

## Speech Delivered by Crystal Calarusse, incoming CEO of INQAAHE INQAAHE General Assembly, March 2019

Thank you. I'm so happy to be standing here with you at this General Assembly, in this beautiful country, about to embark on this adventure with you—the next stage of INQAAHE's organizational life. I feel very lucky to have the privilege of working on such a noble and increasingly important mission, of supporting global quality assurance and the significant and impactful work of all its members.

I especially want to thank Susanna Karakhanyan and the board, for their trust and confidence in me as we embark on this partnership. Thanks to the Secretariat in advance for the education they will bring to me. And above all, to all of you, for your support of INQAAHE and its increasing strength as a network.

I hope that you be able to see and benefit from this added capacity. The organization has long had an admirable commitment to quality assurance values—integrity, accountability, academic freedom, partnership, and a commitment to the sharing of good practice. INQAAHE now has additional administrative infrastructure to support and sustain your efforts to promote those values.

I have been working in global accreditation and quality assurance for a long time, both as a staff leader of a global accrediting organization at the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, & Administration (NASPAA) and as a long-serving board member of the Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors (ASPA), another association of quality assurance agencies with a single staff member. I have a history of strengthening organizations with a small staff and a very big reach. It is what I like to do and I think that experience is why I was chosen to have the special privilege to be here. My academic background is in the field of public policy and economics, but my more recent work tends to be around cultural competency, social equity, and public values. The nature of my work in global accreditation and the pressures surrounding higher education make some of these discussions a necessity.

While I'm pleased to be in front of you generally, I'm also excited to be here at this moment in time, specifically, as this is a very important time to strengthen our network. The challenges we face as quality assurance agencies are increasing and we have do not have much choice but to face them. On my mind today, are four primary challenges. However, I expect that you will tell me through your experiences about the ones I've missed.

1. Trust. This is the theme of our conference for very good reasons. We face declining trust in public institutions in many regions. Higher education has historically fared better than other institutions in most cultural contexts, but that is changing in some regions. Our work on integrity with our institutions is paramount in maintaining that trust. This is crucial for the strength of the higher education sector to be able to withstand financial and political challenges.
2. Relevance. The world has changed around academia.
  - a. Technology in particular has changed what educated graduates need to be able to do, and how they must be able to adapt. Technology has changed how organizations are run, how citizens interact with their governments, and the pace with which new ideas emerge. Have our academic institutions kept pace with the very broad skills that graduates need to be successful workers, professionals, and citizens?
  - b. Technology has changed the mechanisms and the frequency with which we communicate with each other, and it has created tremendous access to knowledge that was never before possible. How do we ensure that our particular curation of that knowledge in higher education

remains relevant? And how do we improve our communication about the value of our curation? This is something we have historically not had to do at this scale that is necessary today.

- c. Finally, technology has operationally changed education and quality assurance. There are new mechanisms by which our institutions offer their education to their students, as well as new tools to help us with our determination of quality assurance. Are we responding to these changes in ways that enhance our overall quality goals? And are we able to legitimately discern innovation from efficiency? They can sometimes be the same thing, but also not.
3. Access. The role that quality assurance plays in ensuring social equity, mobility, and inclusion is increasing relevant. United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) #4 is to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong opportunities for all.” Quality assurance is central to higher education’s contribution towards achieving this goal. Pursuing this goal of access is crucial to improving the social well-being in our respective countries and regions, and its pursuit is crucial to the viability of higher education and its role in society. When the higher education sector is perceived as exacerbating inequality versus contributing to social mobility, societal support for universities decreases. What can we learn from each other in terms of effective practices in quality assurance related to access?
4. Maintaining traditional quality assurance values in the midst of change. Our foundational values of integrity and accountability are more important than ever. How do we maintain our adherence to and promotion of these values, while at the same time responding adequately to the changes in the world around us?

I think a lot about the threads that tie these concerns together, and the concept that has been on my mind a lot lately is the concept of RESILIENCE. Resilient systems can weather exogenous shocks and maintain their core integrity. It’s a concept I hear mentioned a lot in various fields from public policy to natural sciences to even relationship advice and personal development. And I think it is because the concept has a great deal of merit and it is, in a sense, our opportunity. Resilience indicates an ability for a system to change and adapt with respect to impacts coming from outside the system, but still maintain integrity in achieving the positive goal or outcomes.

This applies to many things in front of us at this conference. It applies to INQAAHE itself as an organization, in terms of adding capacity to improve resilience. But it also applies much more broadly to our work. Quality assurance providers, institutions of higher education, and students, are all impacted by major technological, political, and environmental challenges. As quality assurance providers, how do we ensure that we are promoting resilient systems in higher education, and how are we ensuring that the graduates themselves are resilient, in the skills and approach they bring to the world after their studies?

These are the things on my mind lately, at the start of this new journey with INQAAHE. But I look forward to learning from all of you what you think are our challenges and opportunities for the future.

Clearly, by your attendance at this conference and the contribution of your expertise you are signaling that you value this convening and this network. I hope that I will have the chance to meet as many of you as possible, if not in person, then virtually over the next year. I would be delighted to know what you think is important about INQAAHE and how this network can continue to be strong, relevant, and resilient.

I will be officially beginning as your CEO at the end of April. There is no email or card yet, but I encourage you to reach out as soon those things are available as I intend to be very accessible.

Thank you again for this amazing opportunity and I look forward to our work together.