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GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

CHEA/CIQG presents briefs highlighting topics from webinars specifically designed for the international community. All four webinars were presented in 2024.

Webinar videos are hyperlinked in the titles.

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MICROCREDENTIALS: Protecting Consumers Through Quality Assurance

GENERAL OVERVIEW



The growing demand for credit-eligible industry microcredentials has sparked extensive discussions within the global higher education quality assurance community. Microcredentials are designed to equip learners with specific skills or knowledge in a particular area. As the job market continues to evolve, microcredentials have gained widespread popularity as a flexible and accessible means of upskilling and reskilling.

The diversity of microcredential types, delivery methods, and providers have drawn attention from the quality assurance community, which emphasizes the importance of external validation.

The first in the series of 2024 CHEA/CIQG webinars was *Microcredentials: Protecting Consumers Through Quality Assurance* presented by:

1. **Dr. Quentin McAndrew** - Global Academic Strategist, Coursera, USA,
2. **Dr. Tina Seufert** - Scientific Director, School of Advanced Professional Studies, Ulm University, Germany
3. **Dr. Pdraig Walsh** - Chief Executive Officer, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)
4. **Dr. Jamil Salmi (moderator)** - Global Tertiary Education Expert (CIQG Advisory Council Member)

Key Elements from the Webinar:

1. **Microcredentials Offer Flexibility and Individualized Learning:** Microcredentials provide learners with the ability to acquire knowledge and skills at their own pace, making them especially beneficial for individuals balancing work or other commitments.
2. **Recognized Value of Microcredentials:** The value of microcredentials is increasingly acknowledged. Many are recognized as rigorous, credit-eligible, and relevant to job markets. Third-party organizations and university partners validate their quality and relevance.
3. **Opportunities for Career Advancement:** Microcredentials can serve as steppingstones toward higher qualifications, such as a master's degree, and play a role in enhancing employability and career progression.
4. **Rapid Growth of the Microcredential Field:** This growth raises questions about how to assess the value and usefulness of different microcredentials and ensure their continued relevance.
5. **Need for Transparency and Validation:** Transparency and validation of microcredentials can be achieved by communicating their value to learners and ensuring the content undergoes faculty review and credit recommendation by an independent body.

EMPLOYING INTERNATIONAL QUALITY ASSURANCE MODELS: Important Considerations for National Systems of Tertiary Education

GENERAL OVERVIEW



In the 21st century, international quality assurance models continue to evolve in response to globalization, technological advancements, and shifting educational priorities. These modern frameworks emphasize international accreditation to promote the global recognition of qualifications and support transnational education. Moreover, there is a growing focus on quality enhancement, which moves beyond compliance to foster continuous improvement, innovation, and adaptability in educational practices. This shift reflects the need for institutions to remain competitive and relevant in an increasingly interconnected and rapidly changing world, where the ability to respond to diverse learner needs and technological disruptions is paramount. These developments highlight the novelty of emerging quality assurance models, which prioritize not just accountability but also the transformation of educational landscapes.

The second webinar in the 2024 CHEA/CIQG Webinar Series was entitled: *Employing International Quality Assurance Models: Important Considerations for National Systems of Tertiary Education*. The webinar featured:

- **T. Chan Basaruddin** - Vice President, INQAAHE and Professor of Computer Science, University of Indonesia.
- **Dr. M. Sylvia Fernandez** - President and Executive Officer, Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP).
- **Dr. John Cribbin** - Deputy Director, Academic Services, Hong Kong University SPACE.
- **Dr. Allan Goodman (moderator)** - Chief Executive Officer, Institute of International Education, CIQG Advisory Council Member, and Webinar moderator.

Key elements from the webinar:

1. **T. Chan Basaruddin** discussed *The Drivers of Change in Accreditation*, which included:

- **Massification of Higher Education:** The growth in student numbers and institutions necessitates a more robust and simplified accreditation process.
- **Technological Advances:** The use of technology, particularly during COVID-19, has transformed accreditation, enabling online evaluations and paperless processes.
- **Evolving Missions of Higher Education:** Universities now play broader roles, including economic development, requiring standards to adapt.
- **New Modalities:** Emerging forms of education, such as transnational education and short learning courses, are influencing changes in accreditation models.

Key elements from the webinar (cont.):

2. **Sylvia Fernandez** discussed the global application of quality assurance in counselor education through the International Registry of Counsellor Education Programs (IRCEP). Recognizing that CACREP standards, which are U.S.-centric, may not be suitable worldwide, IRCEP was created as a global initiative to establish principles of quality counselor education that transcend cultural and national boundaries. It focuses on recognition, not accreditation, with the goal of fostering excellence in counselor education globally, particularly in countries lacking established quality assurance systems.

Highlights of the benefits of IRCEP include the creation of a global network for collaboration and best practices, visibility for programs, and enhanced student mobility. The rigorous review process, involving multiple levels of iteration, ensures the recognition of quality counselor education programs worldwide.

3. **John Cribbin** described transnational education (TNE) in Hong Kong as being regulated through mandatory registration and voluntary accreditation by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ). Over the past two decades, TNE has experienced a sharp decline due to a shrinking local student population and the expansion of local educational opportunities.

Exemptions from certain regulations apply to partnerships with publicly funded universities, while other providers face higher fees but benefit from simplified processes. The UK remains the dominant provider of TNE in Hong Kong, whereas institutions from Australia and the US have seen a decline in presence.

Current TNE legislation excludes online courses, and the recent introduction of taxation on overseas providers has further discouraged participation. Nevertheless, Hong Kong's aspiration to position itself as an education hub, coupled with potential policy changes to attract students from Mainland China, Macau, and Taiwan, could stimulate future growth in the sector.

THE UNESCO GLOBAL CONVENTION ON THE RECOGNITION OF GLOBAL QUALIFICATIONS CONCERNING HIGHER EDUCATION: What, Why, And For Whom?

GENERAL OVERVIEW



The UNESCO Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education, adopted in 2019, represents a significant milestone in advancing international academic mobility and collaboration. The primary objective of the Convention is to enhance access to higher education and promote lifelong learning in an increasingly interconnected world. By reducing barriers to academic and professional mobility, it empowers individuals to pursue education and careers beyond their home countries. The Convention also fosters international cooperation to maintain the quality and integrity of higher education systems, building mutual trust and encouraging shared progress. Its far-reaching impact includes facilitating global knowledge exchange, improving education access for marginalized populations, and supporting the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all.

THE UNESCO GLOBAL CONVENTION ON THE RECOGNITION OF GLOBAL QUALIFICATIONS CONCERNING HIGHER EDUCATION

What, Why, And For Whom?

The third of the 2024 CHEA/CIQG webinar series was *The UNESCO Global Convention on the Recognition of Global Qualifications Concerning Higher Education: What, Why, and For Whom*. Recognizing the current and pending implications for the Convention, CHEA/CIQG's fall webinar brought together both the architects of the Convention and national representatives to share their perspectives. Those presenters included:

- **Ms Vanja Gutovic**, Secretary to the Global Recognition Convention, UNESCO
- **Ms Trudi van Wyk**, Chief Director for Social Inclusion, Equity, Access and Quality, Department of Higher Education and Training, South Africa
- **Dr Joanna Wilson**, Head of the European Network of Information Centres, Australia
- **Prof. Gonzalo Baroni Boces**, President of the Latin America and Caribbean Convention, Argentina
- **Dr Andreas Snildal**, Policy Director, Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills, Norway
- **Ms Melanie Gottlieb**, Executive Director, American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, USA
- **Dr Peter J. Wells (moderator)**, UNESCO Head of Education for Southern Africa

Key elements from the webinar:

1. **Vanya Gutovic** highlighted the rapid growth in higher education, with 256 million students enrolled globally and 6.4 million studying internationally. Despite this progress, enrollment disparities remain, ranging from 9% in sub-Saharan Africa to over 80% in Europe and North America. The UNESCO Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications, adopted in 2019 and enforced in 2023, establishes universal principles for fair and transparent qualification recognition, addressing non-traditional learning and supporting refugees. It complements regional conventions to promote global mobility and cooperation while respecting national laws.

THE UNESCO GLOBAL CONVENTION ON THE RECOGNITION OF GLOBAL QUALIFICATIONS CONCERNING HIGHER EDUCATION

What, Why, And For Whom?

Key elements from the webinar (cont.):

With 30 states ratified and others in progress, the Convention already accounts for 25% of internationally mobile students. Implementation relies on national information centers and regional networks to build trust and facilitate recognition. Future priorities include operational guidelines, capacity building, and frameworks for addressing substantial differences. UNESCO's Higher Education Policy Observatory provides data from 150 countries to support monitoring and global collaboration.

2. Trudi van Wyk discussed South Africa's commitment to enhancing international and regional cooperation in higher education through its participation in the Global and Addis Conventions. These conventions help streamline the recognition of international qualifications, promoting academic mobility and setting global education standards. South Africa's framework, including the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and quality councils, ensures parity between domestic and foreign qualifications, facilitating cross-border education and employment.

The country has emphasized the importance of legal, parliamentary processes, mutual recognition agreements, and inclusive policies, particularly for refugees and asylum seekers. The speaker also stressed the importance of funding, legitimacy, and public awareness in successfully implementing these conventions. Moving forward, South Africa plans to leverage its established structures and processes to support the goals of both conventions, ensuring alignment with global education standards while addressing regional needs.

3. Gonzalo Baroni Boces discussed the progress of the Buenos Aires Recognition Convention for higher education in Latin America and the Caribbean. Since its 2021 entry into force, key achievements include the establishment of CINALC (National Information Center for Latin America and the Caribbean) to enhance information sharing, recognition processes, and transparency, along seven countries ratifying the regional convention, while only three have ratified the Global Convention.

THE UNESCO GLOBAL CONVENTION ON THE RECOGNITION OF GLOBAL QUALIFICATIONS CONCERNING HIGHER EDUCATION

What, Why, And For Whom?

Key elements from the webinar (cont.):

A special focus has been placed on improving the recognition of Venezuelan degrees, with guidelines introduced for easier recognition and a feasibility study for a diploma supplement.

Despite linguistic and systemic challenges faced by Venezuelan migrants, the region remains committed to cooperation and inclusivity, particularly for vulnerable populations like Venezuelan refugees. The speaker emphasized the importance of collaboration and continued efforts to encourage more countries to ratify the conventions, reflecting the region's dedication to advancing educational integration and supporting vulnerable populations like Venezuelan refugees.

4. **Joanna Wilson**, Director of the Qualifications Recognition Policy Team at Australia's Department of Education, emphasized the importance of the UNESCO Global Convention for qualifications recognition and mobility. With over 50 years of expertise in this area, Australia views recognition systems as essential for linking education to cultural, social, and economic growth.

The Global Convention complements regional agreements like the Lisbon and Tokyo Conventions by addressing interregional mobility, fostering global cooperation, and promoting fairness, transparency, and respect for national laws. It supports innovation and flexibility, helping to meet evolving educational needs, including nontraditional learning modes. By reducing barriers and enhancing transparency and trust, it facilitates two-way mobility, expands access to higher education, and creates opportunities for students, workers, and institutions. Wilson stressed the need for global collaboration to harmonize recognition systems, ensuring qualifications are recognized widely and unlocking education's economic, cultural, and social benefits.

THE UNESCO GLOBAL CONVENTION ON THE RECOGNITION OF GLOBAL QUALIFICATIONS CONCERNING HIGHER EDUCATION

What, Why, And For Whom?

Key elements from the webinar (cont.):

5. **Andreas Snildal**, from the Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills, shared Norway's role as the first country to ratify the UNESCO Global Convention in 2020. By 2024, Norway fully integrated the Convention's provisions into its legislation, requiring the recognition of qualifications from other State Parties unless significant differences are demonstrated. Norway adopted a phased approach to implementation, emphasizing that ratification does not demand immediate system readiness.

The Directorate oversees qualifications recognition for work purposes and university admissions, aligning national practices with global standards to enhance mobility, transparency, and trust. Norway has also addressed challenges in recognizing partial studies, prior learning, and qualifications for refugees using structured processes like interviews and expert assessments to verify qualifications. These efforts reflect Norway's commitment to equitable recognition practices that promote educational access and international mobility.

6. **Melanie Gottlieb**, Executive Director of AACRAO, outlined the organization's role in advancing equitable access and social mobility in education. As one of the oldest U.S. education associations, AACRAO supports institutions with admissions, enrollment, and academic records, emphasizing best practices, professional development, and global collaboration. Key initiatives include the AACRAO EDGE database, which supports international student admissions and credential evaluation, and partnerships like the Groningen Declaration Network, promoting secure, digital learner mobility.

Gottlieb highlighted AACRAO's alignment with UNESCO's Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications. While the U.S. lacks formal engagement in the Convention, AACRAO has adopted its principles through grassroots efforts, such as the Institutional Readiness Assessment and refugee reintegration initiatives. These efforts focus on equity, transparency, and global standards in higher education. By embedding these values into its strategic direction, AACRAO aims to foster collaboration and drive meaningful change for learners and institutions alike.

THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF QUALITY ASSURANCE: How Does AI Make A Difference?

GENERAL OVERVIEW



Artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming quality assurance (QA) in higher education, offering improved efficiency, precision, and global standardization. AI systems analyze large datasets to evaluate student outcomes, faculty performance, and curriculum effectiveness, helping to identify gaps and drive institutional improvement. Predictive analytics allow for early intervention with at-risk students, enhancing retention and graduation rates. Furthermore, AI supports the standardization of QA processes across regions, promoting transparency and comparability.

However, the adoption of AI in higher education is not without controversy. Concerns regarding data privacy, algorithmic bias, and the ethical use of student and institutional data remain, particularly in countries with limited regulatory frameworks. Critics caution that over-reliance on AI risks reducing complex educational evaluations to purely qualitative metrics, potentially overlooking cultural and contextual nuances. There are also concerns about job displacement among QA professionals and unequal access to advanced AI technologies, especially in underfunded institutions.

Despite these challenges, AI holds immense potential to revolutionize QA in higher education, provided its implementation is ethical, equitable, and carefully considered. Addressing these concerns will be essential to harnessing AI's benefits while maintaining trust and accountability.

How Does AI Make A Difference?

The fourth webinar of the 2024 CHEA/CIQG webinar series was *The Changing Landscape of Quality Assurance: How Does AI Make a Difference?* The presenters were:

1. **Dr. Fengchun Miao** – Chief of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Education, UNESCO,
2. **Mr. Cato Rolea** – Assistant Director for Digital Transformation, Ecctis Ltd., and
3. **Dr. Nadia Badrawi (Moderator)** – CIQG Advisory Council Member; President of the Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ANQAHE)

Fenchung Miao discussed the ethical implications of AI in education, stressing the importance of understanding the intent behind AI design, data usage, and the importance of human control over AI. He highlighted UNESCO's key publications on AI in education, such as the *AI Competency Framework for Teachers and Guidance for Generative AI in Education and Research*. Dr. Miao also discussed the potential risks of AI, including concerns about data privacy, the digital divide, and the need for trustworthy, explainable AI systems.

Cato Rolea shared insights on the practical aspects of integrating AI into higher education. Drawing analogies from past technological advancements, he emphasized the need for institutions to adopt AI responsibly and understand its impact and potential. Dr. Rolea highlighted the disparity between students' and educators' familiarity with AI and suggested that institutions should provide necessary training and develop policies to guide ethical AI use.

Key Elements from the Webinar:

1. Global Guidance on AI in Education:

Organizations like UNESCO provide essential frameworks, such as the *AI Competency Framework for Teachers and AI Competency Framework for Students*, to guide AI usage in education.

Key Elements from the Webinar (cont.):

2. Ethical Concerns in AI Usage:

Ethical considerations surrounding AI must be addressed, including:

- a. Conflicts between human rights and the goals of AI developers, particularly regarding data usage.
- b. Risks of AI designs to prioritize consumer manipulation over the public good.

3. Evolving Definitions of Quality and Qualifications in the AI Era:

The importance of human-centered AI design, foundational knowledge, higher-order thinking, and vocational skills was emphasized in response to shifting educational priorities in the AI age.

4. Controversies Surrounding Generative AI:

Issues such as AI's lack of regulation and the biases in training data that may marginalize underrepresented groups were discussed. Furthermore, there are challenges in AI-driven assessment and accreditation including:

- a. Ethical issues in AI-powered assessment tools like face recognition and content generation.
- b. Potential for accreditation divide and the misuse of unregulated AI systems.
- c. Necessity of human-controlled, accountable AI systems in quality assurance.

5. Understanding Artificial Intelligence in Education:

- a. AI has been evolving for decades, but generative AI like ChatGPT has brought it into mainstream usage, making powerful tools accessible to everyone, regardless of technical expertise.
- b. There is a distinction between AI as a broader field and generative AI as a specific subset; ChatGPT is just one example of this subset.

Key Elements from the Webinar (cont.):

6. Challenges with AI Adoption in Higher Education:

- a. There is a gap between students who are actively using AI, and educators, many of whom lack familiarity with the technology.
- b. This disconnect makes it difficult to ensure the quality of learning and teaching experiences, as well as to establish consistent ethical and effective use of AI in education.
- c. Students are asking for more courses on AI literacy, indicating a need for institutions to provide resources and training.

7. Historical Parallels and Lessons:

- a. The adoption of generative AI mirrors earlier disruptions like the introduction of Google and Wikipedia, which initially caused concern but were eventually integrated into educational practices.
- b. Rolea uses the "Titanic analogy" to highlight the risks of advancing AI without sufficient caution and governance, emphasizing the need to steer the "ship" responsibly.

The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) and its International Quality Group (CIQG) are dedicated to advancing global quality assurance in higher education. CHEA/CIQG focuses on promoting excellence and accountability across all educational contexts, steadfastly supporting innovation and continuous improvement. Through its webinars and other initiatives, CHEA/CIQG offers its members meaningful dialogue on emerging trends that influence quality assurance in higher education.