CONFERENCE REPORT

HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN: MANAGING CHANGE AND ENSURING QUALITY

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A one-day conference organised by the Coimbra Group in conjunction with the University of Malta, and the support of the Foundation for International Studies and the European Union. Malta, 25 November 1996. Final Report of the Rapporteur General.

Introduction

T he aim of this report is to give an overview of the key themes that were raised during a one-day conference entitled 'Higher Education in the Mediterranean: Managing Change and Ensuring Quality', held in Malta on the 25th of November 1996, under the auspices of the Coimbra Group in conjunction with the University of Malta, and with the support of the Foundation for International Studies and the European Union. The present report synthesises the main contributions made by presenters, and connects these to the central questions that provided a framework for the meeting.

The conference brought together European and Mediterranean experts with the intention of facilitating an exchange of experiences, ideas and strategies in the management of change and particularly in the assurance of quality in higher education systems. The programme was structured in such a way as to provide opportunities for both European and Mediterranean countries to describe their countries' and/or their regions' reactions to issues that have a bearing on both change and quality management, namely the massification of higher education and the concomitant reduction of state budgets. At various points throughout the conference it became clear that despite the economic, social, political and cultural differences between European and non-EU Mediterranean countries, much the same concerns were being expressed. This facilitated the creation of a positive and productive environment, where issues raised by the different speakers and discussants resonated with the experiences of all the scholars present.

The report is presented in four sections. Addresses delivered in the opening session come first. This is followed by a section on the issue of networking in international education, where the information communicated by Dr. J. Divis in

the session dedicated to 'Transparency and Information in Higher Education' is also included. A further section summarises the main points broached in the commissioned papers dedicated to the themes of 'management of change' and 'quality assurance'. The conclusion identifies a number of transversal themes that emerged during the conference proceedings.

Opening session

The opening session of the conference consisted in four short addresses by the Rector of the University of Malta (Professor Roger Ellul Micallef), two representatives from the EU Commission (Mr. Giuseppe Massangioli of DGXII/C and Mr. P. van der Hijden of DGXXII/A), and the Maltese Minister of Education and National Culture (Mr. Evarist Batolo). After a brief overview of the historical development of the University of Malta from its beginning as a *Collegium Melitense* in 1592, Professor Roger Ellul Micallef noted that the concept of quality assurance was not new to universities. Whether one looks at the university from the tradition promoted by Humboldt, Newman, or Napoleon, one immediately has to recognise that academic auditing has always been of paramount importance. What has changed has been the repertoire of mechanisms and tools in the carrying out of such auditing, and such changes have largely been the result of new challenges that have arisen as higher education institutions everywhere have been transformed to mass education establishments. Together with access, the issue of mobility and increased inter-university collaboration has also put pressure on the higher education sector to ensure the transfer and recognition of study units, through systems of quality auditing. Drawing on his experience as chairperson of the Council of Europe's Committee for Higher Education and Research, Professor Ellul Micallef warned that in response to increased pressure for accountability exerted on universities both by government and society, one must beware adopting a technicist and petty-minded approach to quality auditing. Rather than, for instance, giving priority to the measurement of the length of study units in different universities, it is much more meaningful to focus on course content and curricula, and to ensure quality therein.

Such views were echoed by Mr. Giuseppe Massangioli, head of the Division within DGXXII/C of the European Commission responsible for relations with third countries in matters dealing with education and training. Mr. Massangioli noted that while tools and indicators had been developed by the OECD in order to evaluate higher education sectors, these were merely guidelines to be used within the context of individual countries as systems managers confronted their own establishments. 'Quality' did not have an absolute referent, and each country

had to remain sensitive to its own particular socio-economic and cultural context as it set about confronting the issue of quality assurance. It certainly was not the intention of the European Union to establish benchmarks which member states had to conform to, for the principle of subsidiarity in the fields of education and training was entrenched in the Treaty of Maastricht. However, the process of integration should bring with it added-value thanks to the sharing of experience and the transfer of knowledge that would help to encourage increased good practice, and in this regard programmes such as SOCRATES, *Leonardo* and *Youth for Europe* are prime facilitators. This knowledge and experience transfer is extended to countries that are not yet member states of the European Union, through a ripple effect that has embraced, among others, EFTA countries, Eastern European countries, and particularly after the Barcelona Conference of 1995, Mediterranean countries.

The Minister of Education and Culture for Malta, Mr. Evarist Bartolo, highlighted the usefulness of the conference in facilitating learning from the experiences of other countries. Each country, however, had to remain sensitive to its own specific context and challenges, and to ultimately take responsibility for the strategies it adopted. In this regard, Mr. Bartolo noted that for Malta for instance, the assurance of quality at the tertiary education level raised the issue of quality assurance at the earlier levels, that is in the primary and secondary school sectors. Indeed, he expressed his conviction that the University ought to be an educational leader and collaborate with other educational partners in order to promote the highest educational standards at all levels.

Mr. P. van der Hijden, responsible for the SOCRATES programme within DGXXII/A of the European Commission, considered the EU 'White Paper on Education and Lifelong Learning', placing this within the general context of the EU policy for education, and connecting it to the key themes raised at the conference. Like Mr. Massangioli, Mr. van der Hijden highlighted the subsidiarity principle that regulates EU action in the field of education, emphasising that a key strategy adopted by the Union is to encourage and support exchange of ideas between different education systems, a strategy which constitutes a 'soft instrument' with no legal and binding force, but which can nevertheless be very effective in bringing about change. Similarly effective is another EU strategy, namely the publication of memoranda, white papers, green papers and so on, which while generally contested, do start debate around themes which all accept as being central. A most recent White Paper concerning 'Competition, Growth and Employment', for instance, highlighted, among other things, the importance of education and training for the economic performance of Europe. The issues raised in this White Paper were taken up by Edith Cresson, the Commissioner in charge of Education and Training, who identified action fields as a programme for

activity for the future. Among these are questions related to the production of new knowledge, the development of linkages between education and industry, the provision of a second chance to low-achievers in schools, and the promotion of foreign language learning. Other issues connect directly with the themes central to the conference, such as the need for Universities to adapt to change, particularly to the challenge presented by the information society, by the demand for lifelong learning, and by the mobility of workers in a European context. The 'White Paper on Education and Lifelong Learning', while not imposing 'European standards' in quality provision, does encourage transparency and hence an effective form of accountability. Practices such as the European Credit Transfer System lead to information about courses and educational practices which, while allowing each institution to maintain its autonomy, nevertheless renders them open to examination and critique

Networking in international education

A key theme running throughout the conference concerned networking between higher education institutions as a vehicle for the development of common strategies in front of common challenges. Three speakers representing the COIMBRA group (Dr. P. Floor, Chairperson of the COIMBRA Steering Committee), UNESCO (Ms S. Uvalic-Trumbic, from the CEPES office), and the Council of Europe (Dr. Michael Vorbeck) addressed this theme, and highlighted their experiences in initiating and co-ordinating such networks. Dr. J. Nivis' address on the European experience in 'Transparency and Information in Higher Education' raised several points relevant to this section, and is therefore summarised here.

Dr. Peter Floor gave an overview of the different kinds of networks within the COIMBRA Group, namely personal networks, subject area networks, institutional networks, and purpose driven networks – all of which have as a main aim the creation of opportunities for added value, adding quality in processes and in output through sharing of information, facilitation of contacts, project development, lobbying and the involvement of members in specific activities, particularly through the creation of sub-networks with specific tasks to be carried out. Dr. Floor mentioned some of the challenges and difficulties that the COIMBRA Group had to face, among these being the tradition of autonomy in many universities, which keeps them from surrendering particularistic interests in favour of goals established by the network. Another challenge is the difficulty of generating enough financial resources to support the activities that are planned. With regards to Mediterranean universities, Dr. Floor outlined a number of

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recommendations. Among these were the necessity for such Universities to have a higher profile internationally and to become known through networking, and through joining such organisations as the European Association of International Education. Dr. Floor suggested that Mediterranean Universities should specialise and try to achieve areas of excellence rather than attempting to spread themselves out too thinly and being more divergent than the human and financial resources allow. One good way of doing this is to establish linkages and networking in subject areas, which is very beneficial for educational co-operation, for teacher mobility, and for research in subjects related to Mediterranean problems, where they can establish themselves as leaders in the field.

Ms Stamenka Uvalic-Trumbic, programme specialist from UNESCO's European Centre for Higher Education (CEPES), shared her experience in networking in international education with the conference participants, highlighting the fact that UNESCO's conception of Europe was broader than that of several organisations since it included 49 states, stretching from Vancouver to Vladivostock, and hence was linked to other regions of the world. Ms Uvalic-Trumbic briefly outlined the main activities related to the recognition of qualification in higher education in Europe, noting that UNESCO was currently involved in elaborating a new joint convention with the Council of Europe on this matter. The convention will be further strengthened if the European Union eventually accepts the invitation to ratify the agreement. If this happened, 49 states will have one legal instrument for the recognition of higher degrees. This will have policy implications not only in the area of accreditation, but also in the monitoring of quality and in the management of new challenges such as the recognition of qualifications of refugee students. The CEPES office is also involved in the restructuring of higher education in a number of central and eastern European countries, striving to develop partnerships with Rumania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Ukraine. It participates actively in other networking structures, such as ENIC (a joint network of equivalence and mobility centres that works closely with a similar EU network, NARIC), the UNESCO chairs programme and UNITWIN, promoting linkages in interdisciplinary fields, particularly in teacher education, ecology, energy, environmental protection, rural development, gender issues and so on. Ms Uvalic-Trumbic finally drew the participants' attention to UNESCO's forthcoming World Conference on Higher Education, which is to take place in Paris in 1998, and which will produce a global document that will further develop the three key themes that had already been developed in UNESCO's 1994 paper on higher education, namely relevance, quality and internationalisation. CEPES is in charge of preparing the European input to the conference, and towards this end is networking with other organisations. A preparatory conference will be held in

Palermo, while Greece has proposed to hold a conference in Thessaloniki to prepare a Mediterranean input for the world conference.

Dr. Michael Vorbeck presented the Council of Europe's experience in networking, with particular reference to the sector of higher education. Dr. Vorbeck noted that the Council of Europe, with 44 member states, laid a stress on the community of common values in Europe, as well as the continent's common culture and history over two millennia. The Higher Education Committee is one of the main bodies of the organisation, bringing together two representatives from each member state, one from government and another one from the university sector. The Committee deals with higher education policy, and the programme of activities concerns four main areas, namely [a] building the university of tomorrow: this includes redefining the research mission of the University in a democratic society, recalling the necessary combination of teaching and research, trying to get the academies of science closer to the university in Eastern Europe, improving the research training, and discussing different funding mechanisms [b] counseling the new member countries of the Council of Europe: through the provision of tools and policies for the academic recognition and mobility, through the facilitation of networking beyond national borders, and through the provision of expertise in the establishment of higher education legislation [c] the development of contents and methods in higher education: through the launching of a project to help social scientists in eastern and central Europe to modernise their teaching programmes, and to contribute to the state's attempts to meet the challenges of transition, while maintaining scholarly rigour and integrity; through the redefinition of European studies; through training for democratic leadership, particularly by identifying and developing university disciplines which can have the greatest impact on the political process, and by addressing the issue of student participation in higher education governance and political life in general [d] documentation and database networking: the running of a computerised European database of educational research projects, the EUDISED database with 16,000 items available on Internet. Access to information operates through a thesaurus, a tool of about 3,300 key words developed jointly with the European Commission's EURYDICE, and now available in 17 languages.

Dr. J. Nivis (NUFFIC, the Netherlands) spoke about a different, if related, aspect of international networking and cooperation, one that is directly linked to the issue of quality in the higher education sector, namely academic and professional recognition. Dr. Nivis noted a change in attitudes towards the exercise of recognition from the 1950s to the present, with the tendency being to move away from the concept of 'equivalence' to a more liberal and transparent approach, one where differences in qualifications between universities are welcomed – since these can enrich systems – as long as such differences are not

substantial. Currently, the burden of proving that differences are indeed substantial enough to warrant rejection of mobility between systems lies with the host institution. Dr. Nivis also highlighted a change in the methodology of academic recognition, over and above a shift in attitudes. Despite the great diversity between higher education systems, many countries use the same criteria in evaluating credentials, and it is only the weight they place on the different criteria that distinguishes them. An important development has been the intensification of contacts between credential evaluators, who have to explain why they have recognised, or failed to recognise particular qualifications or study units. This has led to much more transparency and accountability in the whole exercise, with time limits for decisions about recognition being established, and with applicants having a right to appeal. Dr. Nivis identified three key instruments that facilitate the exercise of academic recognition: [a] Conventions developed by the Council of Europe together with UNESCO-CEPES [b] EU directives, which began in the 1960s and dealt mainly with professional recognition, and which now concern the higher education sector and are based on mutual confidence between institutions and assumed comparability. The principle is that if a person has a degree obtained after at least three years of study from an EU member state, and that degree leads to a qualification in a regulated profession (e.g. engineer, teacher), this qualification has to be recognised in other EU member states, unless the difference in the duration of similar courses in the host country is more than one year [c] A third mechanism that facilitates academic recognition is the European Credit Transfer Systems (ECTS) which consists of an agreement between the host and sending university that a course of study, described in credits, is recognised for credentialling purposes by both institutions. Dr. Nivis concluded his address by highlighting the role of networks in the dissemination of information in this regard, and in the facilitation of transparency in the exercise of academic recognition. With reference to a European context, he mentioned in particular the role played by the EU network of 25 National Academic Recognition Centres (NARICs), and by the Council of Europe and the UNESCO-CEPES joint European Network of Information Centres on Recognition and Mobility (ENIC).

Commissioned papers on 'the management of change' and 'quality assurance'

Five of the commissioned papers read at the conference dealt with different aspects of the management of change and the assurance of quality in higher education. Two papers, one by Professor Claudius Gellert (Reading University, U.K.) and the other by Professor J. Veiga Simao (*Fundaçao das Universidades*

Portgugesas, Lisbon) focused more specifically on the experience of EU member states. Two other papers dealt with the situation of higher education in two Mediterranean states aspiring for membership in the European Union, namely Cyprus (with an address given by Professor Christos Theophilides from the University of Cyprus), and Turkey (with an address given by Professor Hasan Simsek, from the Middle East Technical University). Dr. Ronald Sultana, co-ordinator of the *Comparative and Mediterranean Education Programme* of the University of Malta, provided an overview of the situation of higher education in Mediterranean countries, thus establishing a wider context for the perusal of information from the Cypriot and Turkish colleagues. A summary of each of the five papers' main points is presented in the sections below. The European papers will be referred to first; these will be followed by the three Mediterranean papers, and a concluding section which pulls together the different themes and issues raised.

Experiences in EU member states

Professor Claudius Gellert addressed the theme 'Managing structural changes and relationships in higher education establishments in Europe: issues, experiences and constraints'. The speaker identified eight major changes in Europe, namely [a] quantitative expansion, with universities changing from enclaves of a small élite to mass institutions [b] institutional differentiation, with the development of new forms of higher education which facilitated the expansion of the higher education sector [c] functional modification, with the emergence of new tasks and purposes in higher education, such as in connection with demands made by industry and the labour market, or in response to the needs expressed by a differentiated student clientele [d] the development of new modes of teaching and learning, particularly through the introduction of stricter and more transparent curricula [e] the phenomenon of increased access and educational opportunity, through increased participation of mature students, but also through supportive measures such as mans-tests grants and loans schemes for students more generally [f] the intensification of research and graduate training, in response to a tendency for the funding base for fundamental research to move out of universities towards outside research organisations [g] the increase of governmental interventionism and the intensification of demands for accountability, with funding being the main mechanism in the exercise of influence [h] the tendency towards the Europeanisation of higher education systems, accentuated by the European Union's policy to promote exchanges between academics and students from different universities, and by a move in the direction of harmonisation in order to facilitate such exchanges.

In addressing these trends and shifts and in comparing the efficiency of different systems of higher education, Professor Gellert emphasised that one must focus not only on the output of institutions, in terms of number of graduates or volume of research and publications for instance, but also on the process of teaching and learning. Professor Gellert in fact noted that while there is some knowledge about the unfolding patterns of higher education in Europe, there is no generally agreed concept which enables the comparison of standards, competencies and qualifications, and there is no common understanding of what the efficiency of courses and study programmes consists in. This deficit in knowledge means that despite the European Community's 1988 directive on the mutual recognition of tertiary degrees, neither Universities involved in student exchange programmes, nor employers recruiting graduates on a European labour market have a real understanding of the kinds of educational experiences individuals from different universities are bringing with them, in terms of such parameters as work-load, intensity of supervision, input of individual effort, output in the form of papers and exams, as well as involvement in extra-curricular activities and in all those aspects of life in a higher education institution which facilitate personality development. Professor Gellert therefore proposed that the ultimate measure of the quality of higher education is more adequately caught by a focus on *how*, rather than *what* students are made to study. The Newmanian, liberal stress on character formation as an indicator of efficiency is vindicated by the value that European employers place on such personality characteristics as the ability to think, to adapt to a changing environment, to become involved in cooperative work tasks, and so on.

Professor J. Veiga Simao dealt with the challenge of 'Managing for quality at the operational level' within a European context. He noted how the last decade has seen increasing pressure exerted on the higher education sector to evaluate its three main functions, that of teaching, research and service to the community. Such pressures were coming from within the sector itself, and were also being exerted upon it from by external forces, be these government policies, public perception, or economic realities, including shrinking budgets and structural unemployment. The context in which these pressures have been exerted is worth highlighting: a massification of the sector due to increasing numbers of students, institutions and courses. Professor Veiga Simao noted that the call for the evaluation of higher education led to two main sets of policies and practices. While some countries and/or individual institutions opted for an auditing exercise carried out from within establishments, others preferred the inclusion of external actors in the evaluation process. Institutional autonomy can be safeguarded in both models of evaluation, but external power is linked in different ways in the two forms of practices. State power, for instance, reaches

the first through a sort of osmotic process, while it is more clearly and directly present in the second model.

Professor Veiga Simao noted the increasing globalisation of policies, accentuated by the process of European integration. The right for free circulation of people and services is linked to the recognition of diplomas and professional titles, and this has major implications for the higher education sector, and for the guaranteeing of quality education throughout Europe. The mobility of students and teachers, the new alliances that are being forged between universities, the building of networks on a regional and international level can all be considered as mechanisms that can breathe new life into the existing practices of the recognition of degrees and titles. Professor Veiga Simao made a case against what he referred to as the 'analytic' model of degree recognition, which entailed a case by case analysis of courses and curricular structures, and a practice that has tended to prevail up to the present. This was no longer practical in a 'learning society', given the rate at which new knowledge was being produced, and given the fact that modern career paths are characterised by frequent change in employment. In such a situation, a more 'organic' model of degree recognition was called for, one based on closer cooperation between universities, enterprises and services. Industry seems to be keen to establish such linkages with the higher education sector, as witnessed by the Round Table document, 'Education for Europeans', produced by a group of European companies representing 25% of Europe's GDP.

Within the context of such an information society, the category 'time' achieves a critical importance, so that as the 'World Competitiveness Report' pointed out in 1995, entities must focus on quality and speed in their conduct of administration and reforms. The higher education sector needs to find ways of guaranteeing both. Professor Veiga Simao gave an overview of quality assurance practices in different European countries, but argued in favour of a contractual model drawn up between political and university authorities, with a clear agreement as to a select set of indicators that are to be used as criteria in the evaluation process. This minimises the need for inspection models of quality assessment, where often the question arises as to whether auditors external to the university share its norms and values. Professor Veiga Simao stressed his belief that the success of any evaluation process depended on the involvement of the establishment in question, and argued in favour of the institutionalisation of a climate of quality, where constant self-evaluation is carried out on the basis of previously drawn-up guidelines and frameworks which are clear about the objectives to be reached, and the means by which they can be achieved. External evaluation by independent, self-governing agencies is only meaningful when it supports the development of the culture of quality. Noting that the university as an institution is in transition, Professor Veiga Simao concluded that the process of evaluation should be

characterised by an openness of spirit in order to help institutions make the necessary and creative decisions to respond to the challenges society must face in the next millennium.

Experiences in the non-EU Mediterranean

Dr. Ronald Sultana presented an overview of the current situation of higher education in Mediterranean countries. He immediately raised the issue that non-EU Mediterranean states and territories are different one from the other in political, economic, and socio-cultural terms, and that because of these disparities, it was difficult to develop a comparative perspective in any holistic manner, taking the region as a unit of analysis. Dr. Sultana presented different demographic, economic and educational indicators to show the extent to which the region represented 'many voices' in one sea, but he nevertheless argued that a political economic approach based on theories of the periphery and semi-periphery could be useful in identifying common trends in the higher education sector in Mediterranean countries. Such theories highlighted a number of different characteristics common to the developing regions of the Mediterranean (and elsewhere), including: the mismatch between the demand for higher education and its provision; the almost total reliance on the state for educational provision; the adoption of European discourse and models in the higher education sector without a concomitant attempt to remain sensitive to the specific needs of the context in which such models are applied; the closeness of Mediterranean universities to sources of power, be these religious or secular; and the absence or weakness of rational bureaucracies which leads to the engagement of personnel on the basis of patronage networks rather than formal qualifications and proven ability.

Dr. Sultana also made the point that within the Mediterranean region, certain 'connective tissues' were rather more evident than others when it came to carrying out comparative exercises. This was the case with Arab countries in the region, which provided a useful case study in the carrying out of comparative education work in the Mediterranean. In the absence of actual empirical and grounded research on higher education in the region, Dr. Sultana proposed a strategy that could generate insights about the theme under discussion. This consisted in identifying the characteristics of higher education in the Arab Mediterranean, since a number of studies already existed in this regard, and to then consider whether such elements and issues resonated with the situation prevalent in the non-Arab Mediterranean. The key characteristics that could be identified were: [a] the burgeoning of student numbers in Arab universities, with student enrollment figures increasing fivefold in most countries, leading to several attempts to direct

or control the surge for higher education, and a massive brain drain of graduates to more developed countries [b] the reliance on the state for the provision of higher education, with private universities often being viewed with suspicion and ambivalence, and considered as a threat to government control over standards, curricula and recruitment of personnel [c] such reliance on the state gives the latter enormous influence and control on the higher education sector, with genuine academic autonomy and freedom being largely absent [d] wages tend to be low compared to salary structures in the private sector, so that universities are obliged to allow staff, particularly in the science and engineering fields, to have additional employment, with negative repercussions for research, writing, supervision of students and class preparation [e] Arab universities tend to be rather more transmitters than producers of knowledge, and this is due to lack of sufficient resources, as well as heavy teaching loads, high student-teacher ratios, and reliance on metropole countries for research and training partnerships [f] teaching style tends to reflect the authoritarian relationships that prevail in society more generally [g] the language medium of instruction presents particularly difficult challenges, given that university teaching in science, technology and business is generally conducted in English or French, with students generally not being sufficiently proficient in these languages given the Arabisation policies adopted over the past two decades in the compulsory school sector [h] there is a tension between the adoption of European and 'western' higher education models, and the mounting concerns regarding the perversion of spiritual values and ideas [i] the rise of another sort of fundamentalism, this time exported by western societies, in the form of an economic fundamentalism that is increasingly being adopted by the higher education sector, where technocratic rationality and 'performativity' become the norm, and where universities are increasingly feeling obliged to tighten their links with the perceived needs of the economy.

Dr. Sultana suggested that several of these characteristics were common to other non-Arab Mediterranean countries, with superficial differences accounted for by the cultural form in which deeper processes are expressed.

Professor Christos Theophilides took up the consideration of higher education in the Mediterranean region by focusing directly on his *alma mater*, the University of Cyprus, and by addressing the theme 'Bridging the gap between policy and practice' in meeting the challenge of quality assurance. The University of Cyprus is one of the Mediterranean's youngest University, having been established in 1989, and having opened its doors to students in 1992. It now caters for 2000 students, and the number will be doubled when new schools are added and the University will be functioning in its full capacity. Professor Theophilides made the point that the organisational characteristics of academic institutions are central to the consideration of the provision of a quality service. He identified six such

characteristics, reflecting on the situation prevailing at the University of Cyprus in regard to each of these attributes, as follows: [a] goal ambiguity, which means that assessment becomes difficult since targets are not clearly established, nor related performance indicators spelt out [b] client service, in terms of student input in the evaluation of university activity [c] the use of 'problematic' – as opposed to simple or standardised – technology, in the University's attempts to meet the disparate needs of its clients [d] the tension between the employment of professional staff, who value autonomy, and the bureaucratic demands for quality assurance, that entail 'external' rather than peer evaluation [e] environmental vulnerability, in the sense that universities find themselves subject to demands and pressures made by powerful external forces [f] organised anarchy, given that universities do not function as bureaucracies since they tend to be fluid and flexible, and do not have either clear lines of authority or unambiguous and uncontested goals.

Having identified the organisational characteristics of academic institutions, Professor Theophilides went on to argue that considerations of 'quality' always entailed some form of measurement, which can be either summative and evaluative in nature, or formative and future-oriented in scope. The speaker identified four major issues that needed to be addressed in any evaluative exercise, namely [a] the ground that needed to be prepared so that the measurement of quality could be carried out effectively [b] the procurement of the administrators' genuine commitment to the quality assessment process [c] the effective handling of faculty resistance to a quality assessment project, and [d] the maintenance of momentum during the implementation of a quality assurance programme. Having presented this framework, Professor Theophilides then outlined the steps taken by the University of Cyprus to ensure quality, referring to such procedures as the use of internationally renowned external professors as members of the Interim Governing Board and of personnel selection and promotion boards, the intensification of selective measures to admit only top quality students, so that between 1992 and 1996 only one applicant out of every ten was admitted to the University, and the provision of an adequate budget by the State which enabled the University to implement its activities. Professor Theophilides concluded his address by noting the difficulties involved in expanding quality assurance programmes to include both process and outcomes. He proposed a model developed by R. Barnett as a useful strategy for confronting two crucial dilemmas in this field, namely the issue of who has control over the quality assurance programme (should the exercise be in the hands of academics, and therefore be collegial in nature, or should it be in the hands of the administrators, and be bureaucratic in orientation), what form the evaluation should take and what purposes it should serve (should it be carried out in an emancipatory framework,

generating self-enlightenment or should it be technicist in spirit, with external assessment agents being resorted to).

Professor Hasan Simsek from the Middle East Technical University in Ankara extended the Mediterranean focus by considering recent developments in Turkish higher education systems. Professor Simsek first provided a historical overview of this sector, starting from the first establishment founded in 1773, dwelling on the developments following the proclamation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, particularly the 1933 reform which gave rise to the modern university sector in the country, the 1946 law which granted universities autonomy in governance, the 1973 law which set up a Higher Education Council to coordinate and regulate the growing higher education sector in Turkey, a Council which largely failed to achieve its goals, and the 1981 law which provided a new framework for the regulated expansion of a consolidated higher education structure. Since 1981, the number of universities has increased by three times (from 19 to 68 in 1996), the number of enrolled students has increaded by five times (from 41,574 in 1981 to 199,571 in 1991), number of teaching staff has increased by 65%, and number of students per teaching staff has dropped from 46 in 1981 to 39 in 1991. The graduation rate increased from 50% to 80% in science and engineering, and from 70% to 90% in health sciences.

Professor Simsek located these developments within the context of international trends in the higher education sector, looking at developed and developing countries, and raising issues that had been broached by several other speakers at the conference, including the pressure on universities to adopt new roles, decreasing state budgets and increasing calls for transparency and accountability, and burgeoning student numbers. Drawing on key documents issued by the World Bank and UNESCO, Professor Simsek identified the key problems facing most higher education institutions the world over, including: low quality stemming from expansion in enrollment with limited resources, inefficiency in terms of waste of public resources, programme duplications and high drop out rates, inequity in terms of higher public subsidies in favour of higher education compared to primary and secondary education, and management and institutional leadership issues. Each of these problems or challenges required a response to a set of dilemmas, which Professor Simsek articulated in the form of choices between quality and quantity, centralisation and decentralisation, state monopolisation and diversification, specialisation and interdisciplinarity, public funding and cost sharing.

Despite the tardiness in the development of its higher education sector, it would seem that Turkey is facing similar problems and dilemmas. Five such problematic areas were identified by Professor Simsek: [a] There is, for instance, continued pressure for further expansion of the sector, with an inefficient

distribution of enrollment in various kinds of post-secondary institutions. As in other countries, while student numbers have increased, and indeed more than tripled between 1970 and 1996, the amount of recurring public resources allocated to higher education has only increased in real terms by about 15% to 20%. Strategies that are being considered in order to confront this challenge include increasing the number of higher education institutions, both public and private; increasing the capacity of current higher education institutions, increasing the capacity of non-formal education, and increasing the number of two-year programmes including two-year post-secondary vocational and technical schools. [b] Another problem is the lack of qualified teaching staff, relative to the increase in student numbers, and despite the fact that since 1984 there has been a 139% increase in academic staff with doctorates. Professor Simsek suggested three possible solutions with regard to the problem of faculty shortage: joint graduate programmes between advanced and newly established universities, provision of scholarships for postgraduate study overseas, and changing the mission of some high ranking universities into élite research institutions. [c] A third problem concerns shrinking public resources for higher education funding and the need to reform public funding schemes in such a way that resources are used efficiently and in a manner that is open to accountability. Between 1993 and 1996, the education share of the state budget decreased from 22% to 9.8%, and the share of higher education of the national budget was 4.1% in 1993, and 2.6% in 1996. In such a situation, the only way forward seems to be the diversification of funding, primarily through cost-sharing with students, particularly as private rates of return to higher education graduates in Turkey are estimated to be very high, much higher than is the case for many developing countries. [d] A fourth set of challenges concern organisational and management issues, with the Turkish higher educational sector currently being controlled by the State on the one hand, and by an academic oligarchy on the other. Professor Simsek argued that the situation calls for a reform in the direction of decentralisation and institutional diversification, in order to make the university system more aligned with market forces. Indeed, Turkey is presently considering flexible funding patterns, giving universities more autonomy in institutional and financial operations; shifting much of the decision-making to institutional levels, and creating intermediary bodies to make institutions more accountable to society; weakening traditional public dominance in higher education through encouraging privatisation and through allowing the private and non-governmental institutions to enter the higher education sector. [e] A final major issue for the Turkish higher education sector concerns quality, which is generally considered to have deteriorated between 1980 and 1995 given the leap in enrollment figures. Lower quality provision has

affected instruction, undergraduate and graduate programmes, faculty staff, research and publications, student services, educational materials, and physical facilities. Professor Simsek proposed that among the ways quality issues could be addressed, one could highlight the development of more efficiency in the higher education sector, and the streamlining and channeling of resources towards specified strategic priorities.

Concluding comments

The one-day conference was premised on the value of the exchange of information and ideas between experts from the European and non-EU Mediterranean higher education sector. It very quickly became clear that the issues raised with reference to the former context were of relevance – and indeed, were often applicable – to the latter. It would seem that irrespective of the level of economic development, the higher education sector in most countries is facing similar challenges, including massification, reduced budgets, and internal and external pressures for the auditing and assurance of a quality educational service. Due to the different levels of development in the different countries, as well as to disparate economic, cultural and political contexts, some higher education systems faced the aforementioned challenges earlier, or more or less abruptly. Processes of globalisation and internationalisation have, however, seen a tightening of the world system, and the tendency has been for educational policies, as well as problem-resolution strategies, to cross national borders. The process   of European integration has accelerated this trend, but other countries are also caught up in the centrifugal forces that increasingly characterise the contemporary information society.

Quality, its definition, measurement, and assurance, represented the key transversal themes of the conference. Quality auditing was considered by all participants to be a necessary activity. However, several of the keynote speakers and discussant raised questions related to *why* the exercise of quality assessment should take place, *what* it is that should be evaluated, *how* the exercise should take place, and *who* is best placed to carry out the evaluation. All four issues are interrelated, and an organic view of quality assessment remains sensitive to the questions *why?*, *what?*, *how?* and *who?*, and to the particular social, political and economic contexts in which these questions are posed. While different points of view were expressed, and reference was made to different mechanisms and structures that have been adopted in different countries in Europe and beyond it, there nevertheless emerged a set of consensual views that I will attempt to outline in a schematic manner:

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- Quality auditing is necessary, not only because of the problems associated with increasing student enrollments, but also because the higher education sector has to respond to new demands and pressures, which oblige it to constantly examine its function and roles, and to render itself more transparent and accountable to stakeholders.

- Universities have always been concerned with the issue of quality and excellence, so that the current focus on auditing signals the intensification of challenges that already have a history in the institutional traditions of the university.

- Quality assurance practices have as much to do with the evaluation of educational effectiveness as much as with issues of power and control. This is at least partly due to a concern with the costs and hoped-for benefits – in individual and national terms – in connection with the higher education sector.

- Among the reasons given in response to the rationale behind the carrying out of a quality evaluation exercise, the ones most often mentioned were: accountability (to students, government, stakeholders, society generally); improvement of service, and reshaping of roles and functions in response to new realities and societal transformations. Formative assessment, where evaluation is carried out with the intention to identify weaknesses and to address them in the future, seemed to be preferred over summative forms of evaluation, where the goal is to judge a performance, possibly with a view to making decisions regarding financial budgeting.

- The issue of *what* ought to be evaluated was also covered by many speakers and discussants, and important distinctions were made between technicist and fragmentary approaches, and more holistic ones where attention was mainly given to the formal curriculum taught, as well as to character-building and the socialisation of students into the kinds of citizens required in a society that values economic well-being, and democratic government.

- Much attention was given to the *mechanisms* that could be used to carry out a quality assessment exercise, and as to *who* should use such mechanisms. Examples were presented from several different countries, but there generally seemed to be a preference for evaluative exercises that were carried out by the academic community itself, or in conjunction with it, rather than by an external agency *on* the academic community in question. The best practice is one that leads to the institutionalisation of a culture of quality and excellence in the higher education sector, and in order to facilitate such a culture, constant self-evaluation along clearly outlined criteria should be encouraged. External and impartial evaluating bodies or agencies can, and in some case *should* have a supportive role to play.

Participants expressed a general appreciation of the goals, process and outcomes of the one-day conference. They felt that it had provided a valuable opportunity for the exchange of information and ideas about a set of issues which were clearly topical and of great moment in the different countries represented at the meeting. The view was also expressed that the presence of representatives from other Mediterranean countries would have enriched the gathering, and ensured a more thorough portrayal of the diversity of the region, as well as of the challenges that it currently faces. Many speakers at the conference placed a lot of emphasis on the need for international cooperation and networking in order to help universities develop appropriate strategies for the assurance of quality and the management of an environment characterised by constant change. Such linkages are of great importance to third Mediterranean countries, and the present one-day meeting facilitated new contacts, both in a south-south and in a south-north direction. Such opportunities for exchange should be extended and reinforced through the creation of other fora where a structured dialogue can develop, with firm objectives and goals in mind.