QUALITY ASSURANCE in TERTIARY EDUCATION

The main message that emerged from the seminar is that quality assurance is converging on a set of internationally recognized practices that examine overall institutional development of tertiary education institutions and their programs - not just student learning outcomes. Quality assurance is conducted most frequently through institutional or program self-assessment along with an external peer review. Countries are under increasing pressure to develop quality assurance systems that operate using internationally recognized practices - whether to facilitate recognition of credentials or assessment of key competencies of graduates. These pressures appear to be coming in part from student and labor mobility, the Bologna Process, and cross-border provision of tertiary education. While there appears to be a convergence on the practice of quality assurance, there is wide divergence on the purposes of quality assurance, the uses of the information produced in the process, and the capacity of developing countries to implement quality assurance to the level of international expectations. Analysis of the seminar content and interventions suggests that good practice in quality assurance should be reconsidered in relation to the context in which tertiary education institutions operate - what is the appropriate purpose, structure, and practice of quality assurance in countries that have wide ranging needs and disparate levels capacity to implement?

The seminar benefited by leveraging partnership and sponsorship among the various agencies, with particularly generous support from UNESCO - often a leading convenor on issues related to quality assurance. These supportive relationships were important for not only for significant intellectual contributions from some of the top authorities on quality assurance worldwide, but also for cost sharing. The seminar presentations provided some theoretical content, but most material was framed from practical experience with quality assurance, providing participants with guidance on student assessment, the Bologna Process, rankings, cross border provision, distance education, and regional networks.

Lessons learned: (i) UNESCO is an excellent institutional partner in every respect - particularly in the area of quality assurance. The Bank should endeavor to nurture and maintain this strong working relationship with their higher education group in Paris for future activities in QA. (ii) CIEP is an aesthetic venue with generally good facilities. CIEP also has good contacts with the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the French Ministry of Education and was able to secure resources from them for this seminar. The greatest advantage is that CIEP combines lodging and dining facilities with conference facilities. The rooms at CIEP have high-speed internet access, but due to the tight firewall security in place at CIEP the World Bank computers are blocked from accessing Lotus Notes. CIEP is not ideal for large groups; seminars with more than 60 participants should consider alternative locations. (iii) Such seminars should better leverage the presence of Bank staff / TTLs and encourage greater collaboration with clients. TTLs should be encouraged to use such opportunities to build stronger relations with clients. (iv) Speakers should emphasize practical application of concepts and operational procedures over theoretical discussions. (v) Seminar proceedings will be migrated to the World Bank website to facilitate access.

Next steps: the conference proceedings will be used to produce the outline and basis for an edited volume on quality assurance to be published in FY07. Similar regional seminars will be offered according to demand.