

# **SPEECH**

## **UNIVERSITE DES MASCAREIGNES**

### **National Multiplication Training (Mauritius) 2024 (Workshop 1 of 2)**

**27 February 2024 – Hennessy Park Hotel, Ebene**

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**Ms Pistor and Ms Qin**

**Heads of HEIs**

**Distinguished Guests**

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

#### **Good Morning**

It is an absolute pleasure to be in your midst today, embarking on the launch of what promises to be a transformative endeavor - the inaugural 'Dialogue on Innovative Higher Education Strategies' National Multiplication Training Programme for Higher Education in Mauritius., The focus will be on a theme that is highly significant, namely, *“Effective Implementation of Quality Management Systems in HEIs with a focus on accreditation, audits and an introduction to internationalisation”*.

Before I delve into the significance of this groundbreaking initiative, allow me to extend my warmest greetings to all who have graced us with their presence, and a special welcome to those who have travelled from overseas to share their knowledge. Your presence underscores the collective commitment we share towards advancing the cause of education in the construction of the Mauritian Higher Education Hub.

I believe no one will disagree with the fact that, while our regulatory bodies play a crucial role in overseeing the quality of education, it is imperative that Higher Education Institutions take it upon themselves to push forward proactive measures to implement robust Internal Quality Assurance processes. In this connection, I commend this joint initiative between the Middlesex University and l'Université des Mascareignes for their dedication to this cause and for inspiring their peers to strive for excellence.

We are also thankful to the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development for funding this capacity building initiative, jointly coordinated by the German Academic Exchange Service and the German Rectors' Conference, under the umbrella of the German "Dialogue on Innovative Higher Education Strategies" Programme.

Accordingly, this event, local as it may be, nevertheless reflects a spirit of international collaboration and cooperation that is compellingly aimed at driving positive change and fostering quality and excellence in our higher education system.

With its focus on the effective implementation of quality management systems in higher education institutions, the initiative also satisfies two important needs:

1. for one thing, it symbolizes our unwavering dedication to staying at the forefront of educational innovation, and,
2. for another, it paves the way for a sustainable and globally competitive higher education sector, crucially positioning Mauritius as a hub for innovation and intellectual exchange.

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

Let me reiterate what I have insisted upon, time and again, on different platforms. We hardly need to adduce new evidence to the universally- recognised fact that quality education is the bedrock upon which the future of our nation rests. That being the case, we are ineluctably bound by a collective duty to ensure that our Higher Education Institutions uphold the highest standards of excellence.

In this context, one stark reality is staring us in the face today. If we want to be ready for what is now spelt out as 'the Futures of Higher Education', we need to,

both, invest in building the capacity of our academic staff and quality assurance personnel, and promote excellence in the sector.

I take it that this is central to the mounting of this training programme.

Indeed, by equipping participants with the knowledge, skills, and competences in key areas such as accreditation, quality audits, and internationalisation for effective quality management, this event aligns seamlessly with our aim to equip our university personnel with the foundations of effective quality management systems in higher education.

And it is highly constructive to witness the reciprocity shown by the diverse representations from higher education institutions and stakeholders who are gathered here today. This clearly points to our collective dedication to fostering a culture of academic excellence and continuous improvement.

And we should never forget the aspirational end result. Quality assurance, far from being a mere procedural box-ticking exercise, is, in fact, a solemn commitment to providing our students with an education of unparalleled excellence - one that is not only academically rigorous but also relevant to outface the dynamic challenges of the modern world.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you well know, the Government's vision to elevate Mauritius as a premier education destination is intrinsically linked to the internationalisation of our higher education sector. We are all aware of the decline in national demography, depicted vividly by the sharp decline in the number of learners in primary schools and, by extension, in the local higher education system.

In the face of such a situation, and with our unfaltering vision of a flourishing higher education hub, we are poised to find acceptable means to sustain our higher education sector, through a different mode of student onboarding without, *and I lay heavy stress on this*, without any loss in standard or quality.

In an interconnected world, Ladies and Gentlemen, the internationalisation of education is no longer an option but a necessity. Students have to be encouraged

to grow and thrive in an increasingly diverse and interconnected global workforce. This is where the element of quality assurance in internationalisation of our higher education becomes supremely important.

But there is more to internationalisation than that.

By fostering a global perspective within our universities, we also prepare our students to interact with their peers from different backgrounds and cultures and thus to flourish in an increasingly interconnected world.

In this line, I will remind you that the Higher Education Act has a full section on pastoral care for students, and I will invite all of you to quickly set up an institutional unit which will look after your students through their academic journey at your respective institutions, that is, right from the application stage through to graduation. I am sure the HEC will soon finalise the guidelines for the setting up of such Pastoral Care units.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you embark on this training programme, I encourage you to embrace the journey ahead with an open mind and a determination to excel. Together, let us create an educational ecosystem that not only garners national recognition but earns global acclaim. I here commend the active involvement of the main regulators, the Higher Education Commission and the Quality Assurance Authority.

The New Integrated Standards of the HEC and the Quality Assurance Standards of the QAA are meant to be useful guides in your discussions on quality assurance. I am sure these discussions will be of paramount importance as some of you get ready for the Quality Audits which the QAA is due to carry out soon.

However, it is essential to acknowledge that, while our regulatory bodies provide oversight, our Higher Education Institutions bear the primary responsibility for implementing robust Internal Quality Assurance processes. These ensure the quality of educational standards for teaching and learning catering to our diverse student population.

Let me add that we cannot today talk of Quality Assurance without making reference to the impacts of AI and CHAT GPT on the Higher Education Sector. It is to be noted

that AI is a reality, we will have to line it and adopt it. It is perhaps time for HEIs and regulatory bodies to focus also on the new assessment modes to be adopted.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Let this workshop **not** be for you just participating in yet another event. I strongly encourage participants to come together and build a community of practice dedicated to fostering a quality culture within our higher education institutions. Though seemingly challenging, at first, my Ministry will welcome the creation of a national Quality Assurance Circle regrouping professionals from all institutions, with the sole objective of brainstorming to propose improvements to the QA practices in higher education while working in a fair, open-minded and equitable manner.

Before closing, let me convey my gratitude to the funders and coordinators who made this innovative programme possible today. My special thanks go to University of Potsdam and University of Applied Sciences of Germany.

I also fully applaud the collaborative efforts between local institutions and international partners. Experience has demonstrated the virtue that lies in such *modi operandi* that are instrumental in positioning Mauritius as a global hub for innovation and intellectual exchange. The results of such initiatives are already tangible, as will be the results of this current nexus between Middlesex University and l'Université des Mascareignes,.

I wish all participants all the best for the next days and let us keep in mind that the impact of this programme goes far beyond individual development - it must resonate with the broader national mission to elevate the quality of higher education. Our universities should stand as beacons of excellence on the global stage.

Let us work hand in hand to create an educational ecosystem that is not just nationally recognised but globally celebrated.

I thank you for your attention, and I now have the pleasure to formally declare this workshop open.

***Thank you for your kind attention.***