

2nd IAU Global Meeting of Associations

Rationale, Goal and Expected Outcomes for IAU Opening remarks by Eva Egron-Polak, IAU Secretary General

Bonjour. Il me fait grand plaisir d'ajouter mes mots de bienvenue à ceux du Président de l'AIU et de M. Eric Esperet, délégué générale de la Conférence des présidents d'universités. C'est un grand honneur pour nous de vous réunir pour cette 2eme réunion globale de l'Association internationale des Universités, une réunion qui constitue aussi une première collaboration avec la CPU. J'espère que cela ne sera pas la dernière collaboration.

It is wonderful to welcome representatives of most of the associations that are already IAU members and regular participants at IAU events. As well, it is a pleasure to welcome representatives of associations that have never taken part in past IAU conferences and who may, we hope, consider becoming IAU members in the future.

According to the IAU World Database on Higher Education, there are a little over 17,000 higher education institutions in the world, recognized by their respective governments or competent. Altogether, as associations, and even if we discount the fact that in some cases, we have partial overlap in our membership, the organizations assembled in this room, represent quite a large proportion of these HEIs. This level of representation of the world higher education community is quite impressive so in some ways, we have already succeeded.

As an international association, and in line with one of our priority themes, the IAU's initial and on-going focus in the area of Quality has been on higher education provided across borders. Many of you, but not all, I might underline, have signed the declaration ***Sharing Higher Education Across Borders: a Statement on behalf of HEIs worldwide***. This Statement was elaborated by IAU and three other associations – ACE, AUCC and CHEA. It is included in the background documents provided for this Meeting. The Statement was designed and intended as a means to alert our community of the issues at stake in the growing phenomenon of cross border higher education or as the French call it, *la delocalization* – using a term that was, until recently more frequently applied to and seemed only appropriate for the manufacturing industry. Today this term describes the process of moving whole institutions or programs off-shore rather well.

This document was largely discussed during the first IAU Global Meeting of Associations held in Alexandria, Egypt in 2005. It was pointed out that in the Statement the associations set out principles that, if applied, would make certain that benefits of cross border education would be shared by all and academic values would prevail in this trend. This project was undertaken in parallel to the elaboration of UNESCO/OECD Guidelines on the same issue, a process in which IAU was also very active. The Web reference for these Guidelines is also in the document you have received.

But the agenda for this 2nd Global Meeting of Associations is broader than cross border higher education. It invites all of you to discuss and compare what University Associations – or the organizations that bring together the leadership of HEIs at various levels, are doing to enhance quality higher education offered both at home and abroad.

The 2005 IAU Global Survey on Internationalization indicates that the second most important risk in internationalization is the growth of ‘Degree Mills’ or of higher education of dubious quality. Degree mills do not only work internationally, for the most part they are located in someone’s national jurisdiction and thus their existence underlines the need for mechanisms which ensure that learners can count on the quality of the institutions and programs they attend.

Clearly, national legislation, quality assurance agencies, accreditation boards and other diverse processes and approaches to verify quality exist in many countries. Those agencies or individuals entrusted with this work play an important role in this field. Yet, associations that represent the collective interest of HEIs must also play a role. What exactly this role may be will vary according to the national context, the strength of other actors, the level of autonomy of higher education institutions and many other variables, including as well, the strength and mandate of the association.

Despite the diversity among you, in organizing this meeting the IAU was convinced that there is more convergence in your approaches than divergence. It was also easy to assume, that as membership associations, most of us need to focus on assisting our members to enhance or improve their work and help them find ways to demonstrate the quality of what they do. Furthermore, as associations we ought to be ahead of our members in helping them adjust to the pressures to which they are exposed in regards to quality.

This has been the overall rationale for organizing this 2nd Global Meeting on the theme of ‘enhancing quality’. As for the goals and expected outcomes being pursued by IAU in this meeting, they are relatively simple:

1. Once again to offer you a forum or a platform to learn more about each others’ work, to learn from each others’ experiences, to compare and analyse what approaches may be successful, while others fail. Understanding these failures would also be most instructive.
2. We wish to ascertain, in the area of enhancing quality of HE, what are most commonly shared approaches and services that you offer as associations to your members and what difficulties may be most recurrent.
3. Identifying initiatives that we could further develop in collaboration and on a global scale would be a very welcome outcome as well.
4. A more selfish goal for IAU is to make those of you who do not know us, more familiar with our work, raise awareness of the policy statement I mentioned earlier and perhaps incite you to endorse it, to use and disseminate the companion Checklist for Good Practice and in a more general fashion to get involved in IAU work, perhaps even become members if you have not done so already.

5. The final expected outcome is to hear from your discussion whether an event such as this remains useful and what might be the focus of the 3rd meeting which could again take place in 2 year's time.

I too wish you a lively and fruitful meeting with lots of discussion and networking.

