University World News

A Special Report on CHEA 2018 and CIQG 2018

Rising pressure for transparency in HE

CHEA
Council for Higher Education Accreditation
CHEA International Quality Group CIQG

GLOBAL

Change is the only certainty in HE's evolving landscape

CHEA President Judith Eaton: 'We need to be more willing to challenge the past'

A UNIVERSITY WORLD NEWS REPORT

The pressure for more transparency in quality and assurance accreditation, better action to ensure credibility of university degrees, and greater willingness to embrace change in higher education were among the themes at the Council for Higher Education Accreditation and CHEA CIQG 2018 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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Produced by **University World News**
www.universityworldnews.com

There is an increasing influence of not just governments but intergovernmental bodies on higher education regionally and globally, with implications for higher education, quality assurance and accreditation. It raises questions about who is driving policy and what the relationship between government and higher education should be globally. **Mary Beth Marklein** reports

THERE HAS long been a tension between government expectations for its universities and the goals and mission of a country's institutions of higher education. And universities have long clung to the idyllic notion that the pursuit of knowledge – the truth – knows no political boundaries.

But the reality is that governments around the world make decisions and have aspirations that have implications for higher education, quality assurance and accreditation, raising questions about who is driving policy, whether the policies are socially just and what the relationship between government and higher education should be in a global context.

The United States-based Council for Higher Education Accreditation's International Quality Group (CIQG) sought to unpack some of the key factors and players in international quality assurance and accreditation during its annual gathering last week in Washington. More than 330 people

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CHEA CIQG

representing 32 countries participated in back-to-back meetings sponsored by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) and CIQG.

Two themes emerged. First, institutional autonomy remains the defining feature of the modern university and a prerequisite for its effective and efficient operation, and it must be earned over and over.

"Autonomy is not just a privilege, but it's a privilege for a purpose," said Sijbolt Noorda, chairman of Magna Charta Observatory, a community of 800 universities, primarily in Europe, dedicated to protecting academic freedom. "It is a constant repetition of the same exercise."

Second, the only certainty is change. CHEA President Judith Eaton encouraged participants to embrace that reality. "Let me put it this way," she said. "We need to become more irreverent than we have in the past, more willing to challenge the past as opposed to building on it."

Recent developments that are playing a role

Here are recent developments that are playing a role in quality assurance and accreditation from an international perspective:

Regional influence: During the past year, two policy documents – a Common Higher Education Area by the East African Community and the European Union's renewed *Agenda for Higher Education* – have been adopted that highlight the growing significance of regional influence on higher education policy. Both emphasise cross-border collaboration that addresses a shared set of common priorities.

The European Commission's role is to provide "great opportunities to make it possible for different countries to learn from each other and see how they can get stronger", said Adam Tyson, of the European Commission's Directorate General for Research and Innovation.

The Agenda for Higher Education reflects a set of common priorities that set the direction towards which the European Union wants to go, but Tyson said he is "paid to be impatient" with the progress being made at the country and institutional level.

Above (from top): Sijbolt Noorda, chairman of Magna Charta Observatory

Hossam Badrawi, chairman of the Badrawi Foundation for Education and Development in Egypt

Jamil Salmi, author of *The Tertiary Education Imperative: Knowledge, skills and values for development* and former coordinator of tertiary education for the World Bank

> *The European Commission's role is to provide 'great opportunities for different countries to learn from each other and see how they can get stronger'.* **Adam Tyson**

"It's very important that there is real ownership at the level of institutional leaders, even individual academics," he said, but "we're always wanting to push expanding [them] to go further. We're never satisfied."

Developing countries: Drawing from more than 25 years of experience, Jamil Salmi, author of *The Tertiary Education Imperative: Knowledge, skills and values for development* and former coordinator of tertiary education for the World Bank, stressed the relevance of higher education in developing countries.

World Bank policies historically focused on basic education but in the 1990s began making the case for higher education as an engine of economic development, and only more recently has it zeroed in on the role of quality assurance.

"We assumed that just access would take care of it, and the facts prove us wrong," he said. "It's really the culture."

One problem facing some developing countries is that government instability slows momentum. With each new regime, "everything starts from the beginning, so sustainability is gone and political will is not really there", said Hossam Badrawi, chairman of the Badrawi Foundation for Education and Development in Egypt. "We've made progress [in Egypt] but the government is the major funding vehicle."

Moreover, he noted, in many developing countries "states do not differentiate between regulating

and control". Still, trends in higher education globalisation have given developing countries better opportunities than ever, he said, because industrialised countries are facing a new set of circumstances, too.

"Higher education is not going to be the same in the coming five years," Hossam Badrawi said.

Multinational support: Multilateral organisations such as the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization or UNESCO are taking global leadership roles in the role of quality assurance and social justice in higher education.

The 2015 launch of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals also has called attention to the importance of higher education for economic development. Its target for 2030 is to ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university. Higher education also plays a crucial role in many of the other goals, including reduced inequality and inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

Also filling a void are international, non-profit organisations such as the International Engineering Alliance (IEA), launched in 1989 to develop international quality assurance agreements, with a goal of recognising university degrees in countries where accreditation systems may not be fully developed. The goal is not only to help countries develop their system but also to enhance student mobility.

"There's such a demand for engineering undergraduates," said David Holger, chair of the IEA Governing Group and associate provost emeritus at Iowa State University in the US.

"Organisations and employers were saying the expectations for the outcomes for graduates are very similar across the globe and we need to find a way to know [whether] graduates are substantially equipped through their education to succeed."

> *Institutional autonomy remains the defining feature of the modern university and is 'not just a privilege, but a privilege for a purpose. It is a constant repetition of the same exercise'.* **Sijbolt Noorda**

UNITED STATES

Republicans seek more transparency in higher education

Republicans are proposing a comprehensive rewrite of the higher education law, aimed at streamlining the student aid process, easing up on burdensome regulations and demanding increased transparency among colleges and universities. But Democrats oppose what they say is a deeply flawed proposal. **Mary Beth Marklein** reports

A S THE United States House of Representatives prepares to take up the primary piece of federal higher education legislation for the first time in nearly 10 years, the party lines couldn't be clearer: Republicans are proposing a comprehensive rewrite of the law, and Democrats say they will fight tooth and nail to prevent passage of what they see as a deeply flawed proposal.

At the centre of the debate is the Higher Education Act, which was created in 1965 to ensure that all students have access to higher education regardless of family income. The legislation gives the federal government leverage over institutions that today want access to billions of dollars of federal student aid.

The Higher Education Act is supposed to be reauthorised every

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six years but has not been touched since 2008. In the meantime, the past decade has seen a number of significant developments in higher education, including growing concerns about skyrocketing tuition fees and student debt, calls for more accountability and a growing disenchantment with traditional institutions of higher education.

A Wall Street Journal/NBC News poll published in September found that while 49% of Americans believe four-year colleges and universities are doing a good job, nearly the same share (47%) say they aren't sure college is worth the cost. A Pew Research Center poll released in July found a sharp rise since 2015 in the share of Republicans who say colleges have a negative effect on the way things are going in the country.

American families have "lost faith in what post-secondary education is doing for people and they don't see the payback", Representative Virginia Foxx (R–North Carolina), chair of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, told a gathering of higher education professionals last week.

Foxx is the primary author of the Promoting Real Opportunity, Success, and Prosperity Through Education Reform, or PROSPER, Act, a 542-page bill unveiled in December that supporters say would address problems in higher education by streamlining the student aid process, easing up on burdensome regulations and demanding increased transparency among colleges and universities.

But critics say it shrinks student aid, fails to protect consumers and creates a two-tier higher education system that essentially relegates low- and middle-income students to job-training programmes while wealthier students pursue four-year degrees and graduate education, which on average lead to greater job stability and earnings.

Moreover, some Democrats call the proposal by Republicans a partisan effort, noting that PROSPER was developed quickly and quietly, with little to no input from the higher education community on key provisions and leaving little opportunity for debate.

"It's important to have the voices of all stakeholders at the table," said

> *Supporters say the bill would address problems in higher education by streamlining the student aid process, easing up on burdensome regulations and demanding increased transparency among colleges and universities.*

Bobby Scott (D–Virginia), ranking member of the House education committee. "At the end, it's a matter of priorities, and the House's bill priorities are all wrong."

PROSPER's critics are counting on the Senate to temper the potential impact of any final legislation with a more conservative proposal. Differences between the House and Senate versions would then have to be hammered out.

While advocates for traditional colleges and universities have raised some of the gravest concerns about PROSPER, the for-profit sector would stand to benefit from many of the proposed changes. Michael Dakduk, director of government relations for Career Education Colleges and Universities, which represents institutions that offer career-specific programmes, said his members took an unfair beating under former president Barack Obama's administration.

"Things are getting better now that Congress and the White House are controlled by Republicans," he said.

Foxx and Scott gave their remarks last week in separate sessions during the annual meeting of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation, a non-profit group that advocates on behalf of accreditation and quality assurance professionals.

In past reauthorisations, accreditation and quality assurance have remained largely under the Higher Education Act radar, but PROSPER calls for more than a dozen changes that would have an impact on how accrediting organisations are evaluated, how much higher education is regulated and how innovation is encouraged.

Above (from top): Bobby Scott (Democrat-Virginia), US

Julie Peller, executive director of Higher Learning Advocates

David Baime, senior vice president of government relations for the American Association of Community Colleges, US

Focus on outcomes
Quality standards would focus on student learning and educational outcomes, which would represent a major shift in emphasis from current standards, which focus on facilities and equipment, student support services and similar kinds of measures.

Other changes include a requirement that accrediting commissions include at least one member, along with requirements on how accrediting organisations can apply accreditation standards to institutions with a religious mission.

"Issues of quality, outcomes and accountability are on the forefront of members' minds in a way they haven't been before," said Julie Peller, executive director of Higher Learning Advocates, a non-profit founded in 2016 to advance policy that increases student success. But, she noted, their concerns are expressed in the rhetoric of lawmakers more so than through the bill's language.

David Baime, senior vice president of government relations for the American Association of Community Colleges, noted that the proposal does not set mandatory minimum standards for quality or outcomes. That "is a big political achievement that should not go unnoticed", he said.

In her remarks, Foxx emphasised the limited role for federal government. "I don't want the federal government to define success," Foxx said. "I want you to figure it out. We depend on you to judge the quality of institutions." But she also called on institutions to be more transparent about their outcomes "so students can make better decisions about what programme they'd like to do".

A number of conference attendees acknowledged that traditional colleges and universities need to do a better job of explaining themselves.

Leon Botstein, long-time president of Bard College, known for its commitment to the liberal arts, took issue with the logic behind Foxx's comments.

That so many Americans are sceptical of higher education "doesn't indict what we do necessarily, it doesn't make the opinion right", he said. Nevertheless, "the terms set by Democrats and Republicans should be unacceptable to us, but we have to convince the public of that".

The higher education accreditation community is facing increasing federal interest in a form of transparency based on compliance and sharing information. However, this deepens an inherent tension between accreditation's roles as a gatekeeper to federal funds and in improving academic quality, reports **Mary Beth Marklein**

UNITED STATES

HE accreditation sector faces pressure to reform

THE HIGHER education accreditation community, which confers the quality-assurance seal of approval that allows United States colleges and universities access to billions of dollars of federal student aid, must do a better job of explaining itself to the public if it wants to reverse waning public confidence in higher education.

That was one of the tamer recommendations voiced in February at a conference for accreditors, who are feeling the brunt of growing scepticism about the value of a US college degree. The criticism – which comes from policy-makers, students and parents, employers and other stakeholders – has created what Judith Eaton calls the "new normal" to which accrediting bodies must adapt.

"The new normal's role is, first of all, a compliance and information-sharing or transparency one," says Eaton, president of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), which convened the two-day conference in Washington. The federal interest in accreditation as compliance deepens an already inherent tension between accreditation's role both as a gatekeeper to federal funds and in the process of academic quality improvement.

Much of the two-day conference was devoted to how the US accreditation community might respond. It faces several challenges, participants said, one of which is that accreditation is poorly understood by the lay public because the process itself doesn't lend itself to transparency: it typically takes place behind closed doors, and results are for the most part confidential.

Accreditors also eschew the concept of "bright lines", such as completion rates or employment outcomes, as performance measures. "The compliance model is kind of dangerous [because] no one is going to take a risk on a student whose profile doesn't guarantee success," said James Gaudino, president of Central Washington University. Instead, the accreditation system focuses on continuous improvement and – in what smacks to some critics as akin to cronyism – relies on peer reviews to make judgments.

In a breakout session for accrediting organisations, the conversation gravitated toward the need to educate and update stakeholders on how accreditors are

The growing scepticism about the value of a US college degree – from policymakers, students, parents, employers and other stakeholders – has created what Judith Eaton calls the 'new normal', to which accrediting bodies must adapt.

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responding to the various concerns, said moderator Mary Ellen Petrisko, past president of the WASC Senior College and University Commission, a regional accreditation agency serving the West Coast and Pacific.

"The narrative on what we do as accreditors has not caught up with the reality," Petrisko said. "The reality is more nuanced, so we need to continue our efforts to communicate that."

An added complication is that the accreditation community, like US higher education institutions themselves, is diverse and decentralised. CHEA recognises 60 accrediting organisations, each with its own standards.

They include the six major regional associations that collectively accredit most of the nation's traditional non-profit colleges and universities; national associations such as the Distance Education Accrediting Commission; discipline-focused organisations such as the American Board of Funeral Service Education; and faith-based organisations such as the Association for Biblical Higher Education Commission on Accreditation.

When accreditation "is attacked, we can't speak with a single voice about what in fact it is", said Ed Klonoski, president, Charter Oak State College. "I'm arguing we need only one set of standards."

Martin Kurzweil, a higher education consultant with Ithaka S+R, said accreditation has not kept up with higher education, where only a minority of the student population fits the traditional profile around which accreditation was originally organised and technology has dramatically reshaped what teaching and learning looks like. Accreditation "has not adapted to feeding the needs of this evolving context," he said. "Accreditation has the potential to do something about it, but it must itself adapt in order to do that."

Inherently flawed system

Other presenters acknowledged an inherently flawed system. "Accreditation emerged over time and in a way that wasn't planned very well," said Pennsylvania State University Professor Kevin Kinser. The current discontent with the process, he told the audience in one breakout session, "may not be your fault but it is definitely your problem".

Kinser is co-editor of a forthcoming book, *Accreditation on the Edge*, which outlines what the accreditation sector needs to address if it wants to stay relevant in a fast-changing environment. The title suggests that accreditation may be on the edge of a cliff and about to fall over, or it may be on the cutting edge of transformation, he said.

In some sessions, participants

Above (from top): James Gaudino, president of Central Washington University, US.

Andrée Sursock, a senior adviser to the European University Association

from outside the United States expressed impatience with all the hand-wringing emerging out of the US government's growing interest in regulating accreditation.

"We had the same debate within Europe," said Padraig Walsh, chief executive officer at Quality and Qualifications Ireland. "There are tons of other systems out there. They don't ask, 'Is there anything we can learn from other parts of the world?'"

During her presentation on issues of public trust and accountability, Andrée Sursock, a senior adviser to the European University Association, made a similar observation, noting that "the international experience in Europe has been used to promote other ways of doing things" but it "didn't come up at all" in conversations about how the United States might address many of the same issues.

If 47 countries in Europe representing a diversity of policies, laws and languages, were able to corral a consensus about quality assurance, "it should be possible [for the United States] to set a common framework," said Douglas Blackstone, chief executive of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in the United Kingdom.

Blackstone's advice to his US counterparts, for the record: "Rather than wait for the government to tell them what to do, they should seize the moment and reform themselves. Come together and set an agenda."

GLOBAL

QA bodies note progress in fighting academic corruption

Early research findings on academic corruption suggest that accreditation and quality assurance bodies in some countries are having success in addressing the issue, and research on student attitudes towards cheating offers some insights into how an emphasis on integrity might help reverse the problem. **Mary Beth Marklein** reports

EARLY FINDINGS from two studies on academic corruption suggest that accreditation and quality assurance bodies in some countries are making headway in handling the problem, but questions about how to deal with the unwieldy issue remain a work in progress.

And while the topic is complex and multifaceted, research on student attitudes towards cheating offers some insights into how an emphasis

on integrity might reverse the problem, which has long been the scourge of the higher education accreditation profession.

The moral dimension aside, cheating decreases academic engagement, which undermines the central value of a college degree.

"The credibility of quality assurance agencies is going to depend quite a lot on this topic," says Sir John Daniel, a Canada-based higher

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education researcher. And, he added, the evidence suggests the problem has reached epidemic level. "If you don't think there's anything wrong in your university you just haven't found it yet," he said.

Daniel is leading an international effort by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation's International Quality Group (CIQG) to fight the problem. Findings from two studies were discussed in February at the groups' annual meetings in Washington.

Preliminary findings of a commissioned study

Preliminary findings of a study commissioned by CIQG offer promise that some accreditation and quality assurance bodies believe they are having success in wiping out academic corruption. Many of them work in concert with other organisations, "so there's a lot of activity there", says lead researcher Irene Glendinning, a faculty member in the Office of Teaching and Learning at Coventry University in the United Kingdom.

A few examples cited by Glendinning's research team:

- Last year, quality assurance agencies in Australia and the United Kingdom created guidance notes for how institutions of higher education can address contract cheating, a form of academic dishonesty in which students hire others to complete their work.
- New Zealand has made contract cheating illegal – a move that "should be pursued by every country", Glendinning said, if for no other reason than "it sends the right message" to students.
- Anti-corruption agencies, non-governmental organisations and ombudsmen are supporting the work of quality assurance bodies in Hong Kong as well as Africa, Lithuania, Slovenia, Kosovo and elsewhere.
- China is among countries that have developed or are looking into creating secure digital repositories to authenticate student qualifications. The repositories enable recipients to accept data that comes directly from the learner, reducing the potential for the transmission of fraudulent credentials.

The findings were based on surveys
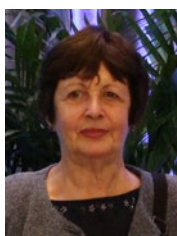
Above (from top): Jason Stephens, an associate professor at the University of Auckland, New Zealand

Irene Glendinning, a faculty member in the Office of Teaching and Learning at Coventry University in the United Kingdom

from 45 quality assurance bodies. More comprehensive findings, including case studies focusing on best practices, are expected to be released this summer, Glendinning said.

Research on cheating

Meanwhile, research on students who behave dishonestly calls attention to the nuanced nature of cheating, as well as the challenges in trying to prevent the problem, said Jason Stephens, an associate professor at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. In a nutshell, he said, most students acknowledge having cheated in some way in the last year, and about a third of students are engaging in certain behaviour even though they believe it to be morally wrong.

His study looked at the effects of a compulsory online academic integrity seminar on cheating. The goal was not simply to reduce academic dishonesty, but also to increase students' knowledge and skills associated with greater moral awareness, judgment, commitment and action. Over four weeks, students engaged in online

discussions focused on questions such as 'What is moral? What is right? Why be good? And what kind of will and skills are needed?'

Results found only small decreases five years later in reporting certain behaviours such as copying homework or plagiarising a few sentences, leading Stephens to conclude that such instruction is both necessary and insufficient. His advice: "Take the long view – effective policies and cultural change take time and effort. Plan on assessing the new policies and procedures you implement and making adjustments."

Jamil Salmi, a tertiary education expert, suggested that an exploration of innovative teaching and learning approaches might also contribute to the conversation on how to eliminate traditional enablers of student dishonesty. Exercises that emphasise team-based activities, for example, "would defeat the purpose [of dishonest behaviour] because it makes cheating irrelevant".

That echoes the World Economic Forum's *The Future of Jobs* report, which lists complex problem solving as employers' most-desired skill. Other top skills include critical thinking, creativity, people management and coordinating with others.

On the broader issue of academic credentials fraud, the Groningen Declaration Network's (GDN) digital data system, which aims to streamline and protect the secure transmission of academic records, has expanded its activity. Established in 2012, GDN's initial phase of operation was seen as a way to crack down on fake credentials. Participating countries are now focused on its value to accreditation organisations, with the hope that its findings can support policy-making.

"Quality assurance is a big part of our discussion," said Michael Reilly, executive director of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, one of the first organisations to embrace GDN.

> *'The credibility of quality assurance agencies is going to depend quite a lot on [tackling cheating]. If you don't think there's anything wrong in your university you just haven't found it yet.'* **Sir John Daniel**

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