

REGULATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE IN TRANSNATIONAL EDUCATION

1. Background

The theme of transnational education has been set as part of the agenda for the follow-up of the Bologna Declaration, since the constitution of a *European area for higher education* raises questions that go far beyond the formal national education systems, as it implies competing in a global education market with traditional and new providers under multiple forms, and also because the issue of mobility, which is central to the Bologna process, has nowadays also to do with the mobility of institutions and of educational programmes and services, besides the mobility of people. Thus, many of the instruments to be developed within the Bologna process to deal with the "promotion of mobility by overcoming obstacles to the effective exercise of free movement" (Bologna Declaration, 1999) may be of relevance for the regulation of transnational education and vice versa.

The Portuguese Presidency, in the first semester of year 2000, defined as the main objective of the annual Conference of the Directors General of Higher Education and the Chairpersons of the Rectors' Conferences of the European Union to bring forward a discussion on transnational education, aiming at identifying forms of regulation for this type of higher education provision.

The former Confederation of European Union Rectors' Conferences accepted the challenge presented by the Portuguese Presidency and prepared a paper for the Conference (Machado dos Santos, 2000) intended to break some ground on the complex theme of transnational education, based on a review of recent reports and papers, having in mind to launch a debate around some key questions, such as: why is transnational education flourishing? in which forms is it developing? which main problems arise? how to deal with them?, with the aim to identify basic concepts and methodologies and try to define an action plan for the near future.

Following the discussions at the Conference, the Confederation, with the support of the European Commission, launched a study to deal with those questions by analysing and making recommendations on the development and impact of transnational education on higher education in Europe.

This paper recollects the main points from the former presentation, drawing also on the conclusions from the project report (Adam, 2001).

2. The explosion of new providers

Ted Marchese, Vice-president of the American Association for Higher Education, presented an extensive survey on what he calls "an explosive array of new competitors" in American higher education. Several trends emerge from his study (Marchese, 1998):

- Many of the existing universities and colleges are developing remote-site strategies, provoking an explosion of **branch campus**;
- A growing percentage of institutions are offering **distance education** courses;
- Big conglomerates of universities are creating powerful **virtual universities** to act as brokers for their distance learning courses;
- **For-profit networks**, including universities, are attracting big investments from Wall Street for the provision of post-secondary education and training in a market considered to be "huge and ripe for the picking";
- **For-profit universities**, well capitalised and national/international in ambition, are rapidly expanding;
- A host of new providers "hope to be the **brokers** of choice for the flood of courseware hitting the Web";
- **Industry** groups combine to produce their own **education enterprises**, with the aim to lessen their dependence on exiting campus due to dissatisfaction with traditional higher education.

The trend of an increasing competition in higher education, as presented above for the U.S., is becoming global and has also reached Europe. In a report by Nikos Kokosalakis (1998) on non-official higher education in the European Union relating to nine European countries, it is documented that in southern Europe there is a significant problem with the rapid expansion of non-official new providers: in Greece some 130 such institutions are reported, enrolling 28 000 students; in Italy, 62 non-official institutions were identified and there are also a large number of franchising agreements and educational brokers; in Spain, more than one hundred institutions of the type are in

operation. Other European countries included in the survey also show this phenomenon, although at a smaller scale: in the UK, about five percent of the students were attending non-official higher education courses in 1992; in Ireland, the existence of eight "rogue colleges" was reported and the development of private higher education has "led to growing public concern about the need for consumer protection"; in France, there are references to 42 non-recognised institutions offering higher education services and to 654 masters degrees and 282 MBAs in 1995 with no official recognition.

A pattern emerging from the survey is that the UK is by far the biggest exporter of higher education in Europe; Greece, Spain and Italy are, in turn, the main importers. The Open University of the UK is one of the main providers in the other European countries, and in general British universities are active in collaborative agreements and in providing MAs and MBAs in all countries of the study. Universities from the U.S. are also present in all countries of the study and are the principal providers from outside Europe.

There are also examples of corporations' collaborative ventures in Europe (O'Mahony, 1998), to provide customised degrees and training, such as the *British Aerospace Virtual University*, the *Daimler-Benz Corporate University* or the *Lufthansa Business School*. International institutions, like the European University Centre for Management Studies with more than a dozen campuses all over Europe, are developing as well.

The main findings from the study established by the Confederation confirm that transnational education is present, in one way or another, in all EU Member States, and that "the variety and permutations of institutions and types of transnational education are considerable (Adam, 2001). As for the emerging patterns of transnational education, it "is largely confined to business subjects (specially MBAs), information technology, computer science and the teaching of widely spoken languages".

The flourishing of new providers in higher education has much to do with the balance of supply and demand, on both quantitative and qualitative terms.

The demand for post-secondary education has been growing continuously, not only from traditional students but also from the emergence of new publics seeking higher education. The increasing connection and juxtaposition of education and training has, in fact, raised the needs for continuing and lifelong education and for more flexible and dynamic forms of delivery: demand-led and client-driven approaches are needed, "where learners can shop for education from diverse sources and in ways they themselves plan"

(OECD, 1996). The need for specialisation and the "saturation of graduates" have in addition contributed to the rapid increase in the demand for postgraduation studies.

From the supply side, the official higher education systems are not always adequate to meet the needs of the expanding education markets, often falling short of what is needed (Kokosalakis, 1998). In many countries, the provision of official higher education is insufficient and subject to strongly selective recruitment of students. Traditional institutions are frequently organised in supply-led and heavily institutionalised ways, lacking the flexibility to respond in time to the new needs in contents and methodologies. The decline of public funding also contributes to widen the gap between demand and the official supply.

The conditions are therefore ripe for the emergence of alternative providers outside the official higher education, who are quickly grasping the opportunities for a potentially lucrative market. These new providers target the new and left-behind areas which were neglected or poorly served by the traditional institutions, often filling niches and making use of flexible approaches to adapt to clients' needs.

The new information and communication technologies facilitated different and more decentralised ways of organising education, providing easier access to courseware. Many new providers are therefore technology-driven, characterised by high capital investments but low-cost operations.

It must be noticed that alternative providers in a particular country, aiming at filling the gap between demand and supply, may be institutions which are part of the official higher education system in another country. For example, the development of a "enterprise culture" associated with a drop in public funding has led the British universities to market educational services abroad, by offering franchised programmes and recruiting students from abroad. This justifies the strong presence of British universities in southern Europe, as mentioned earlier.

3. Basic concepts and definitions

The situation concerning transnational education is very dynamic and fluid, and different terms are sometimes used to mean similar - but not always equivalent — concepts, so it is convenient to clarify a few basic definitions. Some good references for a terminology can be found in the *UNESCO/Council of Europe Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education* (UNESCO/COE, 1999 and 2000) and in a study on

"institutions, programmes and qualifications outside of the educational system of the host country" (Högskoleverket, 1998), produced by the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education. The Report by Stephen Adam (2001) presents a neat systematisation of terminology and definitions.

A first distinction must be made between two somewhat overlapping concepts:

Non-official higher education — higher education activities operating in parallel to and outside the official higher education system of the host country;

Transnational education — higher education activities (study programmes, or sets of courses of study, or educational services, including those of distance education) in which the learners are located in a host country different from the one where the awarding institution is based; such programmes may belong to the education systems of a State different from the host country or may operate outside of any national education system.

Transnational education implies, therefore, crossing the borders of national higher education systems and usually falls into the category of non-official higher education in the host country. However, non-official higher education may also include private institutions which are not transnational.

Transnational education is often considered in relation with the franchising of institutions and programmes, but it can also take other forms of delivery. The different **institutional arrangements** may be systematised as follows:

Franchising: the process whereby a higher education institution (*franchiser*) from a certain country grants another institution (*franchisee*) in another country the right to provide the franchiser's programmes/qualifications in the franchisee's host country, irrespective of the students' provenience (from the first, the second or any other country):

- in many cases, the franchisee only provides the first part of the educational programme, which can be recognised as partial credits towards a qualification at the franchiser in the context of a "programme articulation";
- the franchisee is not always recognised in the host country, even if the franchiser's programmes/qualifications delivered in its home country are recognised in the host country.

Branch campus: campus established by a higher education institution from one country in another country (the host country) to offer its own educational programmes/qualifications, irrespective of the students' provenience:

- the arrangement is similar to franchising, but the franchisee is a campus of the franchiser;
- the notes on franchising apply here as well.

Programme articulation: inter-institutional arrangements whereby two or more institutions agree to define jointly a study programme in terms of study credits and credit transfers, so that students pursuing their studies in one institution have their credits recognised by the other and accepted for transfer in order to continue their studies ("twinning programmes", "articulation agreements", ...).

International institution: institution offering "international" programmes/ qualifications that are not part of a specific educational system:

- may have branch campuses in several countries;
- seldom recognised in host countries;
- may be accredited by a national accrediting body in the U.S., or have articulation agreements with American or British universities.

Off-shore institution: autonomous institution established in a host country but belonging, in terms of its organisation and contents, to the educational system of another country without having a campus in the country to which it belongs:

- seldom recognised in the host country;
- some are accredited by regional or national accrediting commissions in the U.S.;
- some may have articulation agreements with other educational institutions in the country to which they belong.

Corporate university: established by a large corporation which organises its own higher education institutions or study programmes offering qualifications that do not belong to any national system of higher education;

Distance learning: a wide range of learning activities, where learner and teacher are separated, which may or may not be organised within a framework belonging to the higher education system of a particular country.

Virtual university: institution whose only contact with the student is by remote means.

It is possible for a particular institution to fit the description of more than one type of institutional arrangement. Also, new modalities or arrangements may emerge as the demand for higher education keeps growing.

4. Problems arising from transnational education

Transnational education can be seen in a positive way, as representing an important contribution to improve access to higher education in countries where the demand far exceeds the available supply from the official higher education system. It can also contribute to the diversification of the ways in which educational and professional training programmes are delivered, widening learning opportunities for new publics emerging from the development of lifelong learning attitudes. Transnational education is also seen as a means to further develop the internationalisation of higher education and to promote intercultural cooperation (Vlasceanu, 1999) and in this way it may benefit home institutions through links with prestigious foreign institutions (Adam, 2001). It represents a means to generate extra revenues, as well.

There is a growing tension, however, between the national educational systems and the process of internationalisation of higher education (Kokosalakis, 1998; Vlasceanu, 1999), mainly due to the alarming growth of transnational education and the emerging problems of transparency and regulation. The appearance of "degree mills" and cases of dubious legality in the awarding of degrees does not help to reduce the tensions. Also, "there are quite openly expressed fears in the established integrated universities that new entrants (...) will 'cream-skim' them, *i.e.*, offer only high-demand low-cost courses with solid margins of profit (...) , diminishing their ability to cross-subsidise low-demand or high-cost areas the retention of which is a legitimate public interest" (Chipman, 1999).

Nevertheless, transnational education in general should not be identified with fraudulent activities or bogus titles. Much of its provision works in parallel to the formal systems and in some cases it can be of comparable or even higher quality. The trouble is that in an increasingly diversified system, the necessary mechanisms to guarantee adequate regulation and transparency are lacking.

There are, indeed, serious implications from the fast and unchecked growth of transnational education. Kokosalakis (1998) underlines that all the national reports from the nine countries involved in his study point to the "crucial problems (raised by non-official higher education) for the whole area of certification, recognition, parity of titles, transparency, quality control and assurance and above all the legal framework which legitimises these issues across the EU". The difficulties are augmented by the fact that transnational education often falls outside the official framework for higher education and, as a consequence, stays outside the formal supervision of academic standards.

In synthesis, the most problematic issues emerging from the expansion of transnational education are (Vlasceanu, 1999):

- **regulation:** "the various legislative, cultural, linguistic consequences of partnerships or other education arrangements";
- **quality assurance:** "the assurance of quality and standards of both the study programmes provided and degrees awarded through collaborative partnerships";
- **recognition:** "the recognition of qualifications awarded through such transnational collaborative partnerships".

There is a basic concern behind these considerations — the need for consumer protection. As said before, malpractice may occur and there are "degree mills" in operation, so people may be awarded titles without formal or substantive value. The aggressive marketing of institutions and programmes is not always helpful and may even be misleading or deceitful. The problem also concerns other stakeholders, like official academic institutions or employers, who may be misled into accepting non-recognised or false qualifications. Certification and adequate information (transparency) play an important role in this context.

5. Basis for solutions

To devise ways and solutions to deal with the problems raised by transnational education, the crucial and interdependent issues of regulation, quality assurance and recognition must be addressed, as seen.

Regulation

The study commissioned by the Confederation (Adam, 2001) concluded that in the EU Member States there are, as a rule, no specific regulation or control mechanisms for transnational education. On the contrary, "in Europe, the most common approach is not regulate non-rational providers unless they seek to become officially recognised institutions within a national system". As for the qualifications, they "may be looked upon more favourably if the awarding body is recognised in its country of origin".

The questions should not, however, be seen only in the context of the legal and formal structures of regulation of higher education in each country, because borderlines are different and what is an official qualification in one country may be non-official in

another. Indeed, "the crux of the problem arises within the transnational framework of regulation and recognition of higher education in the EU" (Kokosalakis, 1998) and any regulatory measures must take into consideration the national, the EU and the international law. To this effect, it is worth remembering that the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) establishes equal treatment related to the movement of professional and educational services across national borders. In the relations between the EU Member States, the same question arises from the implementation of Directives relating to the internal market and to mobility.

An interesting point to note is that the countries with open regulatory frameworks, like Austria, the Netherlands or Norway, seem to have less problems with transnational education, because such open systems tend to absorb non-official higher education as it comes and, by officialising it, some control is acquired.

Quality assurance

Non-official higher education raises problems of transparency and quality control as it is outside the official system and therefore is not subject to the national mechanisms of quality assurance in the host country. The difficulties aggravate because many of the new suppliers have no internal quality assurance mechanisms.

When looking at transnational education from the supplier side, two different situations may occur which are of relevance to quality assurance:

- the programmes/qualifications offered in the host country are integrated in the official system of the awarding institution's country;
- the programmes/qualifications do not belong to any official system.

The first situation may lessen the problems, because the awarding institution is then subject to the quality assurance system in its country and the franchised/exported programmes are most probably recognised in the original country. The circumstances, however, are not always completely clear and problems may occur for a number of different reasons: the awarding institution, even if it is public in its own country, becomes a private institution, financially dependent on the students fees, in the host country; the partner institution may be a small or recently established organisation lacking university tradition; the franchising agreement may not guarantee a sufficient control of the awarding institution on the supervision of teaching and examinations, the quality of staff and resources or the protection of students.

Anyway, the awarding institution has the main responsibility for the quality of the qualifications provided, which raises a problem of image for the institution itself and for its national higher education system if standards are not kept in the franchised programmes. This, by itself, constitutes a mechanism of some safeguard of standards, because the national system (Rectors' Conference, national agency for quality assurance, Government) is interested in not having its image tarnished and is therefore likely to take precautionary measures.

It is understandable, in this context, that the main higher education exporting countries, in an attempt to address the issues on the quality of transnational education — as seen from the provider's perspective — have produced codes of good practice that include recommendations for the awarding institutions aiming at ensuring the quality of education provided and the standards of the qualifications awarded. Particularly meaningful examples of such codes are:

- in the **UK**: *Code of Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards in Higher Education: Collaborative Provision*, Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (1999);
- in the **US**: *Principles of Good Practice for Educational Programs for Non-U.S. Nationals*, shared among the regional institutional accrediting bodies of the US;
- in **Australia**: *Code of Ethical Practice in the Provision of Education to International Students by Australian Universities*, Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee (1998).

The second situation, when the awarding institution does not belong to any official system, escapes regulation from the supplier's side and is more fluid and prone to create problems. Some providers are however conscious of the image problem and seek forms of legitimation for their courses, sometimes through alliances with well established universities. International accreditation by private agencies in thematic areas is another possibility for buying a label of quality . In a more global approach, the Global Alliance for Transnational Education (GATE) devised a code of good practice for transnational education and a process of certification for those institutions that submit themselves to certification procedures and adhere to the established principles. However, criticisms are known on this type of approach.

From the demand side, *i.e.*, in the perspective of the receiving countries, different forms of reaction may be identified to try to solve the problems of transnational education, from simply outlawing transnational programmes to the integration of such programmes in the official system of higher education through a recognition procedure.

The radical approach of a tight control on the operation of transnational education does not seem to be convenient, because it will probably be in conflict with European Union or international laws and, anyway, would only postpone and not solve the problems. A recent example concerns Greece, where non-official higher education is precluded by the constitution but, following action by the European Court of Justice, the legislation governing private universities, degree parity, academic qualifications and professional rights may change, bringing it into line with the rest of the EU (THES, 2000).

A more practical and efficient approach may be to institute appropriate practices to gain some control of the provision of transnational education in the host country, namely by creating mechanisms and/or incentives for its submission to the quality assurance procedures applying to official higher education. In this context, it is important that the title "university" and the powers to award degrees are protected.

On what concerns the possible development of a quality framework for transnational education, a very detailed and useful proposal can be found in a project report on "Borderless Education" carried out at UK (CVCP, 2000):

"We suggest that the main elements of a quality framework for borderless education should include: currency and security of qualifications; audit of the system for the design and approval of curricula or appropriate learning contracts; an internationally-recognised system of educational credit; licensing of staff; security of assessment; an internationally-recognised approach to recording and certifying attainment; adequate and accurate public information about learning opportunities; approved guidance and complaints systems for learners; transparent quality management processes for each agent in the educational supply chain; access to learning resources assured by the provider; and publication of guidance relevant to different modes of provision."

The problems on quality assurance emerging from transnational education are of individual concern to most European countries, but there is also a European dimension to it. In fact, besides being a common concern, by highlighting these problems one focuses on areas where intervention could be foreseen, such as the promotion of policies of common recognition and parity of titles and the transparency of their production and regulation, which, after all, are prerequisites for promoting mobility of people within Europe.

This was recognised in the Prague Summit, where the Ministers of Education "called upon the universities and other higher education institutions, national agencies and the European Network of Quality Assurance in Higher Education (...) to collaborate

in establishing a common framework of reference and to disseminate best practice" in regard to quality standards and quality assurance (Prague Communiqué, 2001).

Recognition

The recognition of institutions and of programmes, for academic and/or for professional purposes, is a very complex subject involving conflicting interests at several levels, viz. between the protection of traditional diplomas and professions and the needs in relation to mobility and the market. The theme relates strongly with the issue of accreditation, which is presently the subject of hot discussions in Europe and escapes the scope of this presentation. However, two particular points must be raised here.

The first is that a wide normative and methodological framework to deal in general terms with the recognition of qualifications awarded under transnational collaborative arrangements is already provided by the Lisbon Recognition Convention (Council of Europe, 1997), particularly in what concerns the mobility of students. However, the Convention applies to qualifications issued under a higher education system recognised by a signatory State of the Convention and does not deal with the specific recognition issues deriving from transnational education. In this context, the work being conducted by the Working Group on Transnational Education, operating within the ENIC framework under the auspices of UNESCO(CEPES) and the Council of Europe, which is dealing with "the issues of quality and assessment of franchised higher education programmes/institutions (in order to) propose guidelines for the recognition of qualifications granted by these institutions" (UNESCO/COE, 1999), is of great importance.

The Working Group prepared a draft for a *Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education* (UNESCO/COE, 2000) which is under appreciation by the Committee of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. The code aims at providing a normative framework designed to present the perspectives of both sending and receiving countries. The code provides a set of principles, in the form of statements with a normative value, with the objective to be a source of reference to the quality assurance and evaluation of programmes, to contribute to consumer protection for students, employers and other stakeholders and to facilitate the recognition of qualifications.

The second point relates to the transparency of certification, which can be greatly enhanced by the systematic use of the Diploma Supplement developed as a joint initiative of the European Commission, the Council of Europe and UNESCO/CEPES. The former Confederation, with support from the European Commission, undertook a project to promote the implementation of the diploma supplement in all Member States of the

EU and the EEA in which, besides advancing with a general information campaign and the technical training of staff, a template was developed, for both WINDOWS 97 and WINDOWS 2000 operating systems. This template, which greatly facilitates the use of the Diploma Supplement, can be downloaded from the European Commission's or the European Universities Association's sites. If issuing the diploma supplement becomes a rule, it can hardly be avoided by non-official higher education institutions and the extra information provided may be of help to assess the value of the qualifications.

6. Basis for an action plan

Transnational education brings to the field of higher education a situation of fluidity and competition that completely changes its landscape. It represents a matter of concern for each EU Member State individually and for the Union as a whole. The national and European dimensions of the problem must be kept in mind when devising any measures intended to reinforce the beneficial aspects of transnational education in terms of learning opportunities, and to solve or reduce the tensions related to quality and standards of the qualifications awarded.

A first very basic question to be addressed is the one of **clarification and transparency**. A better understanding of the normative basis of transnational education, of its practices and of its effects is essential as a means to make it acceptable for both the receiving and the sending systems. Transparency in the regulatory mechanisms, in the formulation of transnational arrangements, in its monitoring and assessment and in the recognition and certification of qualifications is a fundamental prerequisite to ease the tensions.

To make these objectives operational, some possible courses for action can be foreseen, as follows.

Probing deeper on transnational education in Europe: the study on transnational education in Europe (Adam, 2001) should be complemented by widening and deepening its scope, namely in order to extend the survey to all signatory countries of the *Bologna Declaration/Prague Communiqué* and to undertake further research on the ongoing nature and impact of transnational education. The implications of GATS and of EU Directives on the provision of transnational education, as well as the harmonisation of regulatory mechanisms and the encouragement of good practices, should be explicitly addressed.

Improving information on transnational education: it is a responsibility of national authorities, higher education institutions and international bodies to raise public awareness on the elements to look for in transnational educational services, such as the status of the institution, its accreditation and the recognition of its programmes of study. National authorities should also provide updated information on officially recognised institutions and awards, as a way to further expose the activities of bogus institutions.

To fulfil those objectives, there must be an appropriate monitoring of developments on transnational education at European level. Adam (2001) suggests, for the effect, that the European Commission, UNESCO and the Council of Europe establish a **European forum**, including such bodies as EUA, ESIB, ENQA, the NARICs and ENICs, International Professional Bodies, EADTU, etc., as "a group of organisations that, when necessary, are called together to:

- promote the inter-institutional exchange of information and intelligence on transnational educational policy and problems;
- formulate recommendations regarding the 'internal' and 'external' European dimension of transnational education;
- facilitate liaison between traditional higher education institutions, franchisers, franchisees, virtual universities, non-official transnational higher education providers, professional bodies and corporate providers;
- encourage staff development workshops and seminars to promote good practice."

National legal framework of regulation: the legal framework for the regulation of higher education needs serious consideration in each country, in order to develop a more comprehensive, diverse and elaborate approach, keeping in mind that the open regulatory systems demonstrate better adaptation to the new and non-official forms of higher education provision. Measures to assist new providers of higher education in seeking official recognition should, therefore, be encouraged.

In particular, action at national level is necessary to protect educational titles and awards and to improve the legislation concerning the marketing, description and distribution of educational services, as a way to expose bogus and fraudulent higher education institutions and activities.

The role of ENQA: the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education is expected to play an essential role in monitoring and in exchanging information related to

quality and transparency in the provision of transnational education. For the effect, ENQA must follow closely the ways in which the national systems of quality assurance deal with the assessment of non-official higher education, aiming at the dissemination of examples of good practice. In this way, ENQA will establish itself as a forum for monitoring the quality assurance dimension of transnational education and help the national authorities and QA agencies to develop appropriate actions.

It must be stressed, however, that the network is not - and should not be - intended as a European agency for accreditation.

The role of national quality assurance bodies: the national agencies for quality assurance should start dealing also with imported transnational education, by monitoring its developments and providing adequate advice and information to the public.

The role of the NARIC/ENIC Network: the experience of NARICs/ENICs on the recognition of official qualifications under the Lisbon Recognition Convention is of great importance to tackle the more difficult issue of the recognition of non-official qualifications. The Convention, although restricted in a strict legal sense to the recognition of official qualifications, provides a procedural and methodological framework that can be of value for transnational education, as is clearly shown in the code of good practice under preparation within the NARIC/ENIC network. NARICs/ENICs should therefore be encouraged to proceed with their work on the discussion and dissemination of good practice.

Promotion and implementation of the Diploma Supplement: as mentioned earlier, it is important to generalise the use of the diploma supplement as a means to introduce greater transparency into the certification of qualifications and provide better information for consumer protection and for recognition procedures.

7. Transnational education and University values

A final point must be made on the fact that wild competitiveness and the marketisation of higher education raise serious conflicts with the traditional university ethos of scholarship and the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. Alternative providers do not necessarily produce new knowledge, they are more concerned with transmitting existing knowledge and they "may be trading on one of the most destructive myths of our time, the idea that intellectual powers, deep understanding, and valuable skills can be 'transmitted' via 'delivery systems' " as pointed out by the President of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (Schneider, 1998) .

It is essential that the traditional research university keeps its dedication to disinterested study, of which it is proud, and to the creation of a proper environment for students' socialisation and character building, in a judicious balance with serving the needs coming from society's new and wider expectations. Above all, the modern university, like the ancient Greek Academies, must value very high in its mission the question of what sorts of citizens it wants its graduates to become.

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