

TRANSNATIONAL QUALITY ASSURANCE: IN PURSUIT OF GLOBAL COOPERATION

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The international context has with no doubt acted as a political window through which change...in quality assurance... has been introduced.²

I. Introduction:

Assurance of quality and standards has become more than a domestic concern to individual nations. National and regional policy agendas for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (HE) are increasingly being determined by supra-national trends and decisions. In an effort to remain in the global market, Higher Education administrations are being pushed to be more publicly transparent, not only for what they do, but also for the standards of their academic and professional programs. As the Lord Dearing Report suggested, there is much to be gained by greater expectations and clarity about standards and the levels of achievement required for different awards.³ As a result, one of the more positive outcomes of global pressure and internationalization in Higher Education has been greater collaboration and cooperation across borders and between national and regional associations in efforts to achieve comparable standards.

Another facet of global pressure and internationalization, of course, is increased competition. In competing in this kind of environment, accreditation, public information and accountability are extremely important, not only for those countries and institutions that are not well known in international HE circuits, but also for those that have already achieved greater levels of prominence. As a consequence, in developing and revising review processes, leaders in higher education increasingly have to respond to pressures to reach equivalency of studies carried out in different countries;⁴ demands for the recognition of academic degrees and qualifications, and free trade and international agreements, among others.⁵

In efforts to achieve comparability, it is clear that both developed and undeveloped countries are facing interesting challenges, and that the responses tend to vary from place

¹ The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Council of Ontario Universities.

² Perellon, Juan F. and Josep, M. Vilatta National Mediations of Supranational Trends in QA, Comparative Study of Spain and Switzerland, pg. 9

³ The National Framework for Higher Education qualifications, called for in the Dearing Report, was published in January 2001. ["Higher Education in the Learning Society" Report of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (the Dearing Report) HMSO, London July 1997]

⁴ Dzelme, J. (2003) pg. 4

⁵ Historical links between individual countries are of less significance in an era when international relations are governed by multilateral agreements that are driven by free trade.

to place because of previous or existing arrangements in the domain of Quality Assurance. The history and culture of the society, as well as the economic and educational priorities of the government, will inevitably shape the response. Dr. Antony Stella from the Indian National Accreditation System (NAAC) suggests,

*it is obvious that the instruments and methods adopted by one country in assessing the quality of higher education may not be totally applicable to another. Even within one country, one agency may have a different mandate from another...*⁶

and argues the Indian educational experience must be viewed with this understanding.

The internationalization and globalization of Higher Education, the transparency of standards in graduate education and the influence these are having in Canada and on the Ontario public universities in terms of greater collaboration and cooperation are the focus of this paper. After presenting a brief overview of movements elsewhere, the paper introduces the process through which the Canadian policy-making structures in higher education are mediating, interpreting and reinterpreting transnational trends, and influencing the relationships at the regional and national levels. By taking one Province (Ontario) as an example, we can see the interaction that is occurring at the institutional, provincial and national levels. Before delving into this case study, it is important for the reader to understand the nature of one of the keys to transparency, e.g., “standards”. What, then, do we mean when we use the term “standards”?

II. The Role of Standards in Movements Toward Transparency:

Due to the fact that the supra-national trends have questioned the validity and, indeed, sometimes questioned the comparability among countries,⁷ one of the more challenging dimensions of the efforts at collaboration/cooperation is the search for “comparable standards”. The Berlin Communiqué, for example, invited ENQA, in cooperation with EUA (European University Association), ESIB, and EURASHE to develop an agreed upon set of standards, procedures and guidelines on Quality Assurance. The call for agreed-upon standards raised issues about what “standards” are, particularly since the term “standard” is used so variably in the literature. For example, some see standards as quantitative sets of criteria, or checklists; others see them as a code of principles (which corresponds to a set of “Procedures” or “Guidelines”).⁸

Standards have traditionally been set by the professoriate, and although the professoriate in leading institutions may have been confident that they knew what these standards were, the implicit nature of these standards is becoming increasingly less useful at a global level.⁹ Nevertheless, while many more countries and institutions now seem to

⁶ Stella, Antony and Professor A. Gnanam *Making the Most of Accreditation: Lessons of Experience from India*, pg. 1

⁷ Brennan, et.al., 1996

⁸ EUA's Quality Assurance Policy position in the Context of the Berlin Communiqué, 12 April, 2004.

⁹ Brennan, et. al. 1996

accept that there is a growing need for a reference framework for evaluation and accreditation, and while both criteria and standards are used for this purpose, both terms continue to be used and defined in many and confusing ways.¹⁰

Regardless of the variability, one of the main goals in establishing standards in the current climate remains “mutual recognition”.¹¹ As a path to achieving mutual recognition, one common pattern has been for standards to define the desirable final result of students in higher education institutions and contain the main requirements concerning educational objectives. Standards are commonly accepted to mean the level of requirements and conditions that must be met by institutions or programs to be evaluated by a QA agency. These conditions involve expectations with regard to quality, and describe the expected outcomes of a program. Such standards typically concern the competencies, knowledge, skills and/or attitudes that are expected of the graduates.¹²

III. Concerns Raised About Trends Toward Developing Common Standards:

Along with attempts at comparability, definition and transparency of standards, however, cautions are frequently being raised. There are concerns, for example, that common standards kill creativity and exceptional solutions for new programs or changes in an existing one. There is a perceived danger that standards are too conservative, especially internationally-accepted standards. In addition, in new programs it is particularly difficult to evaluate learning results as opposed to input variables.¹³ Some of the other issues that have been raised include questions of how agencies can make operational decisions on quality and at the same time make operational in QA the international demand for comparability of level descriptors of study program.¹⁴ There are also questions about how agencies can balance the demand for feedback on improvement by the program (the most positive elements in the actual QA system) versus the political pressures on strong and clear public decisions on quality. It takes tremendous skills to steer a right balance between the demands of quality and the realities of what is achievable in different circumstances....other than upholding the principles of quality assurance in higher education, more significantly Professor Leong has staunchly upheld the principles of independence of a quality assurance body. He sees rightly that this independence is crucial to the integrity of the quality assurance process.¹⁵

In spite of these concerns, as the paper suggests, standard setting and accreditation are two critical aspects of facilitating the movement of persons across both regional and

¹⁰ Look at Thune’s review 2003, Thune C. et al. 2003 *Quality Procedures in European Higher Education An ENQA survey*. ENQA Occasional Papers Helsinki.

¹¹ Fasel, Sylvie et al. *Accreditation in Germany, Austria and Switzerland: The D-A.CH Network*.

¹² See Van Damme -[Trends and Models in International QA in HE – relation to trade in Education. Higher Education Management and Policy, Vol. 14, No. 3, pp. 93-129).

¹³ Generally, any program will need two cohorts of graduates to provide adequate data for evaluation of program policies, procedures and placement of graduates (Hamalainen, K.)

¹⁴ Aria van Staaa and Pim Storm, (2003) pg. 6

¹⁵ HKCAA *Establishment of a Qualifications Network and its Associated Quality Assurance Mechanisms* Accredited Note Issue No. 26, June 2004.

international borders through cross border recognition of qualifications and the transfer of academic credits. In those academic or professional areas where standards are inclined to be implicit, such as the humanities, the literature suggests a focus on goals should help to make the implicit more explicit. To indicate the level of explicitness that may be achieved in goals oriented-education, Jones (1994) defines three sets of generic outcome inventories that are crucial to HE – critical thinking, speech communication, and writing. National frameworks of qualifications, in fact, usually include 3 key sets of outcomes: 1) knowledge 2) skills and 3) competence, articulated in terms of standards for learning outcomes, and supported by systems for quality assurance. These are sometimes defined as “Qualifications”; e.g., formal awards for the recognition of learning.

The mission of the “Global Forum on International Quality Assurance, Accreditation and the Recognition of Qualifications” is to link existing frameworks dealing with these matters and to provide a platform for continuing dialogue. The aim is to propose an international policy framework that is useful to private and transnational providers. An important dimension of this effort is that such a framework must reconcile the interests of government, the traditional Higher Education sector, for-profit providers and the needs and interests of students and the general public. UNESCO, for example, is carrying out this work with a number of partners, including INQAAHE, but the economic and political pressures should not be minimized.¹⁶

As we shall see later in the paper, efforts to make implicit standards more explicit have been a primary objective in the Ontario context, but not without consideration of and concerns about a loss of autonomy. Before describing in greater detail the Ontario experience, and how they are addressing some of these concerns, the next portion of the paper illustrates only some of the movements that are taking place internationally to recognize the importance of supra-national trends and efforts to reach greater transparency and common standards. In doing so, the brief description of these activities will also illustrate how various countries are recognizing the importance of the communication and cooperation between the different levels of government, quality assurance agencies, the traditional Higher Education sector, and the public.

IV. Examples of International Progress:

(a) Europe:

The movement towards greater transparency is particularly evident in Europe, where the political commitment to consolidate European higher education (as stated in the Bologna Declaration) has established a political demand for the transparency of higher education, in addition to the challenges created by increasing student mobility and the competition to attract students. The origins of the Bologna Process can be traced back to the Maastricht Treaty, and the Sorbonne Joint Declaration (1998). The goal set at that time was toward the adoption of a system of credits that would allow transfer across participating HE systems, common recognition, transparency and simplification. This was to involve a system of easily readable and comparable degrees. On June 19th, 1999 a declaration was signed by 29 European Ministers of Higher Education to establish a

¹⁶ ,(Lewis, pg. 17)

European HE Area (EHEA) by 2010 [referred to as the Bologna Declaration]. This launched a major initiative to restructure and harmonize the HE system of the EU into a more transparent and mutually-recognized common system.¹⁷ What followed was a series of declarations, communiqués, official statements, and trend reports from the conferences, conventions and official seminars called by different groups.¹⁸

The Bologna agenda highlighted the need to go beyond pure national arrangements and toward a system of Quality Assurance able to take into account the new context of an internationalized HE.¹⁹ The harmonization of standards requires collaboration and cooperation, not only at national levels, but it must include all levels involved in Higher Education administration. The Bologna Process is indeed a colossal undertaking that exemplifies the involvement of governments, educational organizations, higher education institutions, and students. It is scheduled to be completed by 2010, and the responsibility for implementing the goals of the Bologna Declaration rests with all the different levels.²⁰ The Bologna Declaration confirmed the autonomy of universities, and committed itself to communication between ministries of education and universities.²¹

The Trends III report notes that if the EHEA

*is to become a reality, it has to evolve from governmental intentions and legislation to institutional structures and process.*²²

While member states of the EU are controlled by the Ministries (MHE), the participating EU countries agreed to involve the European University Association (EUA), Higher Education (EURASHE), the National Union of Students in Europe (ESIB), and the European Network for HE (ENQA).

The Prague and Berlin Communiqués were set up to follow the meeting in Paris and Bologna in order to measure progress and set further goals. The Graz Declaration is deemed the formal position of Europe's universities, including the development of a set of standards, procedures and guidelines for the requirement for a report to the Bergen Conference.²³

At the last follow up meeting held in Berlin in September 2003, the Ministers of Education advocated the need to encourage cooperation with other parts of the world and to open up future Bologna events to representatives of the non-European countries. Evidence of cooperation and collaboration at more than one level can be seen in the movements that are taking place in some of the following countries as well.

¹⁷ Yopp, John H., CGS Communicator, Vol. Xxxvi, No. 10, Dec. 2003.

¹⁸ When it is completed in 2010, it will include 12 million students and 4,000 universities across Europe

¹⁹ Perellon, Juan F. and Josep, M. Vilatta *National Mediations of Supra-national Trend in QA, A Comparative Study of Spain and Switzerland*. (2003)

²⁰ WES Description of "The Bologna Process".

²¹ Yopp, J. (2003) pg. 2.

²² Trends III website www.unige.ch/eug."

²³ European University Association Document *Forward for Berlin: The Role of Universities to 2010 and Beyond*. Louven July 7, 2003.

(b) The Netherlands:

In the experience of the Nordic countries, Lewis suggests the existence of some sort of regulatory framework facilitated cooperation.²⁴ Flanders and the Netherlands decided to set up a common accreditation organization and system that considered accreditation a logical step in the existing quality assurance system. This assessment will be made by the NAO (The Dutch Accreditation organization), an independent organization established by law. The NAO's first task is to determine whether the goals comply with the set of quality standards expressed in output (graduates), organization, staff and facilities.²⁵ The quality assurance agencies in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden conducted a pilot project on mutual recognition as a way of bridging the gap between internationalisation of quality assurance and national embedment of Higher Education.²⁶

(c) Switzerland:

Perellon suggests that Switzerland could not stay behind in a context of increased internationalization of higher education.²⁷ It was proposed that the Confederation and the Cantons jointly set up a body responsible for quality control and accreditation and that the new body follow international structures in this domain. The 1998 Bill Promotion of Education, Research and Technology for the period 2000-2003 provided for greater coordination among the different components of the sector, reinforced governance structures, and centralized quality assurance and accreditation procedures. While the Bill acknowledged that responsibility for quality assurance rested with the institutions, it underlined the need for the Confederation and the Cantons to ensure that this was done on the basis of comparable criteria.

(d) Ireland:

The governing authorities of the seven universities in Ireland established the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB), one of whose aims is to represent the Universities nationally and internationally on issues related to quality assurance and quality improvement.²⁸

(e) Japan:

²⁴ Lewis, Richard, U.S. Open University, Center for Higher Education Research and Information, UK pg. 7-8

²⁵ Scheele, J.P. Karl Dittrich, Mark Frederick *Accreditation in the Netherlands, A European Challenge?* February 2003

²⁶ Kristofferson, Dorte and Tobias Lindeberg *Creating QA and International Transparency for QA Agencies: The Case of Mutual Recognition, Quality in Higher Education*, Vol. 10, No. 1, April 2004 pg 31

²⁷ Perellon, Juan F. and Joseph M. Vilalta *National Mediations of Supra-national Trends in Quality Assurance: A Comparative Study of Spain and Switzerland*

²⁸ McQuillan, Don *The Irish Universities Quality System and Its Place in Europe* (2003)

The Japan University Accreditation Association (JUAA) is a higher education Assurance agency which was established in 1947 to improve the quality of Japanese Universities. In 2003, the JUAA committed itself to making common standards of accreditation throughout the world. In the Tokyo Declaration 2002, the significance of Transparency and Equivalence in the Bologna Declaration 1999 for promoting the competitiveness and attractiveness of European higher education was recognized. The JUAA also hopes to make international contributions in the region, and in reforms to its university accreditation system in order to enhance the national and international validity of Japanese universities as well as by collaborating with HEQAA.²⁹

(f) Australia:

Australia has recognized, according to Pearce, that international markets, education and employment will provide ongoing challenges to demonstrate that their standards are comparable with the standards of higher education and research internationally. Pearce further suggests that

*Australia's position in these international markets will depend on its ability to demonstrate comparable standards of education and educational outcomes...our participation in mutual recognition arrangements and other conventions that assist the movement of highly educated professionals, as well as the export of educational products all require us to be a partner in the ongoing international developments in quality assurance.*³⁰

(g) The United States:

In the USA, the 50 states are sovereign in matters concerned with Higher Education legislation, and those who have some experience of attempting to establish a US-wide higher education system find it difficult to think of the US as a higher education entity at all.³¹ Nevertheless, the *CGS Communicator* reports that the implication of increased competition, and challenges re equivalency in international agreements have encouraged the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) in Washington, D.C. to partner with other associations to initiate a collaboration to study the impact of the Bologna Process on U.S. Higher Education.³²

V. Canada

(a) The Canadian Context

²⁹ Ohname, Masaterio *New Confidence Building: Quality Assurance Systems of JUAA Being Relevant to the World Experience.*

³⁰ Pearce, M. (2003) pg. 9

³¹ Lewis, Richard. Keynote Address INQAAHE, pg. 1

³² CGS Communicator December 2003 pg. 4

The Canadian situation is similar in many ways to that of the U.S. In addition, like other jurisdictions, a study of the Canadian context requires a model that functions at three levels:

- 1) The Institutional
- 2) The Provincial and
- 3) The National

and ultimately leading to cooperation at the fourth level:

- 4) The International

Canada is a federation of ten provinces and three territories. At the moment in Canada, QA of HE is primarily embedded in institutional or regional Quality Assurance agencies. Under the Canadian constitution, provincial governments have exclusive responsibility for all levels of education. There is no ministry or department of education at the federal level. In each province and territory there are laws, policies, and procedures that govern the operation of postsecondary institutions. Most higher education public institutions are established by public legislation and receive public funds to support their operations.³³ Private postsecondary institutions are not established by public legislation, and for the most part, do not receive public funding. Nevertheless, in considering the Canadian context, the reader will begin to understand the impact international pressures are having as they increasingly influence the national level as well as the regional and institutional levels. Ontario provides an example of how a commitment can be made between the institutions, the Province and the national government to facilitate the development of common standards and/or quality assurance procedures in Higher Education in Canada. This commitment is, in turn, being driven by global pressures and internationalization. And, as in so many of the examples illustrated above, the impetus is coming from the international context to stimulate the provincial and national levels to obtain collaboration and input from the regional and institutional level

(b) Ontario – The Provincial or Regional Level:

The [Postsecondary Education Choice and Excellence Act](#), passed in December 2000, regulates degree granting in Ontario. One function of this Act was to establish an advisory quality review body - the [Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board](#). Expanding “choice” made it easier for private degree-granting organizations to operate in Ontario. Safeguarding “excellence” meant that all applications for Ministerial Consent to offer degrees that are not rooted in an Ontario statute enabling the organization to offer such programs would be referred to the Board, which in turn would make recommendations to the Minister.³⁴

(c) Public Universities in Ontario – The Institutional Level

³³ The federal government provides only indirect support to postsecondary education through fiscal transfers to the provinces and by funding university research and student assistance.

³⁴ Baker, Donald N. *On Postsecondary Quality Assurance in Ontario: Introduction of the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board, 2001-02* Toronto, March 20, 2002

Like Australia, where the universities have primary responsibility for their own standards and develop their own processes to ensure these standards, Ontario public universities conduct their own quality assessment of universities and programs and develop and maintain their own standards.³⁵ This makes Ontario a particularly good example of a region where quality assessment has been conducted at the institutional level successfully for many years, but with a cooperative agreement with the Province.

Undergraduate programs at Ontario's public universities are assessed, on a voluntary periodic basis, by the Undergraduate Program Review Audit Committee (UPRAC), under the aegis of the Ontario Council of Academic Vice-Presidents. The primary function of the assessment is to audit the processes used by universities for the review of their existing undergraduate programs.

Graduate programs offered by or proposed by public universities are assessed on a voluntary basis by the [Ontario Council on Graduate Studies](#) (OCGS).³⁶ The purpose of an assessment is to make recommendations based on quality considerations about existing programs or before new programs are offered.³⁷ Outcomes of the OCGS reviews are reported yearly to the Government which permits the universities to maintain their autonomy at the same time as fulfill an accountability function to the Province. The Province has agreed to accept the outcome of the review as a necessary condition for funding approval. This process and this cooperative relationship between the institutional and political level has functioned effectively for over twenty years.

In the more recent past, the amount of interaction between levels has taken on a slightly new shift in similar ways to that described in other countries. For example, the Ontario universities, through the auspices of OCGS, are now working with the provincial body (PEQAB) and the national body, the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC), to gain greater transparency in standards and guidelines for quality assessment at the graduate level, the impetus of this coming from the national level. As is the case with many peer-reviewed processes, the current OCGS Appraisal Process is more input-oriented where an institution has to demonstrate through the peer-reviewed work of faculty that they have the capability to launch and continue a specified degree. Standards have, therefore, generally been more implicit.

The following are the general categories now being defined to describe the outcome of the degree expectations for students (standards) that have been set at the provincial level in Ontario by PEQAB,³⁸ and represent the standard, which the university body at the

³⁵ Pearce, Margaret *Australia Higher Education Quality and Standards: The Evolving Role of the Commonwealth Government*, pg. 1

³⁶ Both UPRAC and OCGS reviews are carried out under the auspices of the Council of Ontario Universities

³⁷ Universities also conduct cyclical academic reviews of each department and program using processes of independent peer review. Many public universities also undergo accreditation at the program level by various international program accreditation agencies, such as those approved by the United States Department of Education.

³⁸ The first major task of PEQAB was to survey the criteria and procedures used by similar agencies and accrediting bodies around the world. In doing so, the work of other jurisdictions (such as the European community) on articulating and harmonizing academic standards was quickly brought to light. Furthermore, the program quality assessment of all programs now begins with an assessment against the relevant degree-level standard. Baker, D. op cit., p. 8-9

system level (OCGS) have considered in their elaboration of their own degree expectations (i) Depth and Breadth of Knowledge (ii) Research Component (iii) Level of Analytical Skill (iv) Level of Application of Knowledge, (v) Professional Capacity/Autonomy (vi) Level of Communications Skills and (vii) Awareness of Limits of Knowledge.

And, like other regions, some concerns have been expressed about the long-range impact or value of setting common standards. Concerns have also been raised about the degree to which the OCGS process might be affected by a 'buy-in' to a more outcome-oriented set of Standards? One concern is about the extent to which a government driven initiative would be flexible to any recommended changes in their standards by OCGS. Another concern pertains to the implications for OCGS, a volunteer, self-accreditation process, of moving to a provincial or federal type standards process that is more susceptible to taking on an ever-changing political nature. What degree of autonomy would be given up, at what price and for what benefits?

A related concern pertains to the fact that OCGS has endorsed and upheld a contextually-based process where individual universities have most commonly set admission criteria, program objectives, curriculum/course descriptions, and developed objectives for comprehensive exams, practica, research papers rather than an outcomes based one.. Therefore, some have asked whether more objective standards have the potential to undermine niche, mission-specific strengths of research-oriented graduate programs. In spite of such fears, the international climate has generated a dialogue which appears to be mobilizing our own multi-layered system in Ontario.

(c) Canada's Educational System – The National Level³⁹

There is no national body or agency for accreditation in Canada, and in some cases no provincial body. Public postsecondary institutions are given authority to grant degrees, diplomas, and certificates through specific legislation, and these institutions are "recognized" in that sense. A small number of private postsecondary institutions have also been given degree-granting authority, and these too are "recognized"; however, most private postsecondary institutions are not "recognized", but are "registered" or "licensed".⁴⁰ Nevertheless, at the national level, the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) has for some time been engaged in an initiative to profile the Canadian approach to quality assurance in higher education.⁴¹ Impetus for this work comes from a dynamic dialogue on an international protocol on higher education quality assurance and the implications of these developments for Canadian universities.

³⁹ Source: *Canadian Information Center for International Credentials, Postsecondary Education System in Canada: An Overview.*

⁴⁰ "Registered" or "licensed" institutions in Canada (usually private sector training organizations) issue diplomas and certificates that are not authorized by specific legislation. Governments generally limit their authority over these institutions to consumer protection.

⁴¹ The Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada represent 92 public and private not-for-profit universities and university-degree level colleges across Canada.

At the heart of AUCC's engagement in this issue lies the objective of ensuring that the stature of Canadian universities as institutions offering high quality education continues to be recognized around the world, not only for purposes of international student recruitment and off-shore export activities in an increasingly competitive and globalized market, but also for the reputation of Canadian graduates and researchers. In this regard, AUCC is working toward a clear articulation and profiling of Canadian higher education QA policies. The Association's Board of Directors has approved the "Principles of Institutional Quality Assurance in Canadian Higher Education" and the Executive Heads of AUCC Member institutions have recently been invited to endorse them.⁴²

In addition to this exercise, an interprovincial meeting was held in February which led to the creation of a small working group of British Columbia and Ontario officials to work on various projects, including the formulation of a recommendation for the Deputy Ministers of Higher Education on a pan-Canadian approach to quality assurance for degree programs. Mindful of the responsibility of each province and territory with respect to educational matters, as well as the tradition of the autonomy of institutions and their need to participate in a pan-Canadian approach to quality assurance, the Working Group proposed the following recommendations:

1. That members of the ACDME endorse in principle the establishment of a pan-Canadian approach to quality assurance for degree programs that would include the development of: (a) a degree qualifications framework, (b) standards for accreditation/quality assurance reviews, and (c) a pan-Canadian approach to the external validation of the quality of programs based on (a) and (b).
2. That members of the ACDME establish a committee consisting of an appointed representative from all interested provinces/territories, and
3. That the committee draft a recommended pan-Canadian approach to quality assurance of degree programs for Deputies' review after consultation with degree-granting institutions and other appropriate stakeholders.

At their meeting of August 20, 2004, the Deputies approved these recommendations and agreed to establish a committee.

There are, of course, questions about whether they will actually develop a pan-Canadian consensus on desired degree level standards or procedures for the quality assurance of degree programs, or whether they will merely agree that each province should develop its own. There are also questions about whether they will agree on the role and composition of a pan-Canadian body charged with setting standards for quality assurance and with auditing institutional program quality assurance activities to determine whether they conform to the standards, or whether they will merely agree that each province should consider establishing its own auditing/accrediting body.

⁴² AUCC *QA in Canadian Higher Education – Institutional Survey*.

In the final analysis, however, there will be no further movement without a significant level of cooperation and “trust”. Central to the success of a qualifications network is the matter of “trust” in the business of qualifications, which is closely attached to credibility and acceptance, and is an essential attribute of successful qualifications.⁴³ The work of developing trust goes beyond determining a framework and into the way the framework is communicated and implemented. The process can be just as important as technical details. Nevertheless, there appears to be clear recognition that in this climate of transnational transparency, broad national consensus helps to foster confidence in international terms, and recognition of qualifications at all levels (the institutional, the regional, the national and international) is therefore fundamentally important.⁴⁴

⁴³ Maguire, B. (2003)

⁴⁴ Leong, John C.Y. and Wong, W.S. (2003) pg. 7

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