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Cultural Organization

Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education

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Note from the Secretariat

The initiative to develop guidelines on “Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education” is a follow-up to a resolution adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO (29 September-17 October 2003), inviting the Director-General to “develop practices and principles to guide cross-border provision of higher education, drawing on the competence of UNESCO and other international agencies, in cooperation with quality assurance agencies and educational providers”.

The resolution confirmed the leading role of UNESCO in higher education reasserted through the World Conference on Higher Education (WCHE, 1998, WCHE+5, 2003), and the Global Forum on International Quality Assurance, Accreditation and the Recognition of Qualifications (2002, 2004).

UNESCO and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) agreed to proceed with the elaboration of joint Guidelines for quality provision in cross-border higher education, based on United Nations and UNESCO principles and instruments, as an educational response to the growing commercialization of higher education.

The objective of the drafting process was to elaborate guidelines based on the specific needs of Member States and addressing real problems. Experts from UNESCO and OECD Member States as well as stakeholders including higher education institutions, student associations, quality assurance and accreditation agencies, recognition agencies, academic staff associations, professional bodies, the private sector and other international organizations were invited to take part in the process. The Guidelines were conceived as being voluntary and non-binding in character and as providing orientation for developing national capacity and international cooperation in this area. They are neither a normative nor a standard-setting document.

The objectives of the Guidelines are to propose tools and a synthesis of best practices that can assist Member States in assessing the quality and relevance of higher education provided across borders and to protect students and other stakeholders in

higher education from low-quality higher education provision. The Guidelines address six stakeholders in higher education (governments, higher education institutions/providers including academic staff, student bodies, quality assurance and accreditation bodies, academic recognition bodies, and professional bodies), provide a set of orientations to practitioners, and seek to promote mutual trust and international cooperation between providers and receivers of cross-border higher education.

Following the resolution of the 33rd session of the General Conference (October 2005), the Guidelines are issued as a Secretariat document on “Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education” elaborated in cooperation with OECD. They are perceived as a timely document that addresses key higher education issues in a more globalized society and are equally relevant for developed and developing countries.

UNESCO stands ready to provide, upon request, advice to Member States and partners on how the Guidelines may be best utilized; to promote capacity building for quality assurance at the regional level, using the Guidelines as a reference and the regional conventions for the recognition of qualifications as existing frameworks.

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