



A Special Report on CHEA 2017 and CIQG 2017

## Quality assurance in a disrupted world

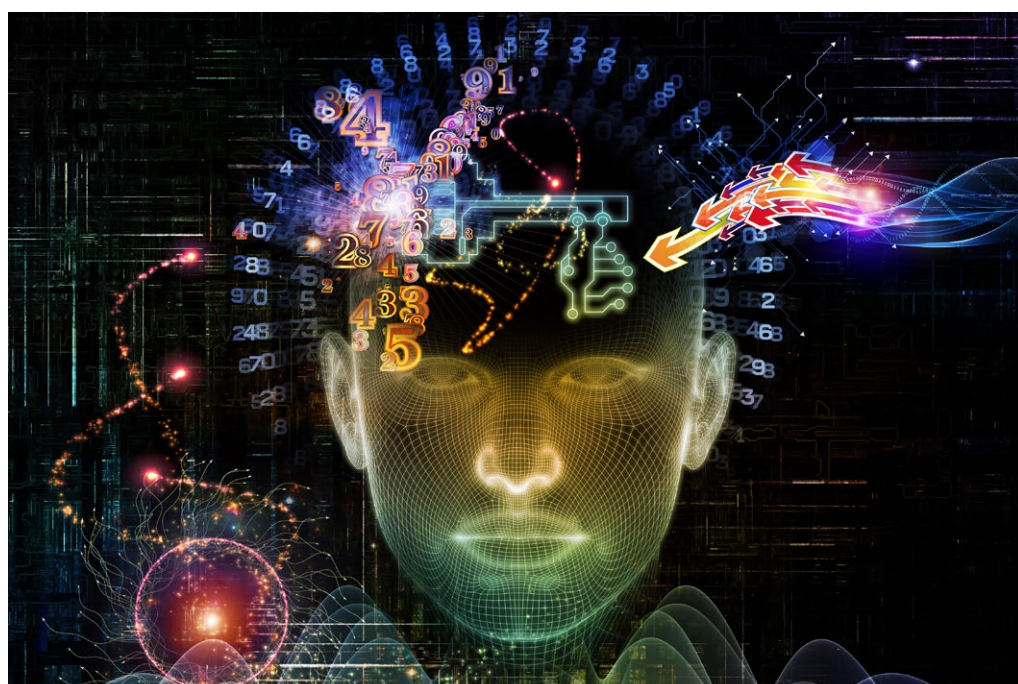
GLOBAL

# Changing world challenges higher education, accreditation

Quality assurance and accreditation professionals are having to adapt to a new world in which disruption of all kinds, not only in the political world, but also in the policy world and through technology development, is shifting the terrain of higher education and presenting new challenges. **Mary Beth Marklein** reports

**T**HE SHIFTING terrain of higher education worldwide is challenging quality assurance and accreditation professionals to examine how they can adjust or transform traditional practices and policies while also preserving core academic values.

That was one of the overriding messages to emerge out of back-to-back conferences on higher education on 30 January – 2 February in



Washington DC, which drew more than 400 people from 30 countries including Japan, Egypt, Croatia, Israel, Jamaica, India and China.

## A UNIVERSITY WORLD NEWS REPORT

Developing quality and assurance accreditation and tackling corruption in higher education in a world disrupted by political and technological change were among the themes at the Council for Higher Education Accreditation and CHEA CIQG 2017 conferences held in Washington DC, for which *University World News* is a media partner. In this souvenir supplement **Mary Beth Marklein** reports on the conferences for *University World News*.



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While the theme for both meetings was the changing landscape of higher education, “we went beyond change to acknowledge disruption”, said Judith Eaton, president of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation or CHEA, which hosted the gathering along with CHEA’s International Quality Group or CIQG.

“And that’s disruption of all kinds – in the political space, the policy space, what’s going on around the world.”

### Not business as usual

The United Kingdom’s Brexit vote and Donald Trump’s unexpected win in the United States presidential election are just two high-profile examples of how business as usual has been turned on its ear.

A more familiar type of disruption in higher education is being caused by corruption. No country is

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immune from it, and the potential consequences of fraudulent research, phony credentials or stolen exam answers can reverberate well beyond geographic borders in an increasingly interdependent society.

On a more upbeat note, an explosion of innovation has widened opportunity and access to higher education around the world. But it also has thrown into question the relevance of traditional methods of teaching and learning.

Amid all the upheaval, one thing is certain – higher education is more important than ever.

Jamil Salmi, former coordinator for tertiary education at the World Bank, reminded conference attendees that higher education lies at the heart of the United Nations sustainable development agenda.

Salmi urged attendees and the accreditation bodies they represent to embrace the emerging alternatives to traditional providers, new kinds of non-degree credentials and new ways of teaching for a new generation of students, who grew up with the internet, Facebook and smart phones. Salmi said his grandson's first spoken word was "iPad".

### **The reason is simple: there really is no other option.**

Technological innovation is "really changing the way [today's students] access information, the way they learn, the way they manage expectations," Salmi said. "We live now in beta mode. We are constantly asked to learn something new."

Many countries have turned to CIQG's seven-point statement of principles for guidance during such tumultuous times, Eaton said.

The principles, developed in 2015, offer a global framework around which a diverse array of higher education systems and national and regional agencies can organise quality assurance policies and address change.

They were developed in response to greater student mobility, a stronger emphasis on faculty exchange and cross-border collaboration and growing reliance on online and web-based education, all of which has underscored the need to find common ground on matters of educational quality.

Over the course of the week, quality assurance professionals shared insights, success stories, frustrations and



**Above (from top):  
Judith Eaton,  
Jamil Salmi,  
Frank Ziegele,  
Maria José  
Lemaitre**

advice on emerging trends. Among issues that were addressed:

### **The student voice**

One recurring theme suggests a growing interest in capturing and incorporating a student perspective on the quality of their education.

Salmi noted, for example, that student engagement surveys, first devised in the United States, have spread to Australia, Canada, across Europe and into China, South Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa. A government-funded initiative in Scotland trains student leaders to participate in campus reviews of quality assurances.

"They have perspectives and opinions which are interesting and relevant," said Manja Klemencic, a lecturer in higher education at Harvard University. "If students are given a meaningful role within the process of quality assurance, they can directly influence the practice of higher education."

### **Comparisons rather than rankings**

While rankings continue to play a role in higher education policy, an initiative that enables comparisons shows promise as a tool for accrediting and quality assurance bodies.

U-Multirank, developed several years ago with funding from the European Commission, was intended to be an improvement over the much-despised global rankings, said U-Multirank architect Frank Ziegele, executive director of the Centre for Higher Education in Germany.

U-Multirank offers a comprehensive set of indicators such as student mobility, teaching and learning, research and knowledge transfer, allowing for more granular – and therefore more meaningful – comparisons.

Efforts to expand U-Multirank have met with some success: Ziegele is

working on a pilot study with China, has had success in Japan, and sees emerging interest from Africa. While US institutions have been tepid in their response, U-Multirank uses federal data reported by the institutions and will include 240 US institutions in its database to be updated in March.

### **Student learning outcomes**

Driven largely by the Bologna Process, the emphasis on student learning outcomes has gained political support in quality assurance in many countries.

However, preserving carefully guarded institutional autonomy has become a major concern as some governments look to quality assurance as a regulatory tool. Moreover, tools that measure outcomes are inadequate.

"We don't want just to measure them," said Maria José Lemaitre, executive director of the Centro Interuniversitario de Desarrollo in Chile. "We want to improve them."

### **Risk-based assessment models**

A potential game-changer in quality assurance and assessment is the concept of risk. The United Kingdom and Australia have been leaders in approaching quality assurance and assessment through a risk-based model. Australia's risk indicators include factors such as student attrition and completion and institutional financial viability.

Last year, the UK government announced its intention to abolish the cyclical reporting process, in which every institution undergoes review, toward a more risk-based approach that eases the burden for institutions that consistently demonstrate good performance. It expects new regulatory frameworks to be in place by 2019.

### **Expert as dirty word**

Perhaps the most troubling trend for higher education is the diminished appreciation for fundamental academic values, education consultant John Daniel told attendees. Expert is "a dirty word", he said.

Universities that view themselves as 'elite' need to come up with a new descriptor. And empirical evidence – the quest of academic knowledge-seekers across the globe – has been displaced by, to borrow a phrase used by Trump advisers, 'alternative facts'.

"The vocabulary of higher education is tarnished," Daniel said. But "I don't think we can back off the ideal that... it's better to have knowledge than to not have knowledge."

***CIQG's seven principles, offer a global framework around which a diverse array of higher education systems and national and regional agencies can organise quality assurance policies and address change.***



UNITED STATES

# Universities feel early impacts of Trump era uncertainty



Student protests against the travel ban at University of California, Berkeley © Fox News

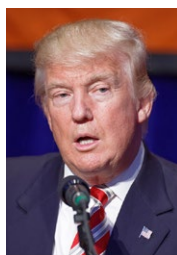
**U**NITED STATES President Donald Trump, whose first weeks in power were as unprecedented as his once-unfathomable ascendancy to the nation's highest office, appears eager to maintain a frenetic pace, political analysts told the international gathering of higher education quality assurance and accreditation experts in Washington.

By early February, Trump had already turned away scores of Muslim immigrants, put a freeze on climate research funding, fired the acting US attorney general, demoted top national security advisers and spurned strategic allies in Mexico and Australia.

"Every day seems like a year, so much is happening," Larry Sabato, a

The frenetic pace of change set by President Trump in his first weeks and the confirmation of his controversial Education Secretary has left observers wondering if a wholesale rewrite of higher education policies and regulations is on the cards.

**Mary Beth Marklein** reports



Donald Trump

professor and director of the Center for Politics at the University of Virginia, told attendees of the annual meeting of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation or CHEA.

The university community is feeling the impact.

More than 17,000 students enrolled in US colleges and universities come from the seven

countries affected by Trump's initial 90-day entry ban – Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen, since blocked by the courts. The immediate enforcement of the ban quickly drew outrage from across a wide range of academia, including university presidents and higher education associations.

In response to student protests at the University of California, Berkeley that led officials to cancel a campus speech by a controversial Trump supporter, Trump seemed to threaten to cut off federal funding to the university.

Undocumented students worry that they are next in line for deportation.

Regardless of whether Trump has the power to follow through on such ideas, such uncertainty may be the

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new normal, some speakers said.

“We are all going to be drinking from a fire hose for the next four years,” Kimberley Strassel, a Wall Street Journal columnist and editorial writer, told the CIQG audience, whose members had flown in from 30 countries.

“This is a president who is not in any way afraid of controversy.”

Noting both that Trump “does not understand basic diplomacy” and that “being outrageous” may be his opening salvo in negotiation strategy, Strassel predicts a “wholesale rewrite” of much of the Barack Obama administration’s policies, including cuts in federal funding to universities for scientific research, a rescinding of investigations into campus sexual assault and, with help from a majority Republican Congress, a revamping of the federal student loan system.

### Prospects for deregulation

Easing regulations on colleges and universities with the goal of lowering the cost to taxpayers and students is also a goal of the Republican-led Congress, US Congresswoman Virginia Foxx, the new chair of the house committee on education and the workforce, said in her remarks.

Describing several Obama administration initiatives as “flawed” and “misguided”, she encouraged CHEA members in the audience to alert her committee to wasteful regulation. “The world is changing, and it is time for our policies to do the same,” she said. “Let’s get out of the way and let the schools innovate.”

Foxx’s comments were echoed in related news the week before, when Jerry Falwell Jr, president of the evangelical Christian Liberty University, told Associated Press that he has been tapped by Trump to lead a presidential task force on higher education reform with a goal to “get the government off the backs of higher education”.

Jamienne Studley, a deputy under secretary of education in the Obama administration and now a national policy advisor and consultant, said innovation and flexibility are important, but said consensus-building across Congress, higher education institutions and the Education Department is critical.

“Government can’t just ‘get

*‘A significant change occurred when student loan debt crossed the US\$1 trillion mark. It was immediately noticeable that higher education rose very quickly on the domestic policy agenda.’*



**Above (from top):**  
**Elizabeth Warren,**  
**Virginia Foxx,**  
**Larry Sabato**

out of the way’,” said Studley, who attended the conference. “The history of problem schools saddling students with debt and no education of value – a fraction of all schools but enough to cause serious concern – demands that we be careful with students’ lives and precious tax dollars.”

The prospect of wide-ranging deregulation worries conference attendee Simon Boehme, director of student engagement for the US-based Quality Assurance Commons for Higher and Postsecondary Education.

A rollback of policies put in place by Obama “endangers students, and imperils the health of our democracy”, he told *University World News*.

### Colliding concerns

Historically, the federal government’s role in higher education has been limited. Non-profit organisations focus on quality assurance, while the federal government, which oversees billions of taxpayer dollars for federal student aid, focuses on college access and affordability.

But those areas of concern have collided with the rise in college costs, growing concern about low completion rates and rising student debt.

“A significant change occurred when student loan debt crossed the US\$1 trillion mark,” said Spiros Protopsaltis, an assistant secretary for higher education and student financial aid at the US Department of Education during the Obama administration.

As word spread that the level was reached, probably in 2011, “it was immediately noticeable that higher education as a domestic policy issue rose very quickly on the agenda”, he said.

### Rise of for-profits

A concurrent rise in corporate-like for-profit universities alongside growing numbers of students defaulting on loan

payments created a new set of concerns during the Obama administration.

In her remarks to conference attendees, Senator Elizabeth Warren, a Massachusetts Democrat, said she planned to reintroduce legislation designed to see that federal student aid does not fall into the hands of colleges with high default rates and low graduation rates.

She singled out as examples two large for-profit colleges, both of which earned accreditation, that closed their doors in recent years in part due to tougher regulations imposed during Obama’s presidency.

She urged accreditation agencies to use their collective power “to stop waste, fraud and abuse in the system” as part of their quality control function. “Please do not rubber stamp these schools without taking a very close look at them.”

Warren did not mention another source of recent concern: She was highly critical of Trump’s nominee for education secretary, Betsy DeVos, whose confirmation hearing in January was among the most contentious.

Visibly annoyed with DeVos’ responses to questions about student loans and grant aid during the hearing, Warren later wrote on her Facebook page: “If Betsy DeVos can’t commit to using the Department of Education’s many tools and resources to protect students from fraud, I don’t see how she can be the Secretary of Education.”

DeVos has since been confirmed, but only after the Vice-President’s historic casting vote broke a tied vote in the Senate.

### Election post-mortem

In his election post-mortem, Sabato, the University of Virginia political analyst, painted a bleak picture for anyone who favoured any number of Trump’s rivals, but especially Hillary Clinton. Trump has treated his win as a mandate for change, Sabato said, yet he received just 46% of the popular vote.

Sabato said he was encouraged by the massive and widespread demonstrations but worried that sustaining enthusiasm will be a challenge even for the most motivated.

He offered a bit of advice for “those of us who are in academe: find the practical application [of your research] and get it into the right hands. There are [people] who actually appreciate good research that gives us a sense of where policy should move.”



A review of anti-corruption policies around the world found very few institutions focused on the problem, but there is now a growing sense that it should be high on the agenda of policymakers. **Mary Beth Marklein** reports

**GLOBAL**

# Collective effort needed to combat academic corruption

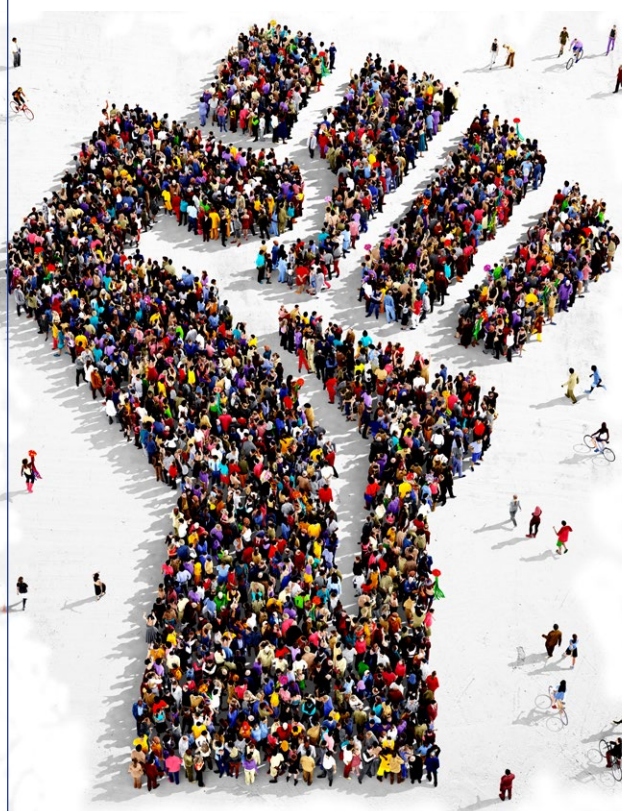
**A** PANEL PRESENTATION on how the global academic community can combat academic corruption in higher education provoked a lively discussion highlighting the widespread and wide-ranging scope of the problem, the diversity of responses and a growing sense that the issue belongs high on the agenda for policy-makers in international education.

The conversation took place in a breakout session during the annual meeting of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation or CHEA in Washington.

CHEA last year began tackling the ubiquitous and unwieldy problem of corruption, issuing an advisory statement outlining the pressing need for a collective effort to eliminate academic corruption and launching a webinar series to address potential solutions.

In a review of policies around the world, “very few of the bodies we looked at really put much of a focus on corruption as part of their reviews of quality assurance in their nations or jurisdiction”, said session moderator Sir John Daniel, an international higher education consultant who helms the CHEA initiative.

CHEA is now considering next steps, including the possibility of producing an online course on corruption, based on its advisory statement. Daniel noted that some MOOC – massive open online course – providers offer courses to students on academic integrity but the CHEA course would be directed primarily at higher education faculty and administrators.



The advisory statement, developed by CHEA and the International Institute for Educational Planning of UNESCO, defines corruption as “any prescribed action in connection with, for example,

admissions, examinations or degree awarding that attempts to gain unfair advantage, including cheating, plagiarism, falsification of research, degree mills and accreditation mills”.

Corruption, hardly a new concept, is most likely to sprout when the stakes are high. Noting the growing pressure on ambitious young academics to publish, a recent *New York Times* column offered a glimpse into the world of fake academic conferences and journals.

The Cambodian government last year sent police to high school exam test sites around the country as part of a crackdown on bribery, stand-in test takers and related forms of cheating.

When New Zealand immigration authorities threatened nearly 150 Indian students with deportation last year after detecting fraudulent visa applications, the students organised a protest, saying education agents they worked with provided false financial information without their knowledge or consent.

## Anti-corruption initiatives

In some regions, higher education institutions or organisations are leading anti-corruption initiatives, a few of which were highlighted at the CHEA session.

The non-profit Global University Network for Innovation in Africa – GUNi-Africa – for example has launched a series of workshops to raise public awareness of the problem of academic corruption and its significance. At the same time it is developing an Academic Integrity Index that would be tied to rankings.

The GUNi-Africa campaign is

*The GUNi-Africa campaign against corruption in higher education is based on a pilot study in Nigeria, which found that combining public awareness and stiff sanctions was effective.*

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based on a pilot study in Nigeria, which found that a combination of public awareness and stiff sanctions was effective.

“Prevention is better than cure, we think,” said GUNi-Africa President Peter Okebukola, pro-chancellor of Crawford University in Nigeria. But “when you know the rules, and you transgress them, you must have sanctions”.

The biggest challenge, Okebukola said, is that corruption is so widespread that higher education officials questioned why higher education was being singled out.

A European Union-funded project on plagiarism identified a number of challenges, including the lack of a common or consistent approach for dealing with the problem.

A survey last year of 800 people in six countries found that, in addition to practices such as cheating on exams and professors taking bribes, a contributing factor was lax enforcement by authorities.

“Although lots of these penalties

were on the books, very few of them appeared to be actually imposed,” said Irene Glendinning, a Coventry University professor and principal investigator for the EU project, known as the Impact of Policies for Plagiarism in Higher Education Across Europe.

On the flip side, she said, the study also revealed that many stakeholders are aware of problems but feel powerless to act.

In Australia, where the media reported that education agents were falsifying academic records for international applicants, universities are looking into developing a secure database that would allow admissions officials to check the validity of academic credentials.

There is a “huge demand and interest from providers for examples of good practices”, said Anthony McClaran, CEO of Australia’s Tertiary Education and Quality Standards Agency.

Notably, few representatives of United States universities or organisations attended the (optional) session on corruption, leading conference organisers to ponder



**Above (from top):**  
**Sir John**  
**Daniel, Irene**  
**Glendinning,**  
**Anthony McClaran**

whether its US membership is being complacent about the problem, or, perhaps think it doesn’t apply to them. The United States needs “to be a part of this”, said CHEA President Judith Eaton.

Coincidentally, in a separate conference session, US Senator Elizabeth Warren vowed to push for legislation that would penalise what she called “bad actors” who engage in academic fraud and corruption.

But she directed her concerns at the for-profit higher education sector and spoke primarily of how policies enrich the colleges while plunging students into debt and leaving them with a worthless degree.

Daniel wondered whether the term ‘corruption’ was off-putting to the public and private non-profit US sector, which tends to prefer softer descriptions. But he said it’s the right choice of words.

“Some are shocked by our use of the word ‘corruption’ to cover cheating, plagiarism and behaviour for which they would prefer euphemisms like misconduct,” Daniel said. About that CHEA remains “unapologetic”, he stressed. “Dishonesty is dishonesty.”

## GLOBAL

# Quality assurance, higher education and the SDGs

**N**OTING THAT higher education lies at the core of many of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals for 2030, the chief of UNESCO’s higher education division outlined for quality assurance professionals the role they can play in contributing to the success of the initiative.

The outline includes support for programmes that prepare graduates for the needs of the labour market, research aimed at solving global problems and global development, and an embrace of ever-evolving models for teaching, learning and delivering education.

The Sustainable Development Goals or SDGs, adopted last year, are a set of 17 priorities that serve as a roadmap for UN planning. Officially

Higher education lies at the core of many of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and given the skyrocketing demand and rapid proliferation of providers and methods of delivery, quality assurance – and its philosophy of continuous internal improvement – has a key role to play.

**Mary Beth Marklein** reports

known as “Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, the initiative is the successor to the UN’s Millennium Development Goals, or MDGs, for 2015, which were established in 2000.

Whereas universal primary

education was one of the MDGs, the emphasis now has expanded to all levels of education, including the broader concept of lifelong learning.

“Everybody learns every day, not just students,” said Peter Wells, chief of the higher education division of UNESCO – the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. “Higher education institutions themselves need to be lifelong learners.”

Among the target goals the UN aspires to achieve by 2030 is equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, and opportunities to ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills they need to promote sustainable



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development related to education, global citizenship and cultural diversity.

Higher education also will play a prominent role across most other SDG priorities, which include an end to poverty and inequality, scientific progress in areas such as climate change and economic growth, a major priority of developing countries.

UNESCO already has begun to tap university expertise and cooperation as “incubators of solutions” through its University Twinning and Networking initiative, Wells said.

Wells’ remarks came during the annual meeting of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation’s International Quality Group or CIQG in Washington, which drew attendees from 30 countries.

### Quality assurance and the SDGs

Given the skyrocketing demand for higher education around the world, and the rapid proliferation of providers and methods of delivery, Wells said quality assurance – and its philosophy of continuous internal improvement – “must be the foundation” for higher education’s approach to the SDGs.

To that end, UNESCO is helping to organise an international conference on quality assurance, likely to be held next year, as part of its Education 2030 Agenda. Among co-sponsors are the CIQG, the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education, and the World Bank.

To conference attendees, Wells emphasised the importance of involving teachers and professors in quality assurance planning.

“The foundation must be bottom-up,” he said. “It’s an alien concept” in many developing countries, where educators – “who are already overloaded, already underpaid” – will likely view it as one more thing they have to do.

Similarly, he urged higher education officials to lend their support and expertise to education beyond their traditional focus on academic degrees. Examples include short courses or certificate programmes that offer training for specific skills. All too often, he said, “institutions believe that’s not their responsibility”.

### Global convention

UNESCO also is moving forward on plans to establish a global convention



that would enhance transparency and build trust among institutions in different parts of the world. As higher education adapts to an increasingly mobile student body, the need for trust is gaining currency.

The global convention will be a mechanism for bridging gaps, among core principles and provisions developed by each of the various regional conventions, several of which have been established in the last several years. (A convention for

Latin America and the Caribbean is expected to come in 2018).

Stamenka Uvalic-Trumbic, former chief of UNESCO’s higher education section and senior adviser to CIQG, clarified that the provisions of the existing regional and eventual global conventions are not mandatory.

They are designed to make it easier for the international higher education community to share and exchange knowledge through mutual recognition. “The conventions are not international law,” she said.

Yue Kan, an assistant dean of education at Zhejiang University in China, said UNESCO’s convention for Asia, forged in Tokyo in 2011, has provided a mechanism through which China’s higher education institutions can engage with the wider world.

That link gives universities some leverage in determining domestic policy. China’s universities “enjoy very little autonomy [because] the government is very powerful”, he said. “This is an opportunity for collaboration.”

Wells listed a range of activities within the higher education section. Recent UNESCO projects have focused on developing open access resources and massive open online courses, or MOOCs, in higher education. *Making Sense of MOOCs: A guide for policy makers in developing countries*, was published last summer jointly by UNESCO and the Commonwealth of Learning.

This month, UNESCO will again host Mobile Learning Week, aimed at supporting the world’s refugees, who now number more than 21 million.

And UNESCO is in the “embryonic stages” of organising its third World Conference on Higher Education, tentatively set for 2020 in Paris. Wells encouraged conference attendees to “think the unthinkable, imagine the unimaginable about what higher education can be”, and post their thoughts on social media – he provided #HEDBlueSky as a hashtag.

***UNESCO is moving forward on plans to set up a global convention on the recognition of higher education qualifications to enhance transparency and build trust among institutions around the world.***



# CHEA

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## ***CHEA/CIQG Memorandum of Affiliation*** **Promoting Partnerships in Quality Assurance**



The Council for Higher Education Accreditation/ International Quality Group (CHEA/CIQG) *Memorandum of Affiliation* is designed to engage quality assurance and accrediting organizations, higher education providers, organizations and governments in a shared effort to affirm and promote fundamental principles for higher education quality.

The *Memorandum* is based on the seven *International Quality Principles* developed by CHEA/ CIQG in 2015. More than 40 institutions and organizations worldwide have already entered into this affiliation as part of addressing higher education quality internationally.

Those eligible to sign the *Memorandum* include quality assurance and accrediting bodies worldwide, higher education providers, higher education organizations and governments that are CIQG members and acknowledged as competent authorities.

Visit the CHEA Website at **[www.chea.org](http://www.chea.org)** for more information or to view a copy of the *Memorandum*.

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