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***HIGHER EDUCATION FUTURES: KEEPING AN OPEN MIND***

by

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Introduction

Thank you so much for inviting me back to USQ. It is many years since my last visit but I have always thought of USQ as a model of what a dual-mode institution should be. You have innovated in the scope, scale and pedagogy of your programmes and been an important source of innovation in open education, which is our topic today.

You have given me a wonderful title: *Higher Education Futures: Keeping an Open Mind*. It is a stimulating play on words and in this address I shall touch on both meanings. I should rather say ‘we’, because I have prepared these remarks with my former UNESCO colleague Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić. We have worked together for several years on both higher education futures and the open education movement.

Just last week, at the inaugural conference of the new International Quality Group of America’s Council for Higher Education Accreditation, CHEA, we made a joint presentation on the topic *The Open Education Movement: Challenges and Opportunities for Quality Assurance*.

The first way of reading today’s title is that the future of higher education is uncertain and we must keep an open mind about how we respond to the accumulating pressures for change.

The second is that in moulding the future of higher education we should espouse firmly the principles of openness that USQ holds dear.

With both these meanings in mind we shall divide these remarks into three parts.

First, we shall talk about higher education futures, the new dynamics that are creating turbulent times for the sector in countries across the world.

We shall do this by recalling UNESCO's 2009 World Conference on Higher Education, of which Stamenka was the Executive Secretary. Entitled *New Dynamics of Higher Education for Societal Change and Development*, that large conference identified various new trends in the evolution of the sector, often linked to the potential of ICTs.

It is fair to say that these new trends have been even more dynamic than we might have predicted four years ago, creating turbulent times for institutions, governments, staff and students. There are no glib answers to the challenges and opportunities in the eddies and whirlpools created by these new dynamics, which is why we must keep an open mind.

In the second part of the talk we shall assume that underlying all the new dynamics is a trend to greater openness. We shall explore the dimensions of openness in higher education.

Finally, in the third part of the paper we shall look at three relatively new examples of greater openness: Open Educational Resources; Massive Open Online Courses; and the OERu, the Open Education Resource University in which USQ's Jim Taylor has been such an important intellectual leader.

Finally, keeping an open mind, we shall draw some conclusions about where such developments are taking us.

### New Dynamics

That is the plan. Let us now return to the new dynamics that are defining higher education in this decade. We shall focus particularly on: massification and rising demand, the diversification of providers, cross-border higher education, the role of ICTs and quality assurance.

#### *Massification*

The most striking new dynamic is the massification – or even the “universalization” – of higher education. There are over 165 million students enrolled in higher education worldwide. Age cohort higher education participation rates in the world as a whole grew from 19% in 2000 to 26% in 2007, although the

OECD still considers that a 40% Age Participation Rate is the springboard for higher education to make its full contribution to national development.

Globally, enrolments have increased fivefold in less than 40 years. It is now predicted that the global demand for higher education will expand from 97 million students in 2000 to 263 million students in 2025.

### *Diversification*

A multitude of new providers of higher education is emerging to satisfy this rising demand and we will give some examples. One of them is the trend to create so-called ‘World-Class’ Universities that feed on the mushrooming phenomenon of university rankings, which, while controversial, are undoubtedly influencing governments. This phenomenon is growing and we are witnessing what some call “a race for excellence”.

Recent research by Jamil Salmi and Phil Altbach demonstrates that being an old university is no guarantee for achieving excellence and that it is sometimes easier to create a new “world class” university, than trying to change old ones that don’t meet the criteria. The issue here is what does “excellence” really mean and are rankings a proxy for quality?

It is worth remembering that for all the heat that discussion about them generates, these world-class universities and the rankings that sustain them are only a tiny part of the huge enterprise of higher education. Any balanced perspective should recognise this, noting particularly that notions of excellence developed for these institutions may be irrelevant in the quest for quality in the generality of higher education.

For instance, at the other end of the spectrum are transition programmes between schools and universities, such as community colleges, and a range of non-traditional competency based learning models providing a better link to the labour market.

### *Cross-Border Education*

Another strong continuing global trend is cross-border education, which is the mobility of students, programmes and institutions. The diverse forms of CBHE include branch campuses, franchised programmes, twinning arrangements and courses delivered online.

International branch campuses (IBCs) are a distinct and the smallest part of the CBHE provision, but their numbers continue to grow. The number of IBCs has grown by 43% since October 2006.

Cross-border education, however, also takes the form of eLearning. We shall return to the most newsworthy example of this – the Massive Open Online Courses that target students worldwide.

### *Information and Communications Technologies*

This brings us to a new dynamic that cuts across all the others: the WCHE stressed the opportunities offered by modern technology. To quote the Communiqué:

*14. The application of ICTs to teaching and learning has great potential to increase access, quality and success. In order to ensure that the introduction of ICTs adds value, institutions and governments should work together to pool experience, develop policies and strengthen infrastructure.*

### *Internationalisation of Quality Assurance*

Finally let us mention that another overarching new dynamic at the WCHE was the internationalization of quality assurance. All these new trends raise new challenges related to quality.

### Dimensions of Openness

In keeping our minds open about higher education futures we shall be open to new manifestations of openness. But let us recall briefly that openness is not a new concept in higher education – and not at all new in distance learning at other levels, where correspondence courses were usually open to all.

In higher education the London University External Degree Programme pioneered openness 155 years ago by simply offering examinations worldwide. How you acquired the necessary knowledge was up to you: if you could pass all the required examinations you got your degree. That programme has produced five Nobel laureates over its 155 years of existence so no one can call it ineffective.

It was the UK Open University that injected the term ‘open’ into the bloodstream of higher education. Its removal of any academic criteria for admission was radical

at the time and its memorable strap line, open as to people, open as to places, open as to methods and open as to ideas has tremendous power to inspire.

But once you unpack the notion of open education it takes you beyond open admissions and distance learning. The Open University's curriculum was closed in that the programmes and courses were defined and developed by the University – students had to take them as they were although they had great flexibility to mix and match.

However, at the same time as the UKOU, opened 40 years ago, the State University of New York set up Empire State College with the aim of opening up the curriculum. It allowed students to work with mentors to invent their own courses of study. Its slogan 'my degree, my way' captures this perfectly.

These dimensions of openness: open admissions, distance learning at scale, and open curricula remained the principal expressions of openness until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Since then the notion of openness has burgeoned in new directions and we shall now explore three of its manifestations.

### New manifestations of openness

Let us now give some examples of how new manifestations of openness are woven into these new dynamics. We start with Open Educational Resources, OER

Observing the early impact of MIT's OpenCourseware project UNESCO held a forum in 2002 to assess its potential impact on higher education in developing countries.

The term Open Educational Resources was coined at this Forum, which defined them as educational materials that may be freely accessed, reused, modified and shared. In the Forum Declaration participants expressed their wish 'to develop together a universal educational resource for the whole of humanity'.

In the following years most OER activity involved communities of OER producers, but in 2009 UNESCO's World Conference on Higher Education picked up the theme and urged that more attention be paid to the potential of ICT generally and OER in particular. The UNESCO General Conference later that year reinforced this message by urging greater advocacy about OER. Both Stamenka and I have

been involved since 2010 in two joint UNESCO and Commonwealth of Learning projects with this aim.

The first was aimed at educational leaders in developing countries. It involved workshops in Africa and Asia and the publication of two supporting documents: a *Basic Guide to OER*, and *Guidelines for OER in Higher Education*.

Last year our focus moved to governments.

With support from the Hewlett Foundation we were able to survey the world's governments about policies and uses of OER. The results were analysed by Sarah Hoosen in South Africa who reported that:

*“There appears to be great interest in OER across all regions of the world, with several countries embarking on notable OER initiatives. Indeed, the survey itself raised interest and awareness of OER in countries that may not have had much prior exposure to the concept.”*

We also commissioned Neil Butcher and Sarah Hoosen to do a report on the business case for OER. This revealed that the idealism that motivated the early work on OER is now supported by solid economic arguments.

We held regional policy forums around the world in order to encourage dialogue about OER between governments and practitioners, to promote the World OER Congress, and to develop, in a consultative and iterative way, a Declaration on OER to be submitted to the Congress.

We held these forums in all UNESCO regions and they produced some good discussions with helpful proposals for the Paris Declaration on OER.

A final draft was presented to the Congress and approved by acclamation. The Congress also allowed governments and practitioners to share experience of OER on a worldwide basis.

We shall not take you through the Declaration, which is on the UNESCO and COL websites, but simply note the last recommendation, the punch line if you like, that encourages the open licensing of educational materials produced with public funds.

Declarations such as this one are not binding on governments but experience shows that they have significant influence on government policy making.

We note two jurisdictions that decided to implement this recommendation following the conference. My own home province of British Columbia recently announced that it would offer students free online, open textbooks for the 40 most popular post-secondary courses. Half a world away from there, in India, NPTEL, a very large creator of educational materials, decided to make their material formally OER under an open license. This amounts to some 20,000 lecture-hours equivalent.

To conclude on OER we can say that thanks to the efforts of practitioners and governments worldwide, the idea of open licensing is rapidly gaining ground for both idealistic and economic reasons. Governments will be major beneficiaries of open licensing thanks to the potential of OER to improve the cost-effectiveness of their large investments in education.

So, of course, will students. There is heavy traffic on Facebook of students recommending OER that they have found helpful other students.

### Massive Open Online Courses

We continue our selection of three new approaches to opening up education by commenting on last year's higher education sensation, MOOCs. These Massive Open Online Courses are being offered free worldwide by just those highly selective universities where the fees for campus study are rising out of the reach of ordinary people.

MOOCs will now evolve rapidly, so we shall just share some reflections on them from a paper that I wrote last year while a fellow at the Korea National Open University entitled *Making Sense of MOOCs: Musings in a Maze of Myth, Paradox and Possibility*.

Last year MIT, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, offered its first MOOC. This online course, 6.002x, *Circuits and Electronics*, was free and open to anyone, anywhere in the world with no admission requirements. It attracted 155,000 registrations from 160 countries. Of these 155,000 learners only 7,157 passed the course as a whole.

Anant Agrawal, who heads the programme, said the exam was 'very hard'. To criticisms of the extraordinarily high drop out rate of more than 95%, Agrawal replied, 'If you look at the number of passes in absolute terms, it's as many

students as might take the course in 40 years at MIT'. Since MIT announced its first MOOC at the end of 2011 many other US universities have launched similar ventures. There is a herd instinct at work.

Coursera, a for-profit company that helps universities do MOOCs, now claims nearly 2m registrations and is presently offering 200 courses with over 30 partner institutions.

Both the MIT and Coursera courses have all had terrific dropout rates, which MOOC providers have been trying to defend, although the media and bloggers have given Coursera the rougher ride. One reporter found that 'some classes were so rife with plagiarism that professors have had to plead with their students to stop plagiarizing'. One reason is that in order to handle the challenge of scale, Coursera asks students to mark each other's work.

#### *MOOCs in perspective: quality*

Let us try to put MOOCs in perspective. There is plenty to criticise and we shall do that, but there are also possibilities and, either way, they are an important element of the turbulence that is the subject of this paper.

We start with some myths about MOOCs. First, since most of the universities offering MOOCs are well-known US institutions, a first myth is that university brand is a surrogate for teaching quality. It isn't. The universities gained their reputations in research. Nothing suggests that they are particularly talented in teaching, especially teaching online.

Most countries now have quality assurance agencies for higher education and one of the criteria quality auditors usually review is the rates of course and degree completion. They take the view that students seek not merely access, but access to success, which institutions should do everything to facilitate while maintaining standards. In this context MOOC completion rates of less than 10% are a disaster.

The problem is that MOOCs universities have scarcity at the core of their business model. They measure institutional prestige by the people they do not admit, so they are relaxed about high drop out and failure rates.

#### *MOOCs in Perspective: Certification*

This brings us to the central paradox in MOOCs. In most MOOC institutions, success in the course exam, which MIT called 'very hard', does not lead to credit,



but to a certificate. Therefore what determines whether a student can get a degree is not their mastery of MOOC courses, but the admissions process to the university for regular students.

This is disreputable. If we were students who had passed a MOOC that was the same as the course offered on campus in the home university we would be upset if we did not get credit for it.

My late Athabasca University colleague Dan Coldeway called this practice of basing reputation on tough admission requirements the principle of ‘good little piggies in, make good bacon out’.

### *MOOCs in Perspective: Pedagogy*

Let’s look at pedagogy. A reporter who took a Coursera course found it had little pedagogical input. Professor Tony Bates stresses that MOOCs are not a new pedagogy. He notes that the teaching methods ‘are based on an old and out-dated behaviourist pedagogy, relying primarily on information transmission, computer-marked assignments and peer assessment’.

### *MOOCs in Perspective: for what purpose?*

A key question about MOOCs is why they are being offered. The tension is between the ideal of sharing knowledge freely and the need to make money. No one yet has a clear strategy for making money out of MOOCs for the universities involved.

One MOOC provider claims that they are the answer expanding higher education in developing countries. A promotional video for MOOCs showed this stampede for admission at the University of Johannesburg with the implication that MOOCs are the answer to the massification of higher education. But Bates (2012) comments bitinglly: ‘these elite universities continue to treat MOOCs as a philanthropic form of continuing education, and until they are willing to award credit and degrees for this type of programme, we have to believe that they think this is a second class form of education suitable only for the unwashed masses’.

However the very large-scale MOOCs we have talked about are only part of the story. There are now examples of partnerships between universities and private companies to offer online learning in which both parties are making money and students are graduating with degrees. For example, the 40 universities associated

with the organisation *Academic Partnerships* are extremely pleased with the way that it has been able to expand their impact and reputations. They are dealing with thousands of students per course rather than tens or hundreds of thousands – but these students are graduating from their online programmes at the same rate as on-campus students.

Academic Partnerships is now in discussions with a number of Australian universities. It will be interesting to see how this organisation can add value in a country where, unlike the US, universities have a long and successful tradition of dual-mode operation.

### *MOOCs in Perspective: Possibilities*

So much for our criticisms of the hype and contradictions associated with MOOCs. But they are a fascinating development. So many institutions are involved that they will not just peter out. They could chart new paths by improving teaching and cutting the costs of higher education.

Although current MOOCs pedagogy is out-dated, this will now change fast. Competition will produce a great diversity of approaches and much healthy experimentation.

Soon the media, student groups and educational research units will start publishing assessments of MOOC courses that will quickly be consolidated into quality rankings. Placing courses in the public domain before a global audience will force MOOCs institutions to pay more than lip service to importance of teaching and put it at the core their missions. This is the real revolution of MOOCs.

### OERu

We end our remarks about new manifestations of openness with the OER University. They will be brief remarks because the OERu is a trans-Tasman initiative and you know more about developments than we do.

I am delighted that my former COL colleague Wayne Mackintosh is here because his Open Education Resource Foundation hosted the meeting at which the OERu was conceived almost two years ago in New Zealand. Since then the key thought leader in developing the concept has been your own Jim Taylor, who is a world figure in the development of distance learning generally.

We simply observe that the OERu becomes more relevant with every day that passes. It began as an attempt to help students who, in the spirit of Empire State College, wish to construct their degrees from OERs. This diagram shows how the OERu can provide services at every step: tutorial support, assessment, credit recognition and certification.

Now MOOCs have created new needs. We find it outrageous that universities call MOOCs courses, yet do not give credit to those who pass them. This is already changing, but I hope that the OERu will become a vital resource for learners who want to use MOOCs in building a degree.

What we are seeing is the disaggregation or unbundling of higher education, with different providers – both public and private – supplying the various stages in the process from learning to certification. You heard it first in Jim Taylors famous slide of 2007.

We digress for a moment to note that USQ was actually the unwitting pioneer of MOOCs. When Jim Taylor returned from the OERu foundation meeting and this headline appeared in *The Australian*, your then VC was not amused. In fact, as usual, USQ was ahead of the game!

### Conclusions

What are our conclusions?

The new dynamics identified at UNESCO's 2009 World Conference on Higher Education are creating even more turbulence that the 2000 participants could have anticipated.

It is now a truism to state that online learning is a disruptive technology. Maybe, but the growing commitment to openness is probably even more significant. There is a nice historical analogy.

The Open University was the brainchild of Prime Minister Harold Wilson. He proposed to call it 'The University of the Air' because it would make use of broadcasting. But the Planning Committee decided that it should be called 'The Open University': to name it for its purpose, not for the technology that it would use.

In a similar way we believe that openness is the real disruptive ideology of our times.

Open Educational Resources are making individuals; institutions and governments less constipated about intellectual property rights.

Institutions that put scarcity at the core of their business models, that assumed that quality equated with exclusivity, that believed that ‘good little piggies in make good bacon out’, are now offering Massive Open Online Courses. This is the real revolution.

This is why keeping an open mind is the key to higher education futures!

Thank you.