can be mentioned as an example –, recognise the incapacity to meet the increasing demand by their domestic providers and welcome foreign providers. One can say that in most countries the traditional viewpoint still is that higher education is a public responsibility, that institutions have

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to be publicly recognised and financed, and that it is the national state that gives formal public validity to their degrees, leaving not much space to private and foreign providers. The notion 'public' is solely identified with 'national'; thus, institutions which are seen as public in their mother country, become private when engaging in transnational activities in other countries. The distinction public-private, which has been perceived as essential in higher education policy for such a long time, becomes very blurred in the age of globalisation.

In principle, there is no reason to oppose a more positive and open attitude towards private and transnational higher education, even when defending a 'public good' approach to higher education. In modern policy approaches the idea must be accepted that private and non-national institutions can also fulfill public functions. Although the traditional higher education institutions have a tradition and specific academic culture and value-system to defend, it should be strong enough to engage in a more competitive situation with providers coming from another background. The monopoly created by national policy frameworks, which undoubtedly has some 'protectionist' aspects, is not a promising environment to tackle future challenges. Moreover, this policy debate risks to be overruled by the tendencies to see transnational higher education merely as a trade issue, in need of liberalisation. Some observers see the future in a completely liberalised global higher education market, where national authorities and traditional universities no longer will be able to 'protect' their markets and impose their values on students and society. Even if such views still seem to be rather marginal, the factual policy context will change dramatically if the proposals in the WTO to include higher education services in the GATS are adopted, since then 'knowledge services' can be freely traded in the global marketplace. Since these proposals enjoy intensive lobbying from the for-profit providers, are backed by the US government and receive also support from some developing nations seeing it as an opportunity to increase the supply of higher education in their countries, it is likely that they will be realised. Even if formally public provision of higher education will be exempted, marketisation and increasing competition in the international higher education market will be the consequences of liberalisation, further eroding the 'public good' approach in higher education and the traditional academic culture in universities. For the potential student and the general public, the situation will not be very clear and transparent; the actual value of qualifications delivered by private and foreign providers will remain unclear in most countries, even the question on which grounds institutions can label themselves 'universities' will be very difficult to answer. However, a solely defensive reaction, falling back to traditional and exclusively national regulation to support a 'public good' approach and to guarantee open access and 'consumer' protection, protecting the domestic public higher education sector, would be very conservative, short-sighted and ineffective. *What is needed is a truly international and sustainable policy framework for dealing with private and transnational providers, reconciling the interests of national governments, the traditional public higher education sector, for-profit providers and the needs of the demand side of students and the general public interest. It is very important from the start to stress that such a framework is distinct from and comes before the more ambitious quality assurance and accreditation framework dealt with in the next paragraph. This framework should transcend the basic requirements imposed by national and international trade and commerce laws*

and regulations, but should refrain also from becoming a comprehensive and complicated bureaucratic procedure of 'recognition'. It should have the ambition to cover physical transnational education as well as virtual delivery via the Internet. Minimally, this international regulatory framework should contain:

- *an international glossary of common concepts, definitions and terminology,*

- *some basic rules to grant providers the 'licence to teach',*

- *an internationally standardised procedure of registration (including identification of who is in control and who can be held accountable),*

- *some rules concerning the correct use of the basic labels such as 'university', 'doctorate', 'professor', 'master degree', 'accredited', etc.,*

- *the removal of existing barriers to mobility of students and staff, not dealt with in international trade agreements,*

- *some basic elements of a professional code of good practice (building further on work done by UNESCO, Council of Europe a.o.),*

- *a basic arrangement of the intellectual property issues associated with private higher education, and*

- *an agreement on issues of consumer protection and rights of complaint.*

Private and transnational providers should perceive it as in their own interest to actively and positively engage in the realisation of such a regulatory framework. Moreover, in addition to the international regulatory framework the combined public and private higher education sector should be stimulated to establish their own self-regulation, in order to rule out bad practice and to eliminate charlatans, rogue providers and untrustworthy diploma mills, so that they can build a worldwide trust and esteem as respectable service sector. Necessary for this are strong associations of higher education institutions, both of the traditional academic universities and of new, for-profit providers.

2. A second and not at all new challenge is finding a comprehensive solution for the issue of <u>the international transferability and recognition of qualifications and credits</u>. This issue has two sub-questions which in fact are merely two sides of the same problem, namely the recognition of foreign diplomas and degrees and the recognition of diplomas and degrees delivered by non-recognised institutions. During the last decade some important initiatives have been taken by a number of international organisations, mainly in Europe (UNESCO, CEPES, Council of Europe, European Commission, etc.), and the so-called Lisbon Convention is an important step forward, exchanging the old concept of equivalence to that of a more flexible recognition. Nevertheless, in a context of growing mobility of skilled labour and globalisation of the professions, the rather strict national regulations concerning recognition of qualifications create many problems and frequent unnecessary insecurity and suffering for individuals and families. The enormous diversity in

national higher education systems and degree architecture is still mirrored by complicated bureaucratic procedures to investigate whether a foreign or unknown degree matches the domestic ones. Even countries defending a liberalisation of higher education trade, such as the US, apply very strict and severe procedures for the validation of foreign degrees in their own country. Backing this conservative and bureaucratic attitude is not only the will to protect the own, well-known institutions (and own policies), but also an often unrealistic appreciation of the quality of the domestic degrees, not checked by a truly objective comparative understanding of the value of and diversity in foreign degrees. Even if an understanding of the impact of globalisation on higher education and mobility of professional labour would call for a truly international approach, radically breaking with the national control over recognition of qualifications, it is unrealistic to expect that national authorities will be willing to give up this crucial competence. It is regrettable that apparently this issue cannot be resolved within the field of educational policy, and that it has to be circumvented by policies regarding professional mobility, as is the case in the European Union and also in the context of NAFTA. The professions, which are more and more organised on an international scale – as is the case with for example engineering, medicine, accounting and many others – are ready to adopt more flexible attitudes in this matter than most national authorities. In this field some important international agreements, such as the Washington Accord in the field of engineering and technology, pave the way for an international approach.

A perhaps less important, but similar problem concerns the recognition of study periods and credits obtained abroad or in non-recognised institutions. Also within programmes there increasingly is mobility, promoted by programmes such as ERASMUS / SOCRATES in the European Union. In the US and between countries that have adopted a similar system, there is at least a common definition of what a credit represents. In the European Union the ECTS is generalising as an exchange device, although there also are proposals within the context of the Bologna process to develop it into a real credit transfer and accumulation system, even encompassing lifelong learning credits. The development of modular courses and the evolution towards less standardised and more flexible curricula will increase the importance of credits as units for validation of learning experiences. The growing interest in recognition of experiential learning in higher education and lifelong learning even will call for a definition of credits, which is independent of formal learning, as is still the case in both the American and European concepts of credit. The transferability of such credits over national boundaries will not be easy, when many countries even refuse to recognise formal academic study in institutions beyond their administrative supervision.

Some experts expect that focusing on the outcomes of education and learning, thus leaving behind the evaluation of the formal inputs in the learning process, can resolve this issue. It is interesting to see that there are such developments in the field of vocational training, for example in France with the *centres de bilan de compétences*. In the field of higher education however, there is some interest in shifting the focus to outcomes and competencies, but no general willingness to make a complete abstraction of the formal aspects of the educational experience. Other experts think that the issue of recognition of degrees and credits will automatically be resolved with the development of international accreditation systems. It is however unlikely

that a general framework of international accreditation will be realised in the short run and that countries automatically will accept the consequences of it for the recognition of qualifications. This strategy would leave mobile graduates and students in the cold for an unacceptable long period of time.

Thus, there is no alternative than to take a new international initiative in the field of recognition of qualifications. The higher education sector and the national educational authorities have to be convinced that the issue is serious and pressing, that it is not wise to leave this issue to the courts (as is increasingly the case for example in Europe), that the regulation in the field of professional recognition leads to an erosion of educational competences, and that they have to take up the responsibility to find a common, international approach themselves. The growing harmonisation and integration of higher education systems, degree structures and curricula among countries joining a common 'higher education area' eventually create a more positive environment for higher education institutions and national authorities to move to a more flexible attitude in this field. International associations and organisations can take some concrete steps to facilitate this process. The outcome of the process should be no less than a more or less automatic recognition of foreign degrees and credits within 'higher education areas' with similar higher education systems and quality assurance procedures. To include degrees delivered by non-recognised private providers, some additional measures have to be taken on top of those suggested in point 1. There has to be some kind of international 'recognition' of the institution or institutional accreditation, and the programme concerned should be subject to the same quality assurance and accreditation procedures as those applied to the already recognised institutions and programmes.

3. The third and probably most important challenge of course is <u>*developing an international approach to quality assurance and accreditation*</u>. In the previous decade quality assurance and accreditation systems in higher education have been developed in many countries. By far the most of them are national schemes, oriented to the domestic higher education systems. As a consequence, transnational activities of universities and especially distance education and e-learning activities in many cases are not covered by these national quality assurance and accreditation schemes. Since there is a great variety in and limited international communication on standards and benchmarking, the readability and transparency of these quality assurance and accreditation systems to other countries, foreign institutions and international students is low, and therefore the relevance of these national schemes in the context of globalisation of higher education is limited as well.

In a number of countries accreditation schemes have been developed as an instrument to regulate and control the higher education market. There is no generally accepted definition of accreditation in higher education, and in many cases the term is used also to indicate procedures of recognition of institutions, ex ante authorisation or licensing of programmes of new providers, approval of nationally controlled curricula, etc. Here, we use a rather pragmatic definition of accreditation, namely the formal and public statement by an external body, resulting from a quality assurance procedure, that agreed standards of quality are met by an institution or programme. An accredited status can have specific consequences, for example regarding the degree-awarding capacity, the recognition of those degrees, funding, credit-transfer,

access to postgraduate programmes in third institutions, etc. The situation with regard to accreditation internationally is very diverse, with the differences mainly concentrating on the issue of the role of the state in accreditation. In some countries, such as the US, voluntary accreditation of institutions has a long tradition. The American example has led to the development of accreditation in many other countries, but mostly driven by the national authorities willing to control the domestic higher education market. In Europe accreditation is a much debated issue in the context of the Bologna process and opinions are divided, with countries moving to various kinds of accreditation schemes and others opposing it, some institutions seeing it as a necessary instrument to guarantee quality and to differentiate the market and others seeing it as an intolerable attack on their autonomy. It is clear that, a Dutch-Flemish experiment excepted, there is a strict national focus in the European debate on accreditation and a resistance against any form of transnational accreditation system. And those who think about international accreditation, sometimes see it as a strategy to differentiate a specific group of countries or institutions from those outside, and thus to create new divisions. This is often also the case with networks of universities developing mutual inter-institutional accreditation procedures. This short overview illustrates that inter- or transnational accreditation virtually is non-existing and that sometimes accreditation even is used to protect the domestic higher education market and to counteract the development of private and transnational higher education.

The establishment of transnational professional accreditation compensates the absence of truly inter- or transnational public accreditation systems to some extent. Already clearly developed in the fields of engineering (ABET) and management studies (EQUIS), but in development in other professions, these schemes of international professional accreditation fill in the gap left by the national authorities and the higher education community. Another development is the import of foreign accreditors, as is the case of American accreditors or the British Open University validation scheme asked to accredit programmes or institutions in other countries. The establishment of organisations specifically devoted to the accreditation of transnational accreditation is another interesting case, although up to now the most important endeavour in this field, GATE, has not be very successful due to its links with a particular for-profit provider. These developments have in common that they originated outside the higher education community and policy fields, demonstrating the inability of the global higher education world itself to develop its own systems of transnational self-regulation. They also indicate that international accreditation is becoming a reality, although external to the international higher education community itself, and that institutions in the future will be facing a situation of 'multiple accreditation' coming from various origins.

There is a growing agreement on the viewpoint that globalisation in higher education urgently asks for a transnational approach to quality assurance and accreditation, but there are huge differences of vision on how to achieve this and which steps have to be taken. A minimal strategy is to improve communication and exchange among national quality assurance agencies, in the hope that this will lead to a kind of harmonisation and international benchmarking of trustworthy standards and methodologies and the gradual mutual recognition of agencies and schemes.

This minimal strategy, defended for example by ENQA, legitimating the quality assurance and accreditation competencies of the national states, risks to take too much time and to remain too voluntaristic in the light of the profound and accelerating impact of globalisation. A second strategy is to develop a kind of soft validation and approval procedure for existing quality assurance and accreditation systems. International associations such as IAUP think of the possibility to establish a clearinghouse of trustworthy quality assurance and accreditation systems in the world, based on a mutually accepted definition of concepts and basic standards and criteria. Following on this, a third strategy could be the development of real meta-accreditation on an international scale. There are no real significant examples of this for the moment and it is difficult to imagine where such an initiative would derive the authority and legitimacy from to take up a well-defined and trustworthy position in the field. However, the fact that some international professional accreditation schemes succeed in establishing their authority suggests that in principle it would be possible also for the international higher education community to do the same. International organisations such as UNESCO could provide the moral authority and legitimacy to start some experiments in this area. A fourth strategy, the development of a real international accreditation agency, seems to be very unrealistic for the moment, given the unwillingness of national states (and quality assurance agencies) to transfer that kind of crucial competence to an international agency, but also because many fear that this will lead to a very bureaucratic, costly apparatus escaping any kind of control from governments and higher education institutions.

There is no doubt that this issue asks for urgent consideration and action on an international level. The impact of globalisation is such that without a trustworthy international quality scheme of whatever kind that could balance the development of the global higher education market, we will have to face severe problems in the future of which especially the countries in the less developed parts of the world and their students will be the victims. It is difficult to underestimate the risks associated with various kinds of rogue providers and diploma mills. Growing insecurity about the quality status of foreign degrees will lead to even more severe checks at the level of national governments and a more protectionist attitude among institutions, creating more problems regarding recognition of qualifications and mobility of professional labour that those already existing today, and further inhibiting that development of transnational higher education. It is in the self-interest of the global higher education community to develop transnational quality assurance and accreditation systems that can counterbalance the globalisation of higher education.

As a start it is worthwhile to consider some initial steps:

- *an agreement on a common set of definitions and a glossary of concepts regarding international quality assurance and accreditation;*

- *an agreement on a basic set of principles, a.o. that quality assurance and accreditation primarily are a kind of self-regulation of the higher education system, that accreditation is only possible on the basis of existing quality assurance experiences, that international accreditation must respect institutional*

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autonomy and diversity;

- *an initiative to convince the international higher education community, its key actors and its associations that it has to develop transnational forms of self-regulation with respect to quality itself, at the risk of giving away the initiative in this crucial issue;*

- *an initiative to national authorities to convince them to seek international cooperation in the field of quality assurance and accreditation;*

- *an initiative to seek the cooperation of the internationally organised professions in the development of an international regulatory framework with regard to quality assurance and accreditation;*

- *start of work by experts on the analysis and evaluation of standards, criteria and benchmarking procedures used in existing quality assurance and accreditation systems, in order to investigate the possibility of the definition of internationally agreed minimum standards.*

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