

Quality Assurance and Recognition of Qualifications and Credentials

PROFESSOR ELLEN HAZELKORN
BH ASSOCIATES
INQAAHE CONFERENCE 2025
TOKYO 15 MAY 2025



"co-creating more open, inclusive, equitable and collaborative higher education systems that democratize access and knowledge." UNESCO, [*Roadmap for Higher Education*](#) (2022)

"...international recognition of qualifications concerning higher education will facilitate interdependent learning and knowledge development via the mobility of learners and learning, academics, scientific research and researchers, and workers and professionals and will enhance international cooperation in higher education..." UNESCO [*Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education*](#) (2022)

Themes

Higher Education & Research – a Global Endeavour

Global Convention on the Recognition of
Qualifications & Credentials

Actions to Think About





Higher Education & Research – a Global Endeavour

HE at epicenter of changing global landscape

Quickening pace/breadth of technological changes, demographic shifts, green transition + new patterns geopolitical/geoeconomic tensions ➡ worldwide transformative and structural changes:

- Growing diversity of HE providers and learners
- Innovative new designs, structures, delivery & assessment of education
- New types of qualifications (formal, informal, non-formal learning; stackable credentials/credit transfer, joint programmes/degrees, etc.)
- All learners are life-long learners
- Technology/AI- based learning & assessment,
- Shift to online and customisation of learning
- Transnational education (TNE)

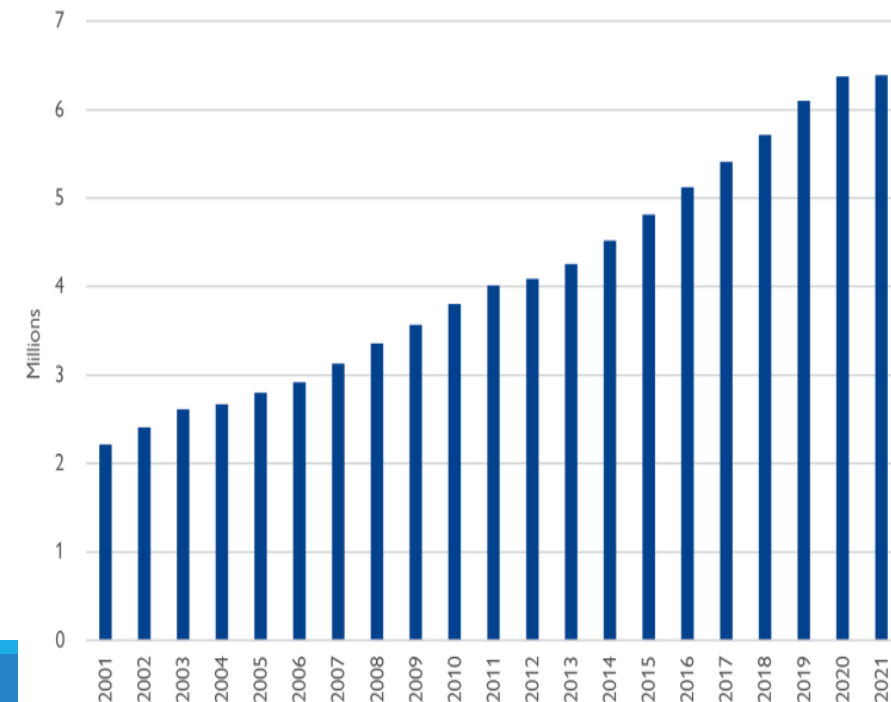


Massification and the Global Talent Pool

Dramatic transformation in number of people participating in HE ➡ expansion in number of colleges/universities

- ~222m tertiary students
- 6m+ international/exchange students
- 90,000+ HEIs
- Private HE is now fastest growing w/ 80m+ students worldwide

Figure 13. International students globally, 2001 to 2021



Global geography of science

Transformation into a global multipolar enterprise

International collaboration is defining feature.

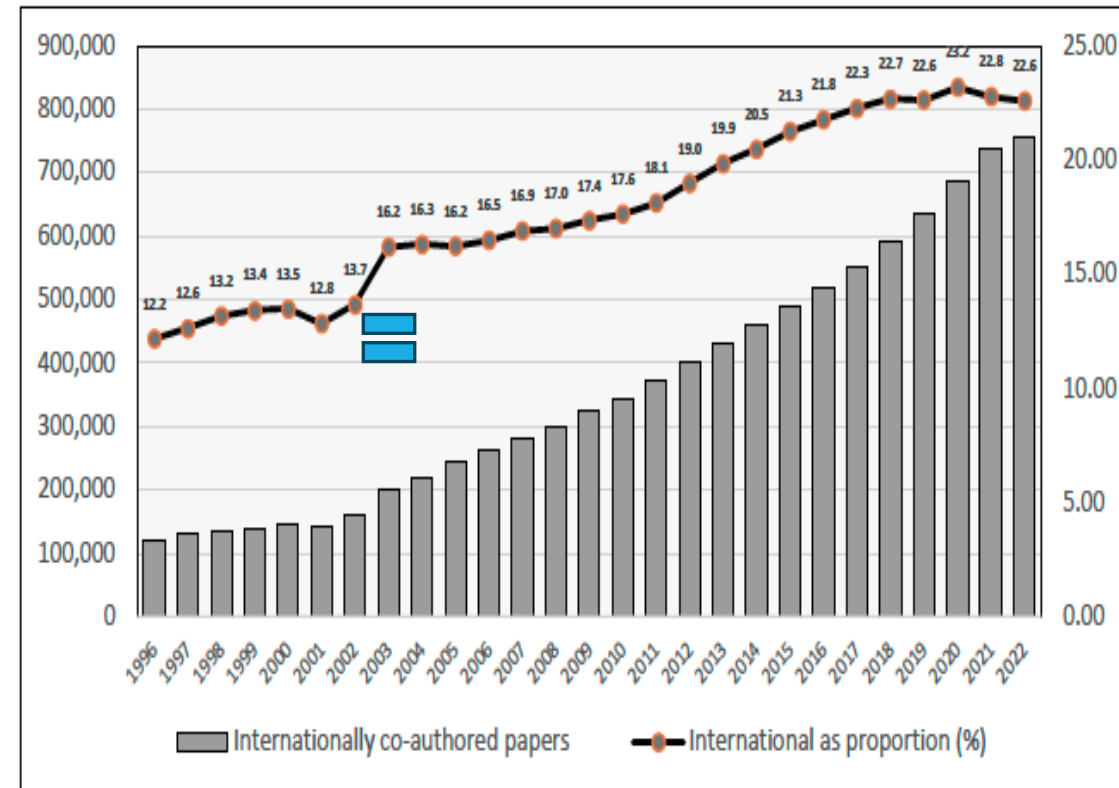
University networks increasing feature of this interconnectedness

Solving societal challenges/addressing the SDGs requires collaborative actions.

Digital revolution, open science, open access and shared platforms facilitating and intensifying transnational collaborations and networks.

Human Genome Project and Covid-19 Vaccine.

Figure 2. Number and proportion (%) of papers in Scopus that were internationally co-authored, World: 1996-2022

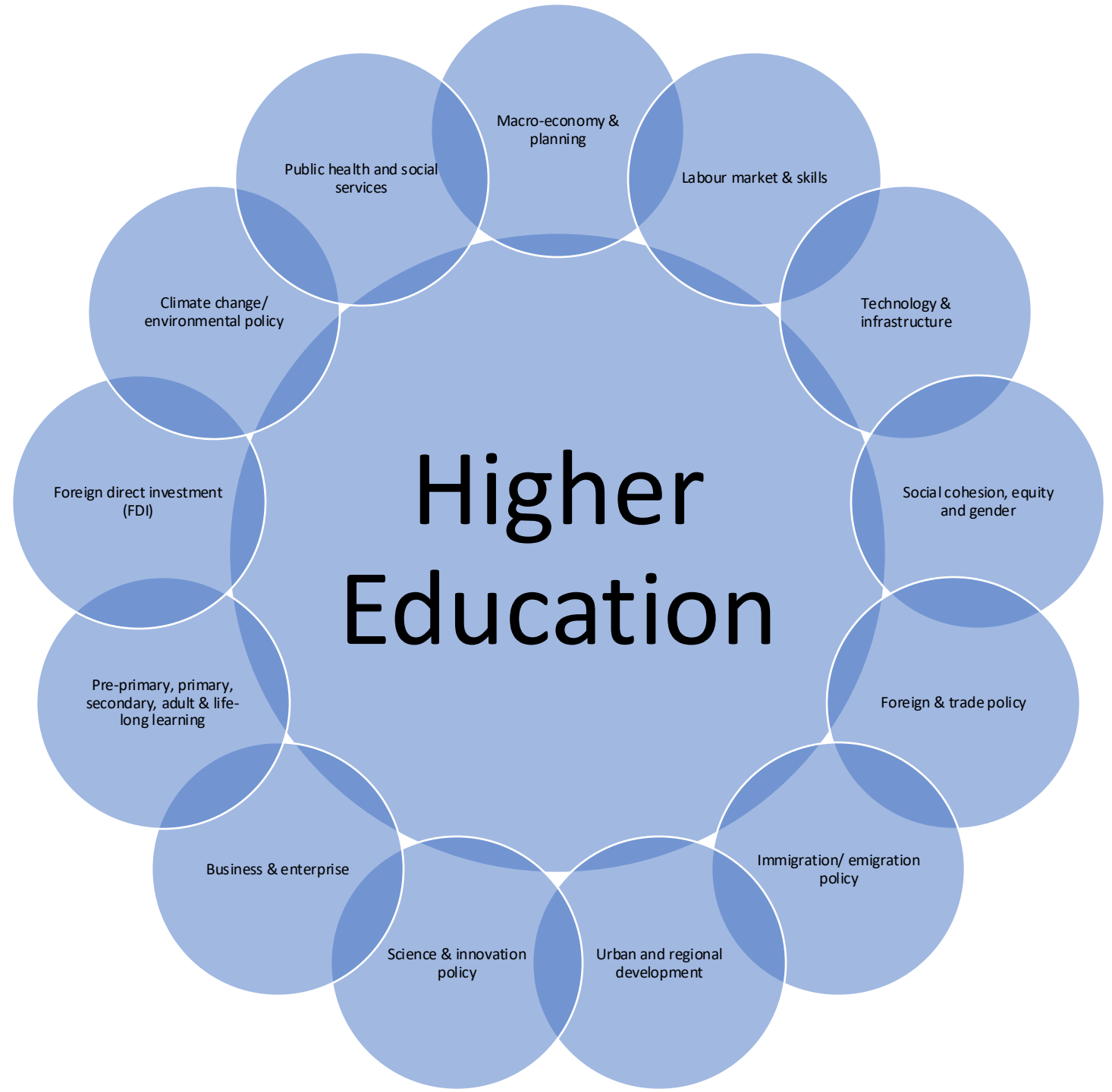


Source: NSB (2024). A change to data compilation in 2003 disrupts comparison over the full period.

“Education is both a goal in itself and a means for attaining all the other SDGs. It is not only an integral part of sustainable development, but also a key enabler for it.”

Quality Assurance matters.

UNESCO Education for Sustainable Development Goals





Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications & Credentials

Assuring quality is concern worldwide

Quality is a key driver impacting on and affecting HE, individuals and nations.

Performance, knowledge and talent-producing capacities of HE is a key differentiator in national/global system.

Provides confidence for prospective students, employers and society:

- Informs strategic and learner choices.
- Mutual recognition of qualifications, and education & scientific partnerships.
- Beacon to attract and retain investment, business and talent.
- National and institutional positioning and pride.

Necessity to regulate expanding global educational marketplace and protect against fraud.



Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education (2019)

Adopted by UNESCO General Conference

First UN treaty on HE with a global scope

By ratifying, countries commit to strengthening international cooperation in higher education, raising its quality at home and worldwide, and helping make academic mobility and the recognition of qualifications a reality for millions around the world.

As of April 2025, 38 States have ratified it.



Key objectives

- Establishes universal principles for fair, transparent and non-discriminatory recognition of HE qualifications and qualifications giving access to HE and offering avenues for further study and employment, including cross-border (CBHE)/transnational-education (TNE).
- Facilitates recognition of qualifications, prior learning and study periods earned remotely.
- Promotes recognition of refugees' qualifications, even in cases where documentary evidence is lacking.
- Facilitates “all “learners and learning, academics, scientific research and researchers, and workers and professionals” across the global post-secondary landscape.



Achieving objectives, requires ...

Trust and confidence in a quality assurance (QA) system based on internationally benchmarked common principles and practices.

- Recognition regardless of where the education programme and learning is undertaken – no difference between the host and home.
- Supports quality learning in a formal, non-formal or informal setting, partial studies/prior learning, in face-to-face, virtual or hybrid formats, traditional or non-traditional modes.
- Greater harmonisation across border to ease recognition, mobility and opportunities.
- “Co-create more open, inclusive, equitable and collaborative higher education systems”.



Challenges 1

- 1) No agreed international definition of quality or how it should be assessed, much less improved, as evidenced by the different approaches, methodologies, and choice of indicators.
- 2) Many states parties do not have the appropriate accreditation/QA legislation and systems in place to evaluate the quality of an HEI or specific programmes to formally recognise it as having met certain minimum criteria or standards.
- 3) Necessary QA frameworks and systems not in place internationally to sufficiently assure/ensure quality and standards in TNE.



Challenges 2

4) Capacity/capability to monitor:

- increased use of technology/AI,
- Ethical/academic integrity risks: plagiarism, privacy and confidentiality, algorithm bias, over-reliance on AI, (mis)use of (learner) data, etc.

5) Insufficient learner/public knowledge and access to comprehensive/accessible information about accredited institutions and programmes – leaving institutions and individuals victims of vagaries of the global marketplace.

6) Existential challenge to the principles of multilateralism and the Global Convention.





Actions to Think About

Actions for INSTITUTIONS

Internal quality assurance (IQA). IQA tools and processes should be introduced and periodically reviewed and updated to assess continued relevance and alignment with international best practices.

Recognition procedures aligned w/Global Convention. Establish and/or streamline procedures for applications, including automatic and reciprocal recognition & recognition of prior learning, partial studies, credit transfer, etc.

Easily accessible information. Actively promote and publish all the information about QA, including for TNE, on website and other public places.

Actions for AGENCIES

Update QA Policies and Practices: Ensure EQA/IQA guidelines/processes (including PHE/TNE), are rigorously implemented and periodically reviewed/updated in alignment w/ international best practices.

Capacity-building: Ensure all stakeholders are all well-trained and informed about QA, trends/developments, esp. TNE, and good practices.

New technologies/AI: Guidelines for the use of AI and other learning products, and ensure they are tested, assessed recognised and appropriately regulated.

Actions for LEARNERS

Key partners in QA: Learners regardless of where studying or format are essential partners in HE.

They should help co-produce QA policies and procedures, and participate on review panels to ensure the process is well-informed by learner perspectives.

Capacity-building: Training should target and include learners to strengthen their active engagement and participation in QA processes as key partners.

Actions for REGIONAL NETWORKS

Regional Qualification Framework: Map alignment between national systems as basis for shared QA principles/standards to aid transparency, mobility, and recognition – and to compare its own standards/practices with others.

QA Guidelines & Information Sharing. Develop, share and harmonise guidelines, documents, etc about good practices and recognition, especially TNE, fraud, etc

Easily accessible information. Actively promote and publish all the information about QA, including for TNE, on website and other public places.

Actions for GOVERNMENTS

National Qualifications Framework (NQF): An essential piece of the quality and qualifications infrastructure.

National Register of Accredited Institutions & Programmes: Open access register to provide assurance, confidence and trust that qualifications meet required high quality standards, and help overcome fraudulent behaviour.

Recognition of Foreign Accreditation and/or QA Agencies – on basis that accrediting body is valid/verifiable and meets international standards/accreditation.

Learner Protection: Legislation and guidelines to protect all learners as consumers of education.

And finally, INQAAHE...

International Framework of Agreed Principles and Standards for Quality and Quality Assurance – working with UNESCO and other global partners

International Register of Accredited Quality Assurance Agencies – as a vital open access tool for public assurance, confidence and trust in the global HE system. Feed information into the World Higher Education Database (WHED).



What YOU can do to push this agenda forward ...

Disseminate knowledge and understanding of the Global Convention.

Become a signatory....

Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education

Date and place of adoption: 25 November 2019 - Paris, France

Entry into force: 5 March 2023, in accordance with its Article XVIII.



Facing the challenge head-on

Gaps leave learners, employers, states parties and the public victim to vagaries of the global marketplace.

Changes/perceived weakening of international collaboration and accreditation can lead to fragmentation at a time when multilateralism is being challenged.



Global Convention has made important strides forward – BUT “comprehensive systemic change” is needed.

