

**Address of Hon (Mrs) L.D. Dookun Luchoomun,
Minister of Education and Human Resources,
Tertiary Education and Scientific Research**

INQAAHE FORUM 2018

**“Quality is in the Eye of the Beholder: Relevance,
Credibility and International Visibility”**

Ladies and Gentlemen

An excellent morning to all of you.

It is my pleasure and privilege to be among you this morning for the launch of the INQAAHE Forum 2018. At the very outset, allow me to join my voice to those of the previous speakers to extend a warm welcome to all of you.

Thank you for taking time off your busy work schedules to attend this Opening Ceremony and, in most cases, to participate in the Forum over the next two days.

It is the first time that Mauritius is hosting the INQAAHE Forum and I am especially delighted to note that the title of this Forum says it all:

“Quality is in the Eye of the Beholder: Relevance, Credibility and International Visibility”.

I am delighted because the three major thrusts that the Forum purports to cover are extremely pertinent **to our Mauritian context** and to today’s international set up in general.

From a global perspective, we know that, with major shifts being witnessed in practically all domains, the goalposts of quality are shifting as well.

In the economic and employment domain, for instance, issues like skills mismatch, asymmetry between degrees and jobs on offer, have become the talk of the day.

Even the student profile in our higher learning institutions is becoming increasingly diversified. Where, at one time, students looked at the finality of university education as resulting in being **employed**, they now perceive their qualifications and the university experience as a passport for enhanced **employability** and rapid career growth.

Besides, we today have to contend with a work force that sees itself as mobile, sectorally as well as geographically. Inevitably, all educational institutions, whether high school or University, find themselves having to deliver on what we now call the “key graduate attributes” which invest graduates with the relevant soft or deep learning skills that will make them employment- ready.

In short, our learners have wised up to the necessity that Universities have to equip them to fulfil a slew of roles and make them capable of adjusting to a future, resting on digitisation and automation.

The impact on the quality of university provision is hence enormous: What was seen as qualitatively sound yesterday is considered today as “dépassé”, jaded, irrelevant.

Ladies and Gentlemen

This explains the significance being attached to Quality Assurance as a watchdog par excellence. Consider the fact that, in the early ‘90s, when the International Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (INQAAHE) was established, fewer than half of the European countries had national quality assurance programs. In April 2010, famed international consultant, Liz Reisberg, delivering a lecture on

Quality Assurance in Brazil, stated that, and I quote, , “*there were very few countries in the world that were not developing national programs for quality assurance in higher education*”

Well, this is our case as well in Mauritius.

As you are probably aware, a swathe of reforms is currently underway in the education and training system in this country to enable it to continue to be relevant to changing local and global contexts.

In fact, it is central to our education and training reform agenda to have quality assurance values and structures deeply embedded in the entire **education system**, right from the early stages to the post-secondary and Higher Education level. At the lower stages, quality assurance ensures the prevalence of inclusiveness, fairness and equity, while, at the higher levels, the determinants, among others, are the relevance and the quality of the knowledge produced and disseminated.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We realise that we have to apply rigorous processes for continuous quality improvement. In fact, this conviction is central to the fulfilment of one of our aspirations, namely, that of becoming a Knowledge Hub and a Centre of Higher learning in this part of the world.

I need perhaps not labour the point but it is a fact that the youth bulge in Africa, with 200 million of them aged between 15 and 24, presents a tremendous opportunity in terms of young talent waiting to be coached and developed. Our Continent is already witnessing a major student flow across the national frontiers and this has to be encouraged.

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We, in Mauritius, believe that we are in a position to attract those determined to move across countries in search of quality higher education.

Of course, the proviso here is that there is a recognition, a portability of qualifications.

Student mobility will gain in momentum when regional higher education qualifications and credit transfer frameworks are developed. Allow me here to indicate to you that the Mauritian government has already agreed to accede to the Addis Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in African States.

On the other hand, only last week, African Ministers of Education met during the Pan-African High-Level Conference on Education (PACE2018) in Nairobi, Kenya and pledged to ratify the Addis Convention and strengthen national quality assurance systems, and allocate necessary resources.

Obviously, we in Mauritius realise that we are not alone in pushing the agenda for borderless education: numerous higher learning institutions in the region and elsewhere are equally competing for international visibility and market shares.

In such a context, ladies and gentlemen, we are making sure that we never lose focus of the credibility of our offer. To be and to remain credible, we are promoting a system which is transparent and trustworthy.

The end word here is that it is vital that the interests of learners be protected at all times. Hence our firm conviction that national quality assurance agencies must be well supported by a well-crafted regulatory

framework and the statutory powers to execute their mandate effectively – these are *sine qua non* conditions for them to remain credible and relevant.

Distinguished Guests,

In this context, let me also share with you that, come July 2018, the Mauritian higher education sector will cross another milestone with the promulgation of the Higher Education Act.

Through this Act, the Mauritian Government is in the process of establishing two highly specialised agencies: namely, the Higher Education Commission and the Quality Assurance Agency. This latter body will have the role of promoting, maintaining and enhancing both the quality assurance of higher education in line with international standards and high quality standards in higher education through appropriate quality assurance mechanisms.

Both institutions will operate synchronously to ensure that the quality assurance of the higher education sector in Mauritius is more responsive and better equipped to cater to the changing global trends. This, we trust, will further consolidate the tertiary education landscape in Mauritius through, amongst others, a more up- to- date and responsive quality assurance framework.

Ladies and Gentlemen

We realise that, while some work can be done on our own, networking and enhanced cooperation are fundamental. This is where our Higher Education sector would gain through active collaboration with the INQAAHE.

In fact, this Network has a set of goals, three of which I perceive to be directly pertinent to a future collaboration:

One, to assist the development of new quality assurance agencies;

Two, to help determine the standards of institutions operating across national borders; and

Three, to assist in the development and use of credit transfer schemes to enhance the mobility of students between institutions within and across national borders

In this enterprise, if our institutions offer quality programmes of a high calibre, I would definitely not be averse to the idea of opening up to cross-border quality assurance.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over the next two days, this Forum will provide participants with the opportunity to reflect on important contemporary challenges facing the quality assurance of higher education. I would like to congratulate the INQAAHE and the Tertiary Education Commission of Mauritius, for all the efforts they have put into organising this Forum. I would also urge all participants to be actively involved in the discussions and deliberations for the greater benefit of the higher education sector.

Ladies and Gentlemen

On this note, I now have the distinct pleasure and honour of declaring the INQAAHE Forum 2018 open.

I thank you all for your kind attention.