

Adrian Curaj · Ligia Deca · Remus Pricopie *Editors*

# European Higher Education Area:

## The Impact of Past and Future Policies



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Adrian Curaj · Ligia Deca · Remus Pricopie  
Editors

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# European Higher Education Area: The Impact of Past and Future Policies

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# Introduction



Adrian Curaj, Ligia Deca and Remus Pricopie

## Twenty Years of Bologna and a Decade of EHEA: What's Next?

Looking at the past policies proposed by the Bologna Process, one can see that structural reforms have been the most successful policy area of the EHEA. Even so, implementation is uneven, and some countries are far from fulfilling their commitments in one or more areas of structural reforms. This puts the credibility of the EHEA in jeopardy as a framework within which national qualifications are compatible, are issued within comparable qualifications structures, are quality assured according to agreed standards and guidelines and are described in easily understandable formats. Nevertheless, EHEA was successful in promoting structural reforms but less so at explaining the rationale and the principles behind them.

The fundamental values on which the EHEA builds—in particular academic freedom, institutional autonomy, student participation in higher education governance, and public responsibility for higher education—have not received the

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attention they deserve. This can be explained by the fact that there is a political need to show rapid accomplishments and that defining goals and assessing implementation of fundamental values have proved challenging. Also, fundamental values are closely linked to the overall situation of democracy and human rights, and the EHEA is not an area of democratic perfection.

The discussion on non-implementation has always been difficult. Uneven implementation is not solely a question of a North/South or East/West divide or a divide between countries that joined the Bologna Process in the early years and those that joined later and therefore had less time to implement the reforms since the expectation was—at least officially—that all EHEA members would have met the same goals by 2010.

“Two speed Bologna” is not solely due to different accession times or different starting points. Differences include: centralised versus decentralised systems, differences between larger and smaller systems, and the degree to which systems differentiate between different kinds and profiles of higher education institutions as well as varying levels of commitment between and within EHEA members. One of the challenges in the further development of the EHEA will, therefore, be to reconcile the need to ensure implementation of common principles and goals with the need to recognise that EHEA members have different traditions as well as recent pasts.

The EHEA was envisaged as a structure and a cooperation process fit for the challenges facing education ministers and the higher education community some 20 years ago. The future of the Bologna Process depends on the capacity to identify the challenges of political importance, and that can be addressed within the loose and extensive structure that is the EHEA. This is essential, as there is a widespread feeling that the EHEA is losing steam and political interest as shown by the decreasing participation rates of ministers in the Ministerial Conferences.

Failing that, Europe faces the need to redefine those structures so that a different EHEA can meet new challenges.

## **Bologna Process Researchers Conference—Where Research Meets Policy**

The Bologna Process Researchers’ Conferences aims primarily at further consolidating the researchers’ community in order for it to provide those research-based insights and recommendations, which would best inform discussions and decisions, including of the Bologna Process Ministerial Conferences. As such, the third edition of the Bologna Process Researchers’ Conference was an excellent opportunity to continue the dialogue initiated during the 2012 and 2015 Ministerial Conferences, between research, policy-making and implementation of the Bologna Process.

It is worth underlining that, in terms of its participants and interested researchers, the topics of the Bologna Process and the construction of the European Higher Education Area have already reached the stage of building its own research community.

The third conference was focused on the already configured impacts as well as on the future of the Bologna Process. It took stock of existing initiatives and attempted to identify some of the key challenges, needed developments and future trends. Five main topics were addressed in particular: internationalisation of higher education, the social dimension within a quality oriented higher education system, transparency tools, financing and governance and the future of the Bologna Process.

## *Context*

The newly emerging contexts of the European higher education developments and Bologna Process implementation are altogether different from those of the launching period. A closer look at recent trends reveals challenges and new configurations, which may hardly be ignored.

The external higher education context is marked by accelerating changes, which bear on higher education policies:

**Technological:** the emerging digital revolution. Technology and digitalisation are becoming a basic necessity for society;

**Social:** growing inequalities, a shrinking middle class and a growing class of precariat, crisis of the traditional welfare state, population ageing, a growing demographic decline, increasing youth unemployment, changes in the life style, refugee crisis: rapidly increasing numbers and a hardening of attitudes in many European countries;

**Political:** the rising of populist ideologies, challenging of established status-quo and democracies, increase in violent extremism, decrease of a broad consensus on basic political and societal principles, and the emergence of “alternative facts” and “post truth politics” (e.g. illiberal vs. liberal democracy, international unilateralism vs global multilateralism);

**Economic:** slow recovery from the economic recession and financial crisis (2008–2012), emerging protectionism, tensions between old and newly emerging industries, sharply divergent views on globalisation;

**Culture:** following the previous post-materialistic cultural developments, a sort of cultural backlash is at work, bringing to the fore formerly dominating cultural values;

**Regional:** European Union is searching for its new future, while growing tensions within the wider Europe and in the shaping of globalisation waves are constantly emerging, including Brexit challenges.

The inner context of higher education is also marked by new configurations:

A steady decrease in student flows, following on the previous massification or universalisation trends—student numbers are starting to decline, influenced by the

decrease in demography, especially in some parts of Europe (Central and Eastern Europe);

A wider range of providers, serving a more differentiated student cohort, and challenging traditional providers with respect to programmes and credentials;

The decreased attractiveness of the Bologna Process, especially at the political level, due to its perception as a *fait accompli*;

Reaching a decade of EHEA with newly accepted members that did not all show a strong commitment to implementing all the Bologna Process measures;

Variable levels of the Bologna Process implementation in the overall EHEA, which have led to an increased need for dealing with non-implementation;

A refocus on academic values and principles as the political context in some countries has put negative pressure on the autonomy of higher education institutions (HEIs);

The need to search for alternative ways of institutionally codifying academic freedom and university social responsibility (e.g. a consequentialist approach to autonomous governance of university and respect for academic integrity codes);

A growing pressure on higher education to address academic and non-academic new societal challenges (e.g. integration of refugees, more transparency and assuming new institutional public responsibilities);

A re-emphasis on vocational/professional higher education in a world of rapidly changing occupational landscapes;

The view that study programmes diversification has reached a peak as a result of developments in the academic division of knowledge which are disconnected from the current economic division of labour;

A growing imbalance between the public and private financing of higher education;

The need for higher education public policies for new data, and the potential of big data and data analytics.

Both these contexts of higher education call for critically oriented research approaches to the Bologna Process and for the exploration of new innovative initiatives. A demand for an increased reflexivity of the Bologna Process is mounting. The researchers' papers and the Conference debates highlighted the relationships between European higher education's changing contexts and new developments in the Bologna Process.

## *Challenges*

There are some **Bologna Process dilemmas and questions** that arise out of the Bologna Process implementation.

Research has evaluated that some of the most pressing and complementary ones are the following:

Should the Bologna Process be focused on the implementation of the goals already defined or develop new policies and policy areas to meet changing/developing needs and demands?

Is there a need for envisaging a “two speed Bologna Process” or just rely on a development “à la carte” that is adapted to each country’s local circumstances, with hope for eventual ‘full’ implementation?

How should non-implementation be addressed in the Bologna Process? Should future Bologna commitments be more concrete in nature?

How and to what extent should the Bologna Process focus on fundamental values?

How should the interaction between supra-national (European), national and institutional levels be shaped in order to ensure a smooth implementation of the Bologna Process commitments and reaffirm the objectives and values of the EHEA?

How will the current socio-economic and political contexts (e.g. Brexit, authoritarianism, populism, migration, etc.) influence the future of higher education on the continent and in its countries?

## ***Conclusions and Recommendations***

Most articles provided a constructively critical overview of the Bologna Process. On the plus side, this provides legitimacy to the conference, focused on researchers and their analyses regarding the Bologna Process implementation, consequences and future endeavours. At the same time, it highlights the idea that after almost 20 years of Bologna Process and ten years of EHEA, there is sufficient evidence collected to highlight both achievements and shortcomings of implementation.

As anticipated from the first edition of the Conference, organised under the concept of European Higher Education at the Crossroads, the Bologna Process has reached a critical moment. Therefore, two possible scenarios for the Bologna Process/EHEA can be envisaged: either, through self-evaluation and lessons learnt, the process will be revived, adapted to the new global challenges and major societal transformations, or it will become irrelevant.

Looking at the present situation, one cannot help notice a stratification, or even a polarisation of the European higher education systems in two major clusters: countries that fully embraced the Bologna principles and largely implemented the key actions versus countries that joined the Process but have yet a long way to go. This could mean that only the “core Bologna countries” take implementation even further, thus potentially leading to a major schism in the European higher education.

Little time remains until Bologna Process turns 20 and the 2020 EHEA Ministerial Conference seems just around the corner. This is a period aimed at critical self-evaluation and an overall assessment of the Bologna Process, making use of all existing tools, including peer learning. Only by looking at past experiences and grasping the complexity of today can we redesign the Bologna Process as



a genuine European driving force, meaningful for the next 20 years, inspiring future transformations and ensuring cohesion of the European higher education.

In spite of the challenges, EHEA has been a successful story. Through the Bologna Process, higher education contributed to building not only EHEA but Europe itself. This should go on. The key from now on is how to adapt the Bologna Process constantly to its times so as to keep it up with the basic European aims and values of the time.

The Bologna Process Researchers Conference participants predominantly took the view that the future of the European higher education cooperation may be more effectively shaped by relying consistently and imaginatively on specific combinations between key referential values and operational commitments. In what follows, crosscutting illustrations, resulting from the conference papers and debates, are put forward.

### ***Bologna Process and the Wider World of Higher Education***

Bologna Process researchers share certain views with regard to the configuration of the wider world of the European higher education.

The key points of this configuration are the following:

Countries all over the world seem to be striving to increase internationalisation and global engagement, yet in many cases, the escalating trend towards isolationism and inward-looking nationalism results in a growing disconnection between the local and the global, thus fragmenting and indeed troubling developments in interuniversity cooperation;

While one may see an increase in academic credit and degree mobility around the world, only a small student elite is benefiting from it;

In recent years, there has been a shift from a more collaborative approach to internationalisation towards a more competitive focus. The paradoxical combination of collaboration and competition, as driving motives for internationalisation, is more manifest within the Bologna Process;

A misconception of internationalisation in higher education reduces it to a “study abroad” approach. Other misconceptions regarding what internationalisation represents are indicated by a series of perceptions like the following: the means appear to have become the goal; more teaching in English and adding an international subject to the programme would suffice for sustaining a programme of internationalisation; more recruitment of international students, more study abroad, more institutional partnerships would outweigh the constant and exigent assessment of international and intercultural learning outcomes; output and quantitative targets may run against the focus on impact and outcomes of internationalisation. Such misconceptions run contrary to an effective and valuable academic internationalisation.

There is a growing need for rethinking internationalisation in order to focus it on the internationalisation of the curriculum and learning outcomes to enhance the quality of education and research.

### ***Social Dimension Within a Quality Oriented Higher Education System***

The Bologna Process and the creation of the European Higher Education Area have resulted in a growing emphasis on equity and inclusion from all groups in society. At the same time, some of the research findings illustrate the persisting gaps between policy and practice, intentions and reality, rhetoric and concrete actions.

Looking at some gaps between policy and practice, certain challenges arise:

In their higher education access policies, many European countries have not systematically targeted policies to support clearly identified underrepresented groups, but rather mainstreamed strategies to expand access and success that all groups might benefit equally;

Student background data are not readily available in many countries, which makes it difficult to analyse equity needs and design appropriate targeted policies;

Many of the learning difficulties that students bring with them to higher education institutions result from inadequate secondary education;

Too many European countries are facing major new equity challenges due to the rapid rise in the refugee population, and the higher education needs of refugee students should be attended to.

Such challenges generate the need for further research and possible actions:

**New positioning of higher education institutions within society.** There should be a greater osmosis between higher education and society, particularly with reference to refugees and working students. The current practices in higher education institutions aim to make these groups fit the institutions, without institutions investing efforts to accommodate student needs;

**Different definitions of success.** Rankings, performance-based funding as well as individual students have different definitions of success. The former two strive to outline, at least to some extent, what achievements higher education institutions have. Student success is anticipated by the learning outcomes institutionally defined. The connections between the two areas of what counts as academic success may hardly meet. Such a conceptual and practical gap should be dealt with as to replace it with a convergent approach;

**Peer learning does not currently work.** Higher education institutions and policy-makers, countries involved in the Bologna Process themselves tend to act separately instead of exchanging ideas and cooperating for a common good. Collegiate mutual learning happens only randomly. Everyone thinks that their context is unique despite having common referential commitments within the Bologna Process framework. This practice should be substituted with one framed

by peer learning. New communities of practice and social networks of knowledge sharing should be built within the Bologna Process framework;

Focussing on new challenges should not lead to a neglect of ‘old’ ones.

**Benefits of technology and digitalisation.** Researchers’ presentations and debates showed a neglect of the topic of digitalisation. More intensive teaching and learning support and also counselling could be made possible through smart applications of new technology.

No country or institution has found a magic answer to the question of how best to overcome the historical, cultural and psychological barriers faced by underrepresented groups (better counselling, better integration of migrant/working students by flexible curricula etc.). Nevertheless, the components of successful policy approaches outlined throughout researchers’ articles provide a useful blueprint for developing new and innovative responses down the road and orienting much-needed further work in the critical area of equality of opportunities in access and success at the higher education level.

### *Transparency Tools—Impact and Future Developments*

Higher education accountability is strongly enhanced by the wide and convincing transparency of its endeavours. Bologna Process researchers look closely at the current uses of institutional transparency tools and reach certain conclusions.

On the whole, higher education institutions should invest more in dealing with issues of social, academic and financial accountability to students and to society at large. Particular attention should be paid to the ways learning outcomes are set up and achieved, while graduate attributes and life-sustaining skills are closely followed up.

Transparency issues take different forms in each country, but essentially, questions are asked about the value and contribution/impact of higher education to individuals, society and the economy, and the appropriate forms of transparency and accountability of both public and private institutions.

Gaining and enhancing public trust in higher education and effective (re)assuring of academic quality are the essential objectives of higher education transparency. More innovative attention should be focused on the diversification of transparency tools, and the best ways (qualitative and quantitative) to assess and measure in an international context.

### *Financing and Governance*

The discussions about governance and funding are particularly intense in times of major changes in the world around higher education, especially as Europe is once again going through such a period. External ruptures in society-at-large and

changing trends in higher education are influencing the policy discussions and reform initiatives.

Changes outside the higher education system, such as increased migratory fluxes, an escalating refugee crisis in Europe (with huge political, social, and economic implications), the emergence of new or recycled ideologies, such as populism and nationalism have brought new challenges to the higher education governance and funding systems.

A European notion of autonomy has emerged based on some kind of European consensus regarding the need for universities to acquire more institutional freedoms so that they could be more efficient in delivering the types of services and goods deemed necessary for the advancement of defined European and national policy goals. Many national governments have also promoted reforms in the area of university autonomy and until recently, most of these reforms have been meant to support increased autonomy, at least in certain dimensions, which in turn was expected to support a more efficient work of the university, as judged against pre-set criteria defined by the public authorities. At the same time, some governments have begun restricting autonomy and academic freedom. These emerging trends are not happening equally in all parts of Europe. European organisations such as the EU and the Council of Europe remain committed to the knowledge society narrative, democracy and to the European integration—and thus to supporting higher education. Many governments, in different ways, continue to act nationally, based on the conviction that higher education is indeed something to be treasured and nurtured, and that it must remain a key matter for public policy. But even in some of those countries, times seem to be changing.

Nevertheless, the “efficiency” concept in higher education, at the core of the developments regarding governance and funding, seems to be vaguely defined as there is no European accepted definition. Moreover, its’ operationalisation and measurement are not straightforward.

The EHEA is a space for dialogue and practice in higher education becoming a new, *sui generis* type of entity (or system) that requires and indeed has developed new governance—that is, new concepts, principles, models, tools and practices.

### ***Moving to the “Next Level”***

The Bologna Process is at a critical stage, approaching a decade from the establishment of the European Higher Education Area and still facing a number of challenges. The lack of homogenous implementation is partially due to the accession of new members that do not have the same timeframe to implement the pre-existing commitments, but also to existing EHEA members that have not managed to implement those commitments. The political interest in the process has decreased as seen by the decreasing number of ministers participating in the Ministerial Conferences. It seems that there is a lack of new politically appealing commitments that would make the Bologna Process more attractive within national debates.

These challenges can be overcome by taking the Bologna Process to the next level focusing both on fundamental values relevant for our time (equity in access, ethical integrity, etc.) but also on concrete commitments and goals in connection with developments in other policy agendas (EU, OECD, UNESCO, the Council of Europe, etc.).

The fundamental values on which the EHEA builds—in particular, academic freedom, institutional autonomy, student and staff participation in higher education governance and public responsibility for higher education should be at the heart of the political debates and decisions. At the same time, it is necessary to focus on challenges of political importance in order to increase the political interest in the process, while addressing the issue of non-implementation, in order to increase the credibility of the EHEA framework. In this sense, the Bologna Process should become primarily a tool for policy learning and contribute to increasing national and institutional debates, rather than restricting them.

Also, when we talk about the *European Higher Education Area*, we don't have to look for a stage when this can be considered “fully implemented” but more we have to look for a process and build a mechanism that will be able to identify the challenges and to adjust—through appropriate policies—the higher education environment, in order to face these challenges.

From the participants to the *Future of Higher Education—Bologna Process Researchers' Conference*, Bucharest, 27–29 November 2017, the Editorial Board retained a number of specific issues that should be addressed immediately by the policymakers and assumed politically by the ministers of education across Europe. Among these it is worth mentioning:

1. Spanning the gap between the school system and higher education. Many underrepresented groups lose students prior to the point of entry into higher education, and many learning difficulties facing students come from the school systems.
2. Increasing the interaction between higher education and society—with reference to both refugees and working students, but also considering demographic developments.
3. Providing greater leadership in combating populism, extremism and anti-intellectualism by a greater focus on democratic education and links to local communities.
4. The need for a collaborative approach to internationalisation that is focused on the curriculum and learning outcomes to enhance the quality of education and research. This needs to become practice rather than a statement.
5. The need to revisit the concept of autonomy and academic freedom in a changing regional, national and European landscape, within the new frameworks of European cooperation and global competition.
6. More attention to the growing pressure to address academic and non-academic new society challenges.
7. The need for higher education public policies for new data and the capacity to integrate big data and data analytics in the new policy and governance systems.

8. Building capacities for full use of innovation and digital environments.
9. Sustainable financing and appropriate governance of higher education in the context of the above-mentioned values.
10. The need to review the EHEA governance structure to support these new ambitions.

### ***Evolution or Revolution?***

Since 2011, the *Bologna Process Researchers' Conference* has had the role of catalysing the quest for possible and plausible futures of the European Higher Education Area.

Some might think the future will be a *revolution*. Others might count on an evolution of the higher education landscape. Probably there is not a correct answer, and alternative paths should be considered. This publication is a contribution of research to policy-making, an informed dialogue among all actors accountable for the future shape of our higher education institutions and an input to the Bologna Ministerial Conference in Paris, May 2018.

The Editors

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**Part I**  
**Bologna Process and the Wider**  
**World of Higher Education**  
**(Coordinated by Hans de Wit)**

# The Bologna Process and the Wider World of Higher Education: The Cooperation Competition Paradox in a Period of Increased Nationalism



Hans de Wit

## Introduction

The Bologna Process, launched with the Bologna Declaration of 1999, is nowadays implemented in 48 states which define the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Internationalisation has always been at the core of the Bologna Process. Additionally, internationalisation is one of the five priorities highlighted in the EC Modernisation Agenda. An EU Parliament study (de Wit et al. 2015) on Internationalisation of Higher Education shows that nowadays institutional and national policies must address challenges, such as digital and blended learning, demographic changes in the student population, immigration, financial crisis or ethnic and religious tensions. An increased nationalist inward-looking trend, as for instance expressed in the UK through Brexit, is another recent phenomenon that impacts on almost all aspects of internationalisation, which involved stakeholders need to take into account.

de Wit and Jones (2017) identify two main paradoxes in the internationalisation of higher education today: “First, we may be striving to increase internationalisation and global engagement, yet in many countries the escalating trend towards isolationism and inward-looking nationalism results in a disconnect between the local and the global. Second, while we see an increase in credit and degree mobility around the world, with some challenge in the United Kingdom and the United States as market leaders in degree mobility, this billion-dollar industry reaches only a small student elite, excluding 99% of the world’s student population.”

de Wit and Rumbley (2018) observe also that there is an increasing disconnect between the notion of the relevance of internationalisation, within and for the sector, and recent trends in society toward greater inward focus, manifested by

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anti-global and anti-international tendencies. They speak like de Wit and Jones (2017) of paradoxes between internationalisation as a collaborative endeavour and internationalisation as a competitive approach; between internationalisation as a key trend in higher education around the world and nationalisation as a rising social phenomenon globally. The Bologna Process has to be concerned about these two paradoxes and address them adequately in the next phase to come.

This introduction to the theme, the Bologna Process and the wider world of higher education, deals with those challenges, in particular with the paradox between collaboration and competition and with resulting misconceptions concerning internationalisation of higher education that have contributed to this inward-looking trend around the world. How is it possible to overcome these misconceptions and paradoxes to internationalisation and create a sustainable and comprehensive internationalisation for all students and faculty?

## **From Marginal to Mainstream**

From a rather marginal and fragmented issue in most countries and institutions of higher education until the end of the 1980s, internationalisation in higher education has evolved over the past 30 years to become a mainstream and central component of policies and practices in higher education, at the international, regional, national, and institutional levels.

An increasing number of institutions of higher education around the world have an internationalisation policy and/or have integrated internationalisation in their mission and vision. More national governments develop strategies and policies for the internationalisation of their higher education systems. The global knowledge economy requires universities, cities, and nations to be key competitors for students, faculty, research funding, and strategic partnerships and to prepare their graduates to be global professionals, scholars, and citizens. Excellence programs, rankings, accreditation agencies are all indicators, and drivers of internationalisation of higher education.

This increased attention for internationalisation is positive news and brings many opportunities, but it also creates many challenges for the sector. The Bologna signature countries, in particular the first ones to sign on to the process in 1999, have been at the forefront of internationalising their higher education. The changing political climate in Europe, the United States of America, and elsewhere is a nationalist reaction to the increased globalisation of our economies and societies and threatens to impact negatively the internationalisation agenda as well as the Europeanisation agenda.

We also see a shift over the past period from a more collaborative approach to internationalisation towards a more competitive focus. Although student and faculty exchange and cooperation in education and research are still an important part of the internationalisation agenda, also, thanks to the European programs such as

Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020, recruitment of international students and faculty, competition for talents, for research funding and for reputation are increasingly dominating the internationalisation agenda.

## **The Bologna Process and the Wider World**

The Bologna Process, initiated in 1999, is one of the major reforms in higher education, and in addition to harmonisation and modernisation, Europeanisation and internationalisation are driving rationales for this reform. This is not the place to describe and analyse at length the process and the opportunities and challenges of its implementation over the past 18 years. Together with the European programs for research (Horizon 2020 and its predecessors) and education (Erasmus+ and its predecessors), the Bologna Process has contributed substantively to the internationalisation in higher education, and has travelled around the world, as analysed in the contribution to this thematic section by Woldegiorgis.

Intended as a reform to harmonize higher education systems and structures in Europe, and to enhance intra-European collaboration and global competitiveness, Evans, in her contribution, perceives it as a neoliberal process, and Bisschof, in his analysis of the effects of the Bologna Process on quality assurance regimes in the Post-Soviet space, concludes that there is more diversity than convergence. The paradox between collaboration and competition as driving motives for internationalisation is manifest in the Bologna Process. That paradox is manifesting itself in the different contributions to this thematic section.

## **Misconceptions**

Ten years ago, the approach toward internationalisation was also still predominantly activity-oriented, even instrumental. de Wit (2011) mentions nine misconceptions, where internationalisation was regarded as synonymous with a specific programmatic or organisational strategy to promote internationalisation, in other words: where the means appeared to have become the goal—the main misconception. The other eight misconceptions were: more teaching in English; adding an international subject to the program is sufficient; more recruitment of international students; more study abroad; more partnerships; little assessment of international and intercultural learning outcomes; all for the sake of output and quantitative targets; while failing to focus on impact and outcomes.

The main misconception is that internationalisation in higher education means “abroad.” The nearly exclusive focus, in most national and institutional strategies, on the mobility of students and faculty (for credit or degree, for short-term revenue or long-term soft policy) is elitist in that it concerns a small minority of students and faculty, worldwide only around 1–2%, with exceptions in Europe

(between 15 and 25%) and the United States (up to 10%). Internationalisation is, by far, not for all students and, thereby, not really *at home*. The leitmotiv of the “Internationalisation at Home” movement in Europe at the end of last century, “what about the other 98%?”, is—even though the percentages are now closer to 80%—still most relevant.

Twenty-five years ago, the focus of internationalisation policies was nearly exclusively on the mobility of students for credits—, in Europe primarily the Erasmus program. At the end of the 1990s, a reaction emerged in Europe calling for more attention to the large majority of students that were not mobile: “Internationalisation at Home.” At the same time, in Australia and the United Kingdom where there was a strong focus on recruiting international degree students, internationalising the curriculum received greater consideration. Internationalisation of the curriculum and Internationalisation at Home, two strongly intertwined approaches, have become part of the agenda of the European Commission and of national governments and institutions of higher education around the world. Implementation, however, is still quite challenging.

The rationale is that all graduates will live and work in an increasingly interconnected globalised world as professionals—economic actors—and as citizens—social and human beings. The need of the labour market for global professionals and of society for global citizens cannot be addressed solely by mobility. International, intercultural, and global learning outcomes are important elements of a modern curriculum.

Responsible global citizenship implies the need to develop social consciousness and a sense of belonging to a global community; cognitive justice; and support to faculty and teachers in developing responsible global citizenship. Education needs to develop a more inclusive understanding of knowledge in order to build capacity to find solutions to complex problems in local and global contexts. It requires curriculum development and content that engages with multiple and global sources of knowledge in which students explore how knowledge is produced, distributed, exchanged, and utilized globally (de Wit and Leask 2017).

## **Rethinking Internationalisation**

In reaction to the dominant focus on mobility and fragmentation in internationalisation policies, a need emerged to rethink internationalisation for the following reasons:

1. The discourse on internationalisation does not always match reality in that, for too many universities, internationalisation means merely a collection of fragmented and unrelated activities, rather than a comprehensive process;
2. Increasing globalisation and commodification of higher education and the development of a global knowledge society and economy have resulted in a new

- range of forms, providers, and products, and new, sometimes conflicting dimensions, views, and elements in the discourse of internationalisation;
3. The international higher education context is rapidly changing. “Internationalisation”—like “international education”—was, until recently, predominantly a western phenomenon, in which developing countries only played a reactive role. Nowadays, emerging economies and higher education communities in other parts of the world are altering the landscape of internationalisation. This shift away from a western, neo-colonial concept (as “internationalisation” is perceived by several educators) means incorporating other, emerging views;
  4. The discourse on internationalisation is often dominated by a small group of stakeholders: higher education leaders, governments, and international bodies. The voices of other stakeholders, such as employers, faculty, and students are heard far less often, with the result that the discourse is insufficiently influenced by those who should benefit the most from its implementation;
  5. Too much of the discourse is oriented toward the national and institutional levels, with little attention to programs. Research, the curriculum, and teaching and learning processes which should be at the core of internationalisation (as expressed by movements such as “Internationalisation at Home”) often receive little attention;
  6. Too often, internationalisation is evaluated quantitatively, in terms of numbers or in terms of inputs and outputs, instead qualitatively, following an approach based on outcomes and on measuring the impact of internationalisation initiatives;
  7. To date, there has been insufficient attention to norms, values, and ethics in the practice of internationalisation. With some notable exceptions, the approach has been pragmatically oriented toward reaching targets, without any debate on potential risks and ethical consequences;
  8. There is an increased awareness that the notion of “internationalisation” is not only a question of relations between nations but even more of relations between cultures and between “global” and “local” (de Wit 2013).

This rethinking process was manifested in a document by the International Association of Universities in April 2012, “Affirming Academic Values in Internationalisation of Higher Education: A Call for Action” (International Association of Universities 2012). Yet, in national and institutional strategies, most of the misconceptions are still prevalent (de Wit 2016, 2017a, b).

## Contributions to This Thematic Section

Over the past years, an intense, stimulating, and sometimes provocative debate about the future of internationalisation has taken place. As de Wit and Rumbley (2018) observe, “Internationalisation is still primarily driven by dynamics at the

institutional level. National policies are often fragmented and tend to be focused on the mobility side and on matters of competition and competitive advantage, while institutional policies tend to be more coordinated and integrated and appear to strive to combine the dimensions of “internationalisation abroad” and “internationalisation at home” more intentionally.” As also Crăciun in her contribution observes, national attention in all of these countries seems to be more focused toward the competitive end. In comparison, at the institutional level, references are more regularly made to matters of internationalisation at home and to global citizenship development—although, as de Wit and Rumbley (2018) state, “even at the institutional level, rhetoric around these ideas is still much more clearly in evidence than strategic and sustained action.”

The contributions to this thematic session illustrate that, under the broad concept of the Bologna Process and internationalisation, there is great variety in—as well as disconnect between—national and institutional policies and strategies and between competition and collaboration.

Crăciun in her analysis of national policies calls for internationalisation as active engagement and policy-making and comes to the conclusion that national policies for internationalisation are still limited in number, mainly a European and developed world phenomenon, stimulated by the active inbound mobility of international students. This seems to imply that competition is driving more the national agendas than collaboration.

Perez-Encinas makes in her contribution a strong appeal for a collaborative approach that fosters community engagement and integration between students and staff members, while Fit and Gologan call for a stronger influence of student perspectives of internationalisation, more support systems for students and better information and communication channels.

Denisova-Schmidt illustrates in her contribution that corruption, lack of academic integrity and other ethical issues are prevalent in the Bologna signature countries and calls for more attention and specific measures to address these concerns.

These papers make clear that the focus is still more on competition than on collaboration, something that is in line with Evans’ argument that the European Higher Education Area is essentially a neoliberal higher education area. One can question if that was the intended purpose of the process and if it does adequate justice to its more collaborative dimensions, but the neoliberal factor cannot be ignored.

The calls for a more collaborative (Perez-Encinas) and student-oriented (Fit and Gologan) approach to internationalisation as well as the concern by Denisova-Schmidt to address ethics and academic integrity in the European Higher Education Area align with Evans’ analysis that there is a need to reshape academic professionalism. Similarly, it fits well with the call for rethinking internationalisation in higher education as described above.

The paradox also manifests itself in the internationalisation of the Bologna Process itself, as Woldegiorgis in his contribution describes the policy travel of the Bologna Process to Africa and its sub-regions. This travel can be perceived either as

advantageous and by that collaborative or as an instrument of neo-colonialism and by that competitive. As he makes clear, context is essential and a simple transfer is not possible.

Altbach and de Wit (2017) are less optimistic than Evans that the neoliberal university is coming to an end. They expect that in the current global political climate the commercial side of internationalisation will continue to thrive for some time, while internationalisation at home will encounter more opposition and will depend even more on institutions than on governments for development and support. New challenges, which were not so clear until now, have come to the forefront. These confront us with the need to look even more critically at our misconceptions and try to create opportunities out of these challenges (see de Wit 2017a, b).

Although we use labels like “comprehensive internationalisation” and “global citizenship” as if our approach were systematic and qualitative, the reality is that “internationalisation” has become a very broad term, used for a great variety of (mostly economic) agendas. Whether the changing geographic landscape of higher education will also result in different agendas remains to be seen.

Some major misconceptions in the coming years will deal with:

- Internationalisation being equal to “global” and ignoring “local”;
- Internationalisation being a risk for national and cultural identities;
- Western values and concepts as the sole models for internationalisation; and
- Internationalisation unfolding worldwide without any regard for and alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals defined by the United Nations.

The following definition of internationalisation—an update of an original definition by Jane Knight in 2008, developed in a Delphi Panel exercise as part of a study for the European Parliament—reflects this imperative adequately:

[Internationalisation is] “the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of postsecondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff and to make a meaningful contribution to society.” (de Wit et al. 2015)

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# Re-shaping the EHEA After the Demise of Neoliberalism: A UK-Informed Perspective



Linda Evans

## Introduction

Reflecting neoliberalism’s “fundamental principle: the superiority of individualized, market-based competition over other modes of organization” (Mudge 2008: 706–707), the UK’s universities—along with those in many European countries—have, over the last two decades or so, fitted themselves out with what are generally considered the trappings of neoliberalism: new public management, performativity, competitiveness, consumerism, and the commodification of services and personnel. The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) has inevitably emerged as a product of this incremental metamorphosis; reflecting the sum of its constituent parts—individual European nations’ higher education sectors and systems—for the most part it is essentially a *neoliberal* higher education area. But now, subtle shifts are discernible and faint rumblings audible—which some commentators have interpreted as the overture to neoliberalism’s death knell. Representing a recent perspectival shift from resignation that the dark neoliberal night is still young—with Kauppi (2015: 32), for example, lamenting that “[n]othing seems to stop the triumph of neoliberalism in academe”, and Mason (2015, p. xii) similarly noting that “[o]ver the past two decades, millions of people have resisted neoliberalism but in general the resistance has failed”—are increasingly expressed predictions that the model has run its course and a new day is about to dawn. It is difficult to gauge how imminent is its demise, but when neoliberalism eventually does—as it inevitably will—become consigned to history, quite a different style of university must emerge from its shadow, and with it, the EHEA’s shape and form will be redefined.

Predominantly conceptual and analytical, and based upon conjecture, deduction and hypothesis, this chapter addresses the questions: What might the post-neoliberal

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university look like?—and how might it impact upon academic life within the EHEA? As a prelude to such consideration, I first outline evidence that neoliberalism’s grip on the European academy is indeed believed to be slackening.

## **The Beginning of the End, or the End of the Beginning? the Popular Backlash to Neoliberalism**

As Zanoni et al. (2017: 575) note: “we are today witnessing epochal changes, which are fundamentally redefining the social, economic, political, and environmental realities we live in unforeseen and unimaginable ways”. Symptomatic of what Jacques (2016) calls a “popular backlash” to the felt effects of “the most disastrous feature of the neoliberal period”—“the huge growth in inequality”—electoral predictions and political “certainties” have been overturned, with, for example, Emmanuel Macron’s victory in the French presidential election of 2017 having “shattered the accepted wisdom of French politics” (Bock 2017), and politically inexperienced Donald Trump’s controversial snatching of the US presidency from under the nose of a seasoned politician who, until the eleventh hour, looked every inch the front-runner (yet, perhaps equally threatening to the status quo in the USA was the surge of support for left-wing Bernie Sanders’s candidacy for the Democratic presidential nomination). It was moreover argued before the 2016 US presidential election took place that “Trump’s position represents a major critique of America as the world’s hegemon. His arguments mark a radical break with the neoliberal, hyper-globalisation ideology that has reigned since the early 1980s” (Jacques 2016).

Adding detail to this increasingly global scenario of unpredictability and cast-off of the familiarity of the status quo are recent political events in the UK, where the aftershock of the 2016 Brexit referendum earthquake remains palpable, and where the electorate sent further shockwaves resounding through Whitehall’s corridors of power in the general election of 2017, when, on the basis of a manifesto that was unequivocally social justice-, anti-austerity- and public services democratisation-focused, the Labour Party dashed predictions of a Conservative landslide victory, wiping out the Tories’ fragile majority and strengthening the power base of left-wing Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn. In diverting directions of travel envisaged by the political masters and mistresses who had plotted the original policy itineraries, such subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) shifts and twists and turns away from acquiescence with prevailing hegemonies essentially reflect an appetite for fairer and more palatable ways of running countries and organising society—for inequality, argues Jacques (2016):

is, bar none, the issue that is driving the political discontent that is now engulfing the west. Given the statistical evidence, it is puzzling, shocking even, that it has been disregarded for so long; the explanation can only lie in the sheer extent of the hegemony of neoliberalism and its values.

Such evident distaste for what is currently being served up at the macro level of organised society seems very likely not only to spill over to, but also to have its origins in, dissatisfaction focused on the meso level and manifested as demands for changes in how organisations and institutions are run—and on what principles, and reflecting what ideologies. Indeed, Jacques (2016) traces popular outrage against banks and bankers—over the societal inequalities that they represented and the ethically questionable practices that had become embedded within their occupational culture—as the prequel to demonstrations of dissatisfaction through the ballot box. Meanwhile, the inequalities in academic pay in the UK, represented by what are typically perceived as the disproportionately high salaries drawn by university vice-chancellors (or presidents or principals, as they are variously titled) and their senior leadership teams are, at the time of writing, also coming under fire (see, for example, Chakraborty 2017; Richardson 2017). And as this kind of burgeoning unrest amongst the workforces and populations of many developed countries continues to be agitated, the most prominent target in the firing line is the economic model upon which, over the last two decades or so, much of the developed world has functioned: neoliberalism; for, as Buckup (2017) argues, “[n]eoliberal economics has reached a breaking point”, and “[t]he neoliberal age [has] had its day”—observations that are echoed by Zandoni et al. (2017: 575): “These ‘electoral mutinies’ suggest that what is under crisis is the governance system of neoliberalism itself”.

For Jacques (2016), moreover, “[a] sure sign of the declining influence of neoliberalism is the rising chorus of intellectual voices raised against it”. A descant to the melody created by political and economic intellectuals whose voices carry across the public space where media and electorate meet, one such chorus represents academics’ articulation of the deleterious facets of life within the neoliberal university and, in some cases, their proposals for renovating the academy in a different architectural style.

## **Out with the Neoliberal and in with the “New”: Redesigning the European University**

Most academics’ negativity towards the neoliberal university is expressed as critical scholarship, and as railing—against governments, and institutional senior management—that yet falls short of proposing alternative, workable scenarios. Published on the website, and therefore under the aegis, of a collaborative research project focused on Europe and the Pacific Rim, “Universities in the Knowledge Economy”, the Auckland Declaration,<sup>1</sup> for example, sets out the principles upon which its signatories believe universities in the twenty-first century should be run. But the Auckland Declaration is simply what its title implies: a declaration. It offers no tangible proposals for realising, through viable plans for restructuring higher

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<sup>1</sup><http://unike.au.dk/the-auckland-declaration/>.

education systems and re-organising universities, the vision that its principles convey. Such limited opposition undoubtedly reflects the difficulty in conceiving of workable alternatives to the neoliberal university, for, as Kauppi (2015: 35) notes, “[n]eoliberal precepts have hijacked the future: at the moment there simply are no credible, coherently formulated political alternatives”, and while Zanoni et al. (2017) highlight the need to “advance ways of organizing life other than the neoliberal one that reduces every activity to its monetary success and subjects to egomaniacs” (p. 581), they, too, fail to offer tangible proposals for how such re-organisation might be effected, and what it might result in: “[w]hat we know is changing and giving way to something new; *what shape that new formation may take is not apparent yet*” (p. 576, emphasis added).

The absence of a clearly defined path that will lead us to the next ideological destination, where we may lay the foundations of the *post*-neoliberal university, reflects the fact that its antecedent—the neoliberal university—neither evolved nor exists in a vacuum; it emerged as the product of a combination of intellectual, political and bureaucratic policymaking. Any transformation that it undergoes cannot therefore be achieved unilaterally but must span its essential tripartite constitution and reflect the complexity that this constitution ascribes to the university. Achieving this is, of course, easier said than done, and Batterbury and Byrne (2017: 30) identify a key issue that needs factoring into any realisable visions and plans for redesigning the university—it must somehow be paid for: “the problem is systemic, and financial. Running a university means managing a huge budget, paying hundreds or thousands of staff, and keeping the lights on. An ethical university, if we could somehow get back to that, will not come cheap, and this cannot be ignored”. Furthermore, as Mudge (2008, p. 720) points out, “neo-liberalism reaches well beyond nationally bound politics and does not mesh neatly with right–left distinctions”, so that, even at the level of government and international politics, acceptable alternatives remain elusive—and those that do present themselves as viable possibilities retain essentially market-driven dimensions.

Since it is more difficult to formulate practical plans based on envisaged scenarios that are entirely unfamiliar than it is to draw upon prior first- or second-hand experience, in any context contemplation of what a different future might look like often focuses on restoring the best of what is regretted as having been lost. Yet, despite Batterbury and Byrne’s (2017) reference, cited above, to “*get[ting] back to an ethical university*” (emphasis added), within the academic discourse that problematizes the neoliberal academy there is evidently little appetite (see, for example, Archer 2008; Bacon 2014; Halfman and Radder 2015; Wright and Greenwood 2017a) for rekindling the past (or idealised perceptions of it). It is also important to recognise that, within the EHEA, the (most recent) past is not always or consistently imagined as a better scenario than the present “reality”; in many eastern European contexts the neoliberal ideologies that underpin higher education systems are assessed in relation to their antecedent: Soviet communism. Outlined by Hibert and Lešić-Thomas (2017) and Hvorecky et al. (2017), the ambivalence towards the neoliberal academy felt by some Eastern European-based academics, who recognise it as neither a better nor a worse alternative to the freedom-curtailing Soviet model,

represents the kind of no-win situation that might be described in colloquial English as having leapt out of the frying pan and into the fire.

While backtracking, then—whether towards academe’s “real” or imagined past, however that may be assessed—does not seem a credible basis for it, the refashioning of the twenty-first century (European) university away from its current neoliberal style is the focus of a discernible small “group” of academic activists who have taken a step beyond routine denouncement of and railing against neoliberal higher education. Members of this “group” have tried to set the ball of change rolling by initiating or contributing to a discourse that articulates what are presented as viable alternatives.

### *A Discourse of Alternatives*

One such proposal that features within what I call the “discourse of alternatives” is the notion of a co-operative university—what Wright and Greenwood (2017a: 1), in their editorial introduction to a journal special issue focused on “alternatives to the deteriorating state of universities”, explain as: “universities run by and for the benefit of students, academics and the public”. Their own article within this special issue (Wright and Greenwood 2017b) presents: “an organisational critique of the pseudo-business model currently in use [in higher education]”. They propose, as a solution, re-establishing universities as trusts, through the introduction of “a model of beneficiary ownership, a matrix form of organisation and renewed relations with society” (p. 42). While Bacon (2014) proposes as “a viable and emergent management paradigm” a model of what he calls “neo-collegiality”, to combat the problem of academics’ lack of input into university management and governance —“university staff in the UK have little say in how their institutions are managed. ... Denial of voice represents an anachronistic approach to running universities” (pp. 1–2)—Wright and Greenwood’s (2017b) proposal for involving academics and students as “collaborators and decision makers in all major institutional venues and processes” (p. 46) is more far-reaching and ambitious in scale. Drawing upon the examples of what they describe as “beneficiary-run organisations”, such as the UK-based John Lewis Partnership,<sup>2</sup> or the Mondragón University, they argue that putting the university’s assets into a non-revocable trust, whereby all members become “beneficial partners, with a clear purpose to engage in satisfying work that

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<sup>2</sup>The John Lewis Partnership underpins a chain of John Lewis department stores and Waitrose supermarkets, selectively located across the UK, and, with a reputation for product quality and customer service, targeting discerning middle-class consumers. The John Lewis Partnership website states that permanent staff are categorised as co-owning partners who share the business’s benefits and profits: “The John Lewis Partnership is one of a growing number of businesses with an employee-owned structure and is a member of the Employee Ownership Association (EOA), the not-for-profit membership body representing the sector” (accessed 15.12.17 at: <https://www.johnlewispartnership.co.uk/about.html>).

is socially beneficial, and an equal say in working out how the university should achieve that purpose” represents a move towards “recreating a participatory public university” (Wright and Greenwood 2017b: 47).

Mondragón University featured in a 2013 *THE* report that considered whether its apparent success was replicable: “can the University of Mondragon, an established higher education cooperative in the lush green mountains of the Basque Country in northern Spain, offer any answers for academies elsewhere?” (Matthews 2013). The report tells us that the university was founded in 1997 from a collection of co-ops dating back to 1943, and that its academic and administrative staff jointly own it: “[t]o become a fully fledged member, employees have to work there for at least two years, and then pay €12,000 ... which buys a slice of the university’s capital that can be withdrawn upon retirement ... no one at Mondragon may earn more than three times the salary of the lowest-paid worker” (Matthews 2013). Mondragón University’s general assembly—the supreme body of its “highly democratic governance structure”—comprises one-third staff, one-third students and one-third outside interested parties, we are told, and its power to sack senior management team members was exercised in 2007 (Matthews 2013). Yet, while Wright and Greenwood (2017b: 47) highlight what they perceive as its key strengths—“students, faculty, administrators and staff together are the beneficiary owners and they can only pursue their interests when the consequences for all groups have been publicly discussed and agreed on. Institutional decision-making, finances and strategic planning are shared and open processes”—the *THE* report (Matthews 2013) uncovers several not-insignificant drawbacks of this version of a co-operative model, most of which represent revenue-related and other financial implications of its private status, including inevitable salary cuts when times are hard, and the marginalisation of arts and humanities subjects in contrast to the privileging of applied research with income-generation potential.

Meanwhile, whilst the basic idea of a co-operative university has been mooted in the UK (Matthews 2013), and a *Co-operative University Working Group* established,<sup>3</sup> no firm plans for founding such a university seem yet to have emerged. Wright and Greenwood (2017b: 60) nevertheless see, as a replacement to what they label the “neo-Taylorist” (and which seems to approximate to what has come to be known as the neoliberal) university:

the creation of an operational meaning of community through the creation of legal structures that engage all the participants caring for the fate of the organisation. Whether they be trusts, cooperatives or employee stock incentive systems, the underlying structure must be based on shared beneficiary ownership or engagement that strongly encourages the participants to promote the interests of their organisation and the role it plays in society.

Along broadly similar lines to the model proposed by Wright and Greenwood, Halfman and Radder’s (2015) proposals for “the project of a public university aimed at the common good” (p. 175), whilst delineated within a framework whose

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<sup>3</sup><https://www.co-op.ac.uk/our-work/researching-co-operatives/co-operative-university-working-group-cuwg/>.

dimensions are determined by the context of the Dutch academy, are presented as having applicability across much of the neoliberal world. Their proposed “twenty provocative first moves” (p. 176)—which they later describe (Halffman and Radder 2017:1) as “concrete measures to achieve this public university”, which is “more akin to a socially engaged knowledge commons than to a corporation”—include the introduction within the university sector of, *inter alia* (Halffman and Radder 2015): a flatter managerial and decision-making hierarchy; a limit to time spent on administrative overheads; a policy of co-operation, rather than competition, between institutions; bans on university mergers, institutional marketing, profitable renting-out of university buildings, and student fees; and the end of “productivity” as a research assessment criterion. Yet, quite apart from the distracting polemic that runs through the narrative of resistance to academic disempowerment, proletarianisation and exploitation within which they are framed, these proposals fail to strike a chord of viability because, unlike those articulated by Wright and Greenwood (2017b), they do not draw upon a model that has been shown—albeit with limitations—to be broadly workable in at least one small corner of Europe.

Rustin’s (2016: 160) “principles on which reform should be based” are directed at the development of a higher education sector that moves away from the neoliberal model by encompassing three specific “traditions or systems of value”: the “industrial”, the “democratic” and the “old humanist” conceptions of educational purpose and provision. “[H]ow the balance of influence between these three traditions is to be struck is fundamental”, he warns, (Rustin 2016: 160), and he emphasises that “[w]e cannot be indifferent to the well-being of the economy, or to the traditions of high culture. We ... are not, after all, educational Maoists”. He accordingly proposes a higher education system—paid for through a form of graduate tax—that recognises: “[p]ost-school education [as] a public as well as a private good, and ... the entitlement of all citizens, supported and funded by the democratic state”. Rustin lists several “principles” that HE systems should embrace, including: stakeholder parity in institutional governance; availability to the public of higher educational institutions’ (HEIs’) resources, skills and knowledge output; quality assurance and inspection to underpin professional learning and development, rather than fuel competition; a shift in the epistemological basis of sectoral and systemic policy (from accountability to educational sociology); increasing universities’ role in “the making of a good society”—supported with targeted research programmes which “are now needed to provide the knowledge-base through which a new consideration can be given to the provision of tertiary education in a democratic, post-neoliberal society” (Rustin 2016: 160–167).

Aligned with the overarching premise upon which Wright and Greenwood (2017b) have developed their vision of a university “for the public good”, and overlapping with several of Halffman and Radder’s (2015) ideas, while yet incorporating a little more detail and specificity than do those of the Netherlands-based authors in terms of how they may be developed into a financially viable plan for university redesign, Rustin’s proposals nevertheless represent rather more focus on underlying principles than on specific plans whose workability may be assessed. As attempts to convey a sense of what the redesigned, post-neoliberal university may

look like, in common with all of the contributions to the alternative discourse outlined above, they represent preliminary impressionistic sketches rather than accurate blueprints. They can, after all, be nothing more than this, for a country's higher education system and the model of university that it will feature cannot be designed by intellectual analysis in isolation, detached from whatever political, economic and bureaucratic models evolve, emerge, or are strategically implemented. Yet, in terms of redirecting policy and practice, small steps can surely be taken that, cumulatively, may begin to restructure the landscape of higher education in Europe.

## **Reshaping the EHEA: Eroding the European Neoliberal Academy by Degrees**

The neoliberal university is one whose policies and practices reflect the influence of market forces—most typically through performativity cultures and the commodification of resources (including staff), and the more specific ways in which these manifest themselves. Redesign or evolution into a different—non- (or post-) neoliberal—university involves relinquishing such “trappings” of neoliberalism. And since there are, of course, *degrees* of neoliberalism, dismantling it progressively and gradually is a more likely scenario than is sudden widespread strategic reform (though the two approaches are not mutually exclusive and may be used in conjunction); so we may conceive of transitions that involve, for example, diluted or reduced neoliberalism, as preludes to eventual total “abstinence” from it—or that retain residual neoliberal features. Such incremental reshaping of the EHEA is likely to be achieved through a snowballing effect, whereby this or that initiative undertaken in a single European region or country—or even in a single university—increases in size and scope as it rolls along and gathers momentum, through being adopted or adapted by others who see some merit in it by recognising it as a “better way”.

### ***Recognition of a “Better Way”: The Micro-level Dimension of Reshaping a Post-neoliberal EHEA***

This notion of recognising something as a “better way” is a key feature of the process of effective change; I have highlighted its fundamental importance (e.g. Evans 2014, 2018) to several aspects of leadership and the development of education workforces in the compulsory and the higher education sectors—including measures directed towards enhancing professionalism.

Within the sociology of professions, professionalism is now accepted as a contested concept, and the academic discourse has moved on (see, for example, Evetts 2003, 2013; Gewirtz et al. 2009; Noordegraaf 2007) from the focus (that was

prevalent in the twentieth century) on trait-based elitist notions of which occupational groups merit professional status, and on what bases. Consistent with my own conceptualisations and definitions of professionalism and professional development (presented, for example, in Evans 2013, 2014, 2018), I argue (Evans 2011) that, whether they be at the meso (e.g. institutional) or macro (e.g. sectoral or national) level, attempts at renovating or changing a workforce’s professionalism constitute intended large-scale professional development. Moreover, for such professional development to be effective in shaping “new” professionalisms, the workforces—the professionals—targeted must “buy into” the refashioned professionalism that is promoted, by recognising it as, for them, currently a “better way”: a “better” professionalism, on balance, than the one it is intended to replace.

These issues are relevant to the discussion in this chapter because this facet of work psychology—people’s tendency to embrace what they judge to improve, and to resent what they consider to (potentially) impoverish, their work-related lives—is crucial to understanding not only academics’ (and, in many respects, students’) attitudes towards the neoliberal academy, but also their likely attitudes towards whatever may replace it. Essentially, then, just as the neoliberal university is so widely perceived as having created work (or study) situations that I describe as “compromising” (Evans 1998, 2001, 2018), since they distance people from their “ideals” by requiring them to compromise on their values and ideologies, the post-neoliberal university that eventually replaces it must, if it is to be assessed as representing a “better way”, contribute towards creating for people more “un-compromising” work situations (Evans 2001, 2018) that better match their values and ideologies. This may be achieved by facilitating and fostering “new” academic professionalisms that are perceived as more acceptable—and hence as representing a “better way”—than those that have evolved to reflect neoliberal ideologies.

It is surprising that, whilst they are evident within the initial anti-neoliberal academic discourse that rails against the system, such work psychology-related issues scarcely feature within the associated “discourse of alternatives”, for they are fundamental to consideration of what an acceptable and effective post-neoliberal European academy might look like; indeed, they should inform the point of departure of such consideration. Having highlighted the difficulties of conceiving of a viable “top-down”, “big picture” vision of a political- or economic-generated alternative to the neoliberal model of organising and running higher education, I argue that we should consider reshaping the EHEA from a micro-level starting point: the constituent components and dimensions of European academics’ professionalism(s).

### **The Building Blocks of a Post-neoliberal EHEA: European Academics’ Professionalism(s)**

It is evident from a plethora of studies (e.g. Archer 2008; Clegg 2008; Erkkilä and Piironen 2015; Kauppi 2015; Ylijoki and Ursin 2015) that the European neoliberal university, as I observe elsewhere (Evans 2018), has not got the best out of its



academics; for the most part, it seems to have increased precarity, fostered instability, unsettled identities, and consequently eroded morale. Scaled up, this evidence leads us to reason that the neoliberal *EHEA* has not got the best out of its academics. Yet turning the page on such tense academic workplace conditions and relations by starting a new chapter in the development of the European academy—a chapter that both precipitates and is precipitated by, the decline of higher education’s neoliberal era—presents the opportunity to redraft the *EHEA*’s psychological contract with its academics by reshaping the professionalism “demanded” of them.

More precisely, such professionalism-(re)shaping would in fact represent *initial* drafting, rather than *redrafting*, since neither the Bologna Process nor the *EHEA* *explicitly* delineates the shape or nature of European academic professionalism that are either “prescribed” or “demanded (or requested)”.<sup>4</sup> Certainly, since they are promoted and facilitated by the Bologna process, receptivity to international mobility, collaboration and co-operation are *implicitly* identified as features of what we may think of as *EHEA*-approved academic professionalism, but other than such implications, what the European academic (including at the pre-employment, early career stage) may reasonably be expected to “look like” (or aspire to look like) remains largely unarticulated—a lacuna that, with a specific focus on researcher development in Europe, I address elsewhere (Evans 2015).

Shown in diagram form in Fig. 1, my conceptualisation of it<sup>5</sup> presents professionalism as a qualitatively neutral, rather than a merit-laden, concept that denotes people’s “mode of being” in relation to their work—simply, how they go about it and what influences them to do so. I conceive of professionalism as trifurcated into three components—behavioural, intellectual and attitudinal—which, collectively, are constituted of eleven sub-components, or dimensions, relating to people’s: perceptions, values, motivation (along with morale and job satisfaction), knowledge and understanding, skills and competences, rationality and analyticism, the bases of their knowledge and knowledge structures, and the processes and procedures that they apply to their work, as well as their output and productivity: how much they “do” or produce at work.

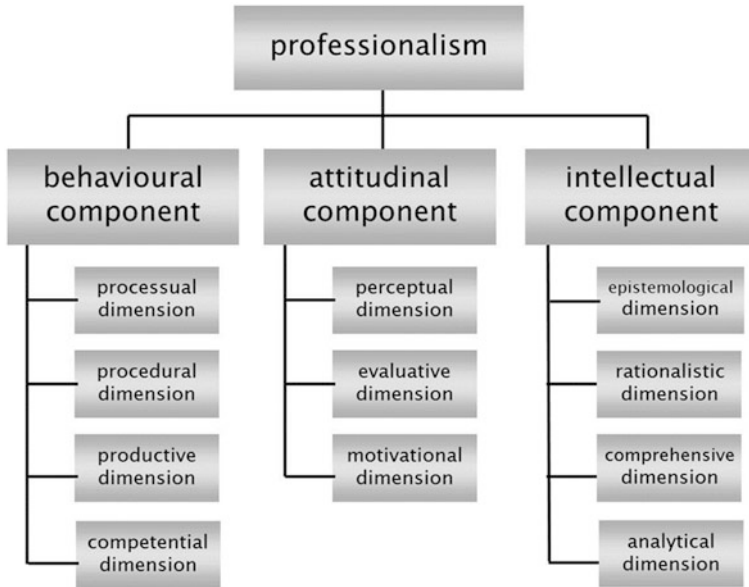
In conveying its expectations of them, the neoliberal academy—through the agency of universities as employing institutions, and reinforced and perpetuated by institutional rankings-determined competitive cultural hegemony (Erkkilä and Piironen 2015)—has imposed on academics a “demanded” professionalism whose shape is reflected in how particular neoliberal-derived interpretations of the nature and purpose of higher education are translated into each of the eleven dimensions shown in Fig. 1.

Moreover, through its acceptance of the institutional competitiveness that is a dominant feature of its landscape, the *EHEA* may even be considered complicit in

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<sup>4</sup>See Evans (2013), (2018) for a full explanation of what I variously label four “reified states” or “perspectival versions” of professionalism: “demanded (or requested)”, “prescribed”, “deduced (or assumed)” and “enacted” professionalism.

<sup>5</sup>This conceptualisation is explained in detail elsewhere (e.g. Evans 2014, 2018, and, adapted to relate to researcher professionalism, in Evans 2015).



**Fig. 1** The componential structure of professionalism

“demanding” of academics such a neoliberal-shaped professionalism. Turning the page on such complicity, then, by way of revisiting the Bologna Process, a new priority for the future of the EHEA beyond 2020, to mark its tenth anniversary, could be added to the list of priorities identified in the 2015 Yerevan Communiqué: the promotion of an explicit new, post-neoliberal, European academic professionalism.

**The “Shape” of an EHEA-Approved Post-neoliberal Academic Professionalism**

What would such a new European academic professionalism look like? To address this question it may be helpful to consider the embodiment of the professionalism in the person of the notional post-neoliberal European academic. Applying as a loose analytical and descriptive framework my conceptual model shown in Fig. 1, we may envisage such an academic as someone who, for example, rather than be influenced by consideration of their potential cost-effectiveness or profitability in deciding what activity processes to engage in and what procedures to follow, feels free to develop and nurture relationships or to respond to approaches and inquiries (from colleagues, students, and members of the public) for their own sake; to be more altruistically-focused than was generally possible within the neoliberal academy. She feels freer to pursue the kinds of “slow scholarship”—akin to what Sullivan (2014: 10) refers to as “measured thought and unhurried instruction—the

‘life of the mind’ concept”—that some detractors of the neoliberal academy lament as having been eroded (e.g. Mountz et al. 2015). Depending on her discipline, the post-neoliberal European academic may not need to be preoccupied with securing increasingly scarce research funds, because she knows that she has, or is being given the time and space to develop, other skills from which her university will benefit—such as curriculum development or teaching skills that will enhance its educational provision, or analytical and academic writing skills that will allow the institution to bask in the reflected glory from her internationally recognised scholarship that demonstrates her capacity for generating ground-breaking theoretical perspectives or policy recommendations that have the potential to contribute to societal growth. The post-neoliberal European academic is comfortable with the principles and ideologies upon which are based her university’s strategic development agenda, because these are no longer focused on consideration of the need for everything to pay its way; rather, they are compatible with her own values that reflect a concern for social justice, equality of opportunity, and a perception of higher education as a vehicle for societal enhancement through a focus on public good, rather than profitability (in its widest sense). Her *self*-perception—her identity—is as an academic who is making a contribution to achieving such ideals, through her work in a university that shares her values, so, for the most part, she is able to buy into her university’s mission. This means, too, that for much of the time she is motivated and enjoys high morale and job satisfaction.

But how might the EHEA, as it moves towards the next era of its development, facilitate such evolution?

### **EHEA-Facilitated Transition Towards a Post-neoliberal European Academy**

A product of the Bologna Process, the EHEA is an enigmatic combination of real, physical entities—Europe’s higher education institutions and the organisations (such as national ministries of higher education) that determine the parameters of their governance—and ideas, ideologies and principles that shape visions of Europe as a fluid, joined-up space. This is a space within which students and academics are ideally conceived of as moving about with few constraints, accessing and contributing to the provision of shared resources (including knowledge), for the purpose of augmenting Europe’s growth as a cohesive society and its capacity and position and standing in the world as an intellectual superpower or knowledge-generator and -broker, in partnership with the European research area (ERA), through the achievements and for the benefit of these transient (in either a virtual or physical sense) Europe-based students and academics. Any—the only—form of agency that the EHEA may exercise as an agentic unity must be through agreements, commitments and declarations made in recognised official fora, such as ministerial conferences, and “ratified” in the reports and communiqués that emerge from these. Yet such “ratification” may turn out to be not worth the paper it is written on if implementation is patchy; indeed, Tibor Navracsics (European

Commissioner responsible for education, culture and sport, 2014–2019) observed in the 2015 Bologna Process Implementation Report (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2015: 3) that “[a]lthough countries are moving in the same direction, they do so at widely varying pace. As a result, the foundations of the European Higher Education Area are not yet fully stable”. What hope, then, is there that this somewhat nebulous—and in some respects, amorphous—entity that is the EHEA may take the initiative to refashion itself in a post-neoliberal style, through promoting the kind of renovated academic professionalism whose general shape I sketch out above?

There is undoubtedly the facility to place a focus on the “European” academic and her or his professionalism (as I interpret the term) on the EHEA development agenda. Yet it is both interesting and disappointing to note that, hitherto, despite passing reference in the European Commission’s modernisation agenda (European Commission 2011, cited in European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2017) that implicitly recognises “the importance of staff” (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2017: 3), agendas of ministerial conferences, and therefore of the reports on the progress of the EHEA’s development and of the implementation of the Bologna Process, have so far failed to incorporate such a micro-level focus on the people—the individuals—who are at the front line of delivering higher education in Europe. The evident lack of recognition both that it is they who are the key instruments in ensuring the quality of European higher education, and of the importance of work psychology in elucidating how to get the best out of them in such roles, is unfathomable. The contents page of the 2015 Bologna Process Implementation Report (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2015) lists as topics and issues covered: the context of the EHEA; degrees and qualifications; quality assurance; the social dimension of higher education; lifelong learning; effective outcomes and employability; and internationalisation and mobility. A glaring omission is the higher education workforce and the university/higher education institution as a workplace; this topic is not covered—it is not even mentioned in passing—within any of the chapters to which it may reasonably be considered to relate, such as the one on quality assurance. Yet since it is an issue that, to varying degrees, underpins and/or impacts upon all of these listed topics—indeed, Navracscics notes that “Policy makers, *academic staff* and students must *work together*, within countries and across borders, *to learn from each other* and to identify and achieve measurable objectives” (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2015: 3, emphases added)—it surely merits its own place on the ministerial discourse agenda, and its own chapter in reports and documentation of progress in reforming and strengthening the EHEA.

There is, however, a glimmer of hope that the European academic workforce and its welfare and consequent capacity to deliver high quality higher education is finally being recognised as a significant issue. A 2017 Eurydice brief identifies the historic neglect of this issue as the impetus for the project whose findings it presents:

While higher education has been subject to increasing demands amidst fast-moving societal transformation, *little attention has been paid to the staff at the centre of the picture*. Change in the higher education environment means that there are inevitably changes to the expectations, work roles, status and professional conditions of academic staff. The *lack of Europe-wide investigation into the situation for academic staff gave rise to this project* that set out to explore the academic profession in different countries, cultures and institutions. (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2017: 3, emphases added)

As occurs with all such reports published under the aegis of the European Commission, however, the 2017 Eurydice brief is disappointingly limited to the presentation of quantitative data, mainly in the form of descriptive statistics, supplemented by very brief commentary; superficiality of focus dilutes elucidatory capacity, so that all we may glean are general overviews. Regrettably, the kinds of micro-level issues that I highlight above as important do not feature.

Consistent with the criticism I have levelled at the Bologna discourse on doctoral education (Evans 2015), I repeat that guiding principles, as the typical products of this discourse, are too general and wishy-washy to have a meaningful and transformative impact on the quality of European higher education provision and output. Greater specificity needs to be incorporated into agreed processes and procedures, including the provision of yardsticks that clearly delineate and illustrate standards (which could vary to reflect, and apply differentially to, different national or regional circumstances, stages of development, and cultures) against which achievements and progress at the micro and meso levels may be evaluated, that will take us—the European academic community—forward. In relation to reshaping European academic professionalism for the EHEA's transition into a post-neoliberal era, such specificity could take the form of agreed policies and practices that European higher education institutions (HEIs), through their ministries, would sign up to, in much the same way that they signed up to the degree structures and mobility-facilitating mechanisms that are so integral to the Bologna Process. These structures and mechanisms have evidently been adopted by a great many European HEIs, despite the profound changes to academic life they are perceived to have wrought in some countries (see, for example, Evans and Cosnefroy 2013; Rege Colet 2015 for accounts of the perceived impact of the Bologna Process on academics and academic working life in France and in Switzerland). There is therefore no reason to assume an unwillingness to co-operate in introducing incremental changes to institutional policy and practices that would be directed towards re-motivating the academic workforce to deliver the European—the EHEA's—vision, through fostering a “new” post-neoliberal academic professionalism.

At the heart of the neoliberal academy, sustaining and perpetuating it, are global university ranking systems. These spawn inter-institutional competition and undermine co-operation, since league table positions tend to be equated with income-generation capacity. Yet, as Lim (2018: 428) observes, “higher education leaders have the capacity to reflect, resist, and, importantly, shape the metrics by which they accept to be ‘judged’”. So, too, does the EHEA, for, as Kauppi (2015: 44) suggests:

If going back is not a realistic option, linguistic counter-strategies might involve using quotation marks when using key concepts such as excellence, thereby indicating the distance between old and new content or inventing new concepts to construct an alternative reality. However, purely linguistic strategies are effective only if linked with transformations in social practices, in what academics do in their everyday activities.

To both support and precipitate academe's transition towards its post-neoliberal era, the EHEA could feasibly identify and agree on the kinds of values and principles for which it wishes to be recognised, effectively initiating and promoting the kinds of "alternative" criteria for judging institutional prestige, reputation and success that support and sustain a "new" European academic professionalism.

If the EHEA does not take the initiative in introducing such changes—including by adding to its discourse agenda the topic of the academic workforce and academic working life—there is a very real likelihood that some of its member nations, or, within these, individual HEIs, will unilaterally set the ball of change rolling across Europe. Indeed, there are signs that such a snowballing-type transition is about to be kick-started—in Scandinavia.

### **The Dawn of a Scandinavian-Led “New” European Academic Professionalism?**

The nature or speed of any post-neoliberal transition that may occur within the EHEA will inevitably depend upon various regional, national and geo-cultural and -political contextual factors. Eastern European countries, for example, having only relatively recently “embraced” some aspects of neoliberalism, may perhaps be slower and more reluctant to change than may their western European neighbours. Many European countries' higher education systems are centralised, so that, to varying degrees, how their universities are run may be determined at government level, and is sometimes enshrined in law. Within such centralised contexts, the form and nature of the university, and the shape of its academics' professionalism, cannot simply emerge incrementally through a snowballing process; they must be planned, agreed and, effectively, “decreed”. In decentralised higher education systems, in contrast, where—as in the UK—universities enjoy considerable autonomy, those of their features that denote neoliberalism may, if there is a will, be eroded unilaterally.

Evidently directed both at individual HEIs and at the UK's wider higher education “system”, Peter Scott's rallying cry, published in the *Guardian* newspaper, represents a wake-up call that urges a policy re-think if universities are to avoid:

ending up on the wrong side of history. They will be seen as accomplices in failing neoliberal markets, against which their students are in revolt, and spurious “modernisation”, which alienates many of their staff. They need to get back on the right side of history—quickly. (Scott 2017)

Elsewhere in this *Guardian* piece, Scott makes a valid point that I touch upon above: that old (neoliberal) habits die hard, so it is difficult to conceive—let alone delineate the features—of a university that is run and organised in any other way, and on any other basis. Yet, even without a comprehensive vision of what the

refashioned university in its entirety will look like and how it will be financed, changes to or the relinquishment of specific neoliberal policies or practices have the capacity to erode the hegemony of neoliberal ideology. The replacement of performativity cultures and audit mechanisms, for example, with what Myklebust (2017)—attributing it to Jouke de Vries, professor of governance and public policy at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands—describes as “a more holistic governance approach based on ‘confidence governance’, or the ‘public value’ approach in public administration ... where management objectives are reached through trust and legitimacy rather than through measurements and control” would represent a step towards university redesign that incorporates and is based upon consideration of how to motivate and get the best out of the academic workforce.

Such change is evidently on the cards for Swedish universities, Myklebust (2017) tells us—quoting Swedish prime minister Stefan Löfven’s declaration that “[t]he time for New Public Management now is ended”. Myklebust reports on a mandate from the Minister for Public Administration in the Ministry of Finance, Ardalan Shekarabi, to the Swedish Agency for Public Management, to work out a new proposal for public governance and leadership systems in public administration. Endorsed by the prime minister, “[t]he mandate included a reduction of reporting and documentation, better inclusion of staff members’ competence and experience, and development of governance to become more ‘holistic and effective’, based on ‘confidence governance’” (Myklebust 2017). The vision of higher education implied by such ideas and proposals is very similar to that articulated by Scandinavian academics Erkkilä and Piironen (2015), summed up as follows:

Understanding academic work as collaboration involving a global research community would allow one to perceive academic work differently. Seen from this perspective, scientific progress would be a collective effort that is not the sum of the actors engaging in it but rather a social process that cannot be reduced to individuals. *For this system to perform at its best, we need a reappraisal of professional values and academic identities.* (p. 60, emphasis added)

It may be through such relatively small steps, rather than through programmes of sweeping reform, that the European university ends up being refashioned. It may even be through the brave actions of a single university, whose senior leaders and managers decide to go out on a limb and make a name for their institution as a pioneering reformist institution—the first one in their country (let’s say, the UK)—to wander off the neoliberal highway and step out onto the *post*-neoliberal path by, for example, reducing or abolishing tuition fees, or telling academics (at least, in some disciplines) that they should no longer feel obliged to relentlessly chase research funding that is about as accessible as the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, or by relinquishing the goal to achieve, within the next five years, ranking as one of the world’s top fifty or twenty-five universities. It may be, as we may infer from Myklebust’s (2017) report, that Swedish universities will realign themselves with what Ylijoki and Ursin (2015: 187) refer to as “the Nordic welfare state model that perceived higher education as a public good” and will lead the rest of the EHEA into the next, post-neoliberal, phase of its development. Or it may be that in

one or other European country a new economic model is adopted by a newly elected government—such as a Corbynist Labour government in the UK—and the accompanying redesign of its higher education system paves the way for re-shaping the EHEA by degrees.

## Concluding Thoughts

“The neoliberal age [has] had its day”, insists Backup (2017)—“It is time to define what comes next”. Jacques (2016), too, argues that “the neoliberals and monetarists are in retreat”, but adds: “[i]n the UK, the media and political worlds are well behind the curve. Few recognise that we are at the end of an era”. It seems, too—as Scott (2017), cited above, notes—that those who call the shots in universities are burying their heads in the sand. As I argue elsewhere (Evans 2018: 246), “the marketised university is not about to rebrand itself in a hurry”—not only because universities are in denial, but also because they have no idea what that new brand will look like, how they may appropriate it, and, above all, what it will cost and how they may hope to meet that cost. In this respect they are evidently not alone, for, as Westwood (2017) points out, despite its 2016 general election manifesto to abolish student tuition fees in England, post-election, the UK’s Labour party remains vague on the detail of how this may be achieved.

Through its scholarly discourse and its politicised engagement with institutional and sectoral leaders and managers, Europe’s academic community has, since around the turn of the millennium, become increasingly vocal in expressing its concerns about its workplace environment: the neoliberal university that has shaped the EHEA. For the most part, it seems, these concerns have fallen on deaf ears. But the political unpredictability and upsets that began to feature in the latter half of the 2010s have shown that those who used to call the shots have become less audible: less certain of their ground; less confident of their authority. They have had to sit up and take notice of the popular voice. They have had to listen, and to demonstrate that they have heard—as has the UK government, in launching in February 2018 a year-long review of post-18 education and funding that includes reviewing higher education tuition fees.<sup>6</sup> European higher education now “stands at a crossroads”, warn Erkkilä and Piironen (2015: 55). The time is surely ripe, then, for opening our ears to the death knells of Europe’s neoliberal university, and turning our attention to how the EHEA may be reshaped after its inevitable demise.

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<sup>6</sup>For the review’s terms of reference, see: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/682348/Post\\_18\\_review\\_-\\_ToR.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/682348/Post_18_review_-_ToR.pdf), accessed on 28.02.18.



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# Policy Travel in Regionalisation of Higher Education: The Case of Bologna Process in Africa



Emnet Tadesse Woldegiorgis

## Introduction

Higher education policies continue to be in a state of change as governments are constantly re-examining many aspects of the sector so as to meet the socio-economic and political expectations of stakeholders. In the era of globalisation, one can observe many commonalities in the reform themes that emerge across countries, suggesting that national and regional governments not only do face common challenges across many jurisdictions but also learn from each other in search of opportunities. Studies of policy travel are embodied within the broader notion of globalisation as both rely on the basic concepts of interconnectedness and interdependence of variance. Interconnectedness also implies interdependence and convergence through a constant flow of technology, information, knowledge, ideologies, values, policies, expertise and ideas across borders (Torres and Rhoads 2006).

In the course of interconnectedness and interdependence of higher education variance, however, technologies, information, knowledge, ideologies, values, policies, and models travel across regions, a situation Benjamin Levin calls “epidemic of education policies” (Levin 1998). The Bologna process of Europe is a manifestation of such interconnectedness and interdependence of variances as a regional framework to recalibrate the institutional architectures of many higher education institutions in the region and create a common higher education area. This reform has, however, managed to draw the attention of many other higher

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education systems, and the process has been travelling to different parts of the world, including Africa.

Explaining similar scenarios, a considerable volume of literature on the inter-regional movement of ideas and practices in public policy has been developed over the last twenty years through various concepts including “policy transfer”, “policy diffusion”, “cross-national attraction”, “policy borrowing” and “policy convergence”. This article explores the notion of policy travel through the conceptions of “policy transfer” and “policy diffusion” and addresses the underlying question of how the Bologna process of Europe travelled to the various sub-regions of Africa.

## **Conceptualising Policy Travel in the Context of Higher Education**

Studies on policy travel emerged within the broader field of comparative studies in public policy analyzing how different policies operate when they are implemented in different contexts. The concept originally developed in the United States of America as an instrument to explain the adoption of policies and how they spread or diffuse throughout the federal system (Dolowitz and Marsh 1996). Gradually, however, the notion of policy travel started to be taken as one of the instruments of comparative regional policy studies especially within studies of European integration (Haas 1970). This is because the concept of policy travel is embodied within the notion of globalisation since both are usually conceptualised in relation to their capacity to harmonise systems and embrace interconnectedness of variance across many jurisdictions. In this regard, there have been many works done on the movement of policies across different spaces (geographic, political, social or spatial) within or in comparison with other regions describing and analyzing the context of transfer or diffusion, efficiency, effectiveness, and the ethics of travelling policy (see Dolowitz and Marsh 1996; Wolman and Page 2002; Dolowitz et al. 2000).

Conceptualising the notion of policy travel has always been a challenge because of the complexity of the process and as policies carry socio-economic, political and ideological values while travelling. There is an ongoing debate on the conceptualisation of the term itself, and different scholars use different words describing the movement of policies. Among others, policy learning, borrowing, transfer, mobility, translation, diffusion, convergence, lesson-drawing, assemblage, travelling ideas, bandwagoning, emulation, harmonisation are some of the terms used describing policy movement. Policy travel is a catch-all, umbrella term, and the central idea of the concept focuses on the movement of ideas, models, structures and institutions across various policy settings. Dolowitz et al. (2000) for instance, define it as: “A process in which knowledge about policies, institutions, and ideas

developed in one time or place is used in the development of policies, institutions etc. in another time or place” (Dolowitz et al. 2000: 3).

Since policies move across different spaces within certain socio-economic and political contexts, understanding the driving factors for policy travel, the actors involved in the process and their dynamic interactions, the way decisions are made and interests negotiated are central questions in policy travel research. This article focusses on the two most important components of policy travel—*policy transfer and policy diffusion*.

Policy transfer focuses on the transfer of the policy content itself from one time or space to another, and the role of different agencies in the process. As thoroughly discussed by Dolowitz and Marsh (1996: 349–350), policy transfer constitutes seven interdependent elements: goals, structure and content; policy instruments or administrative techniques; institutions; ideology; ideas, attitudes and concepts; and negative lessons. Policy transfer usually happens in a structured and top-down manner without thorough discussions and negotiations among stakeholders at the bottom. It is more of an imposition of policies from a “dominant donor” of ideas and practices to the “subordinate recipients” without proper dialogue among the key players, for example—professors, higher education institutions, and ministries of higher education.

Policy diffusion, on the other hand, emphasizes on the dynamics of diffusion or the gradual movement of policies focusing on the timing and sequence of the spread of ideas and practices. It focusses on explaining why some states either adopt or adapt policies and practices more readily than others. Explaining the dynamics of diffusion, literature places the concepts within two polarized scenarios called *immunity and isomorphy*. The immunity scenario implies strong resistance of states or regions either to adopt or adapt policies and practices (Bache and Olsson 2001: 218). The isomorphy scenario, on the other pole, explains how ideas, concepts, and policies easily diffuse across different spaces through the forces of globalisation (Meyer and Rowan 1977; DiMaggio and Powell 1983). In the context of higher education, the key element in the concept of policy travel is the notion of adopting international values in the operations of higher education institutions through transfer and diffusion of policies.

## **How Does the Bologna Process Travel to Africa?**

Understanding the way higher education policies travel to Africa demands a comprehensive approach that utilizes the concepts of policy transfer, diffusion, and convergence. Since its inception in 1998, the Bologna process has managed to attract the attention of many higher education systems in different regions, including Africa, reshaping policies at national, sub-regional and continental levels. In spite of the varying reasons, the transfer and diffusion of the Bologna Process

occurred within the context of globalisation that facilitated not only the processes of policy travel but also the convergence of its variance. Thus, even though globalisation by itself does not lead to policy travel, it has facilitated the policy movement from one region to the other, including Africa, at different points in time. Many developments since the 1990s have pushed the higher education sectors in Africa to pursue different reform initiatives. The higher education sector in Africa has witnessed unprecedented expansions and developments since the 1990s. These expansions are not only in numbers but also in size and type of institutions. This period has also marked the development of privatization in the higher education sector and the expansion of ICT which facilitated cross-border, distance, and online education. These developments, however, came with different concerns/challenges over issues of quality and relevance. The growing student mobility and institutional partnerships have also necessitated regional discussions on how to deal with recognition of qualifications and transferability of credits. These issues have, however, not only been shared among higher education institutions across Africa but also demanded a collective endeavour in the process of addressing them since the nature of the concerns transcends national jurisdictions. Thus, the emergence of regional higher education policies and the efforts to harmonise them partially emanated from the nature and context of the challenges that African higher education institutions have been facing.

In the process of developing policy frameworks to address the above challenges, regional authorities, African governments, and higher education institutions considered the Bologna process as a potential experience to learn and adapt from. Apart from that, African institutions also felt the pressure to align their systems with European reforms as changes in the higher education system in Europe would have a direct implication on African higher education for historical reasons. The context of higher education policy travel to Africa in this regard is mostly related to the long-standing historical relationship of African institutions with European universities. Thus, ignoring European higher education reform will have implications for African higher education institutions as it may mean isolation from their historical partners.

Within the above context, the Bologna process travels to Africa both through policy transfer and policy diffusion processes. The African Union Higher Education Harmonisation Strategy which was introduced in 2007 to harmonise the diverse higher education systems of Africa, for instance, could be taken as a policy transfer process as it was adopted in a top-down manner without thorough discussions and negotiations among stakeholders at the bottom. The diffusion of the various components of the Bologna process—like the *Licence-Master-Doctorate* (LMD), regional quality assurance mechanisms and credit transfer systems—among governments and sub-regional communities, on the other hand, is a gradual movement of ideas and practices. The next sections discuss them in detail.

## ***The African Union Higher Education Harmonisation Strategy***

Higher education policy and strategies developed by the African Union (AU) can be best understood through the nature of the organization itself. The transformation of the previous Organization of African Unity (OAU) to AU through the Abuja Treaty was actually done following the European Union (EU) model in 2001. Historically, the European integration process has passed through different stages from simple free trade area and customs union to a more integrated scheme of monetary union. The Abuja Treaty is also adopted with the same intention of leading Africa on a similar path, to create a stepwise gradual process of regional integration with the assumption that the integration of one sector would lead to the integration of another (African Union 2001).

The Abuja Treaty implicated that the experience of the European integration process is an ideal progression from which Africa could learn since it has already evolved to a monetary union passing through different stages of integration. Once the regional integration scheme and the organizational setting of the AU have been modelled after the EU, adopting other regional policies also became easier for the continent (see Babarinde 2007). As a result, since the transformation of OAU in AU along the EU model, the experience of the EU on different regional policy issues has become a recurrent point of reference for regional policy initiatives in Africa.

It was within this context that the Bologna process of Europe was considered by the AU as a benchmark for regional higher education reform in Africa. The first discussion to adopt the Bologna process in Africa took place on the Third Ordinary Session of the Conference of AU Ministers of Education (COMEDAF III) in Johannesburg, South Africa in August 2007. During the conference, the African Ministers of Education discussed and emphasized the need for regional higher education harmonisation strategy for the revitalization of the sector and for making African institutions competitive in the global knowledge system. It was clearly stated that creating a comparable higher education system in Africa is important to bring together the fragmented higher education systems in the region.

In doing so, the Ministers recommended taking the experience of the Bologna process to develop a higher education harmonisation strategy for Africa. In the report of the COMEDAF III, it is stated, “*The Minister cited the Bologna process that has led to a new higher education system in Europe from which Africa should learn.*” (AU/MIN/EDUC/Draft/RPT (III) 2007, p. 11). Thus, it was within this context that the AU took the experience of the Bologna Process of Europe and developed a higher education harmonisation strategy in Africa. The decision to launch the harmonisation strategy was approved a year later by the 10th Ordinary Session of Assembly of the AU in January 2008 (Assembly/AU/Dec.173 (X) 2008). The draft document for the framework of the harmonisation of higher education was then developed by the AU and, as recommended by COMEDAF III, in the process of developing the harmonisation strategy, the experience of the Bologna process was strongly consulted.



In terms of general objectives, for instance, the African higher education harmonisation strategy is more or less a duplication of the Bologna process, as both documents took the mutual recognition of academic qualifications, promotion of student and staff mobility, provision of a framework for the development of effective quality assurance mechanisms, and transferability of credits as their main objectives (see Bologna Declaration 1999; AU/EXP/EDUC/2 (III) Part II 2007). These general objectives, however, are further stated more specifically, through various communiqués, in the Bologna process than in the African higher education harmonisation strategy. To accommodate the context and interest of Africa in the policy transfer, the African higher education harmonisation strategic document sets six principles as a foundation for the whole process, namely: (i) harmonisation should be an African-driven process; (ii) it should be a true, mutual partnership of all the key players; (iii) it should be enhanced with appropriate infrastructural support and funding; (iv) it should involve the mobilization of all stakeholders in governments, institutions, civil society, and the private sector; (v) it should not disrupt, but should enhance, national educational systems and programmes; and (vi) it should involve improvement of quality through appropriate funding and infrastructural provisions in each country (AU/EXP/EDUC/2 (III) Part II 2007). Even though the African higher education harmonisation strategy document clearly stipulates the principles of the process, however, there is no indication as to how these principles should be operationalized.

The way the Bologna model travelled to Africa through the harmonisation strategy could be best explained within the concept of “policy transfer” rather than “diffusion”. First of all, in the case of the harmonisation strategy, it is the content of the Bologna policy that travelled to Africa, not the practical implementation of its components. The goals and objectives stated in both documents are more or less identical even though the principles of design and implementation are assumed to be accommodative to the African context. This is exactly how policy transfer happens through movement of the policy document itself by a decision made at the top-level without gradual diffusion of its components in the system. The other point is that the transfer of the policy happened in a top-down approach where actors at the bottom have not been consulted much in the policy process. Even though the very idea of higher education harmonisation process is intended to be implemented by higher education institutions, faculties, departments, and professors, the actors have neither been significantly consulted nor communicated in policy transfer process. It was stated in the AU report that, after the endorsement of the strategy, various consultative meetings were organized to brainstorm, understand and further develop the strategic plan of the harmonisation process. In those meetings, however, student associations, university leaderships, representatives of faculty members, employers, and business groups were not represented or brought on board in the policy process.

As a result, the harmonisation process is still mainly floating at the AU level without being much felt at national and institutional levels. Even though the

harmonisation initiative is known among the Ministers of Education of member states, African Union Commission (AUC) experts, and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) coordinators, African universities are not yet fully involved as stakeholders in the harmonisation process, and the strategy is not yet fully implemented. Here, it is important to note that one of the challenges of the non-participatory nature of policy formulation and implementation is its potential to be misunderstood and misinterpreted by stakeholders. If the harmonisation strategy is not properly communicated to African higher education institutions through various consultation forums, and if the very idea of the policy is not debated openly on the various media outlets, and feedbacks are not consulted through the proper channel, then the effective implementation of the policy to achieve its intended goals will be questionable.

Advancing its cause, the European Union Commission (EUC) has also been supporting the AU harmonisation initiatives through funding and consulting the various projects. The EU has involved in the AU higher education harmonisation process from the very outset initiating, funding, expert-advising, and in some cases process-owning the various functional elements of the harmonisation initiatives. The AU harmonisation document states that the process is owned by AU but it also indicates that it has many things in common with the Bologna initiatives. Despite the AUC's claim, however, it is hardly possible to state that the AU harmonisation process is a purely African process since there is a huge involvement of European actors throughout the functional processes. The Mwalimu Nyerere programme that promotes student mobility; Tuning Africa, which works towards harmonisation of curriculum; the Pan-African University Network, that established joint degree programmes; and the African quality assurance and rating mechanisms which are intended to set up common understanding on quality and recognition of academic qualifications are largely funded by the EU commission, the World Bank, and donor countries mainly from Europe (Woldegiorgis et al. 2015).

In addition to the regional harmonisation initiative of the AU, sub-regional economic communities and some African countries have also taken isolated actions of adopting certain elements of the Bologna process in their respective sub-regions. This process of policy travel at sub-regional, national or institutional levels is more of policy diffusion than transfer since the process is a step by step adoption of the Bologna components in a more bottom-up approach. In the next section, we will see how the Bologna policy diffused to Francophone, Anglophone and Lusophone African.

### ***Bologna Process in Francophone Africa***

The higher education system of most Francophone African countries has been modelled after the French higher education system. This has been manifested

through their program curriculum, degree structure, and medium of instruction which have basically been along the French higher education model. This similarity in higher education structure has facilitated higher education partnership and student mobility between the two. That is one of the reasons, among others, for having more students from Francophone Africa in French universities than in any other region.

Moreover, there are many joint post-graduate programs established between Francophone universities of Africa and universities in France. When French institutions shifted their higher education system to the Bologna model, however, it became challenging for Francophone African universities to keep up with their long-standing partners while keeping the old system. Thus, higher education institutions in the former French colonies of North and West Africa felt the urgency of shifting their higher education systems to the 3-cycle Bologna structure along the French reform initiative (Woldegiorgis et al. 2015). In this regard, the impact of the Bologna process has been felt more in Francophone than Anglophone Africa since the Anglophone degree structure has already been in line with the 3-cycle Bologna reform.

Comparability of degrees has been the main discussion at that time since the Three-Cycle Degree Structure in France may pose a compatibility problem for student mobility and recognition of academic qualifications with France. Thus, since 2003, Francophone Africa started to implement the new degree structure proposed by the Bologna process. The Maghreb region of North Africa (Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia), for example, were the first countries to implement the “*Licence-Master-Doctorate*” (LMD) higher education degree structure in their higher education systems. From the Maghreb region, Morocco was the first to start the LMD in 2003, followed by Algeria in 2004, and Tunisia in 2005 with the support of the French government, the EU and the World Bank. As of 2010, the Bologna 3-cycle degree reform at the Bachelor and Master levels has been widely implemented in most institutions and programs in the Maghreb region of North Africa.

The implication of the Bologna process in the Maghreb region of North Africa is not, however, limited to the introduction of LMD and the ECTS systems. One of the main instruments of the Bologna process, which is Diploma Supplement, has also been introduced in Algeria and Tunisia since 2009/2010 while the process is still under discussion in Morocco. Moreover, Tunisia has officially introduced a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) for higher education and has already started implementing it while the process is underway in Algeria and Morocco. The policy travel of the Bologna process to the Maghreb region is not a one-time policy transfer act, rather a gradual diffusion of the instruments of Bologna process to address the challenges of compatibility of degrees and qualifications with their historical partners from Europe. In the course of adopting the Bologna process, decisions are made in a series of sequential phases, starting with the identification of a problem and ending with a set of activities to deal with it.

The adoption of the Bologna model in the Maghreb region has also been supported by various EU collaborative schemes. Among others, the Euro-Mediterranean Higher Education and Research Area, and Tempus programs are the major ones (Ruffio et al. 2010). The Euro-Mediterranean Higher Education and Research Area was founded in 2006 after the Joint Catania Declaration of the representatives from Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, France, Spain, Italy, Malta, Egypt, Portugal, Slovenia, Turkey, Jordan and Greece to create a Euro-Mediterranean Higher Education by 2010 (EACEA 2014). Since then, it has been providing strong support for the reform processes in the Maghreb region of North Africa. The basic idea behind the Catania Declaration is creating a higher education area among the Euro-Mediterranean countries by adopting the Bologna process in their higher education institutions. The Tempus program is also an EU initiative to support higher education reform initiatives along the Bologna line through promoting institutional cooperation that involves the EU and partner countries in the areas of curricular reform, governance reform and higher education and society from which the Maghreb region has been benefiting.

Other Francophone African countries have also adopted the Bologna process since 2007. Since the conference which was held in the Democratic Republic of Congo in July 2007, the member states<sup>1</sup> of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA) have been adopting the Bologna process in their higher education systems. The LMD system, for example, was taken as a priority that needs to be adopted by member states to fix the incompatibility and incomparability of degrees among institutions. As a result, the UEMOA member countries officially adopted the LMD structure from the Bologna process in July 2007 through the Decision No. 03/2007/CM/UEMOA. Even though the LMD structure has been the main priority in the process of adopting the Bologna process, the issues of diploma supplement, regional quality assurance instruments, and qualification frameworks have also been gradually introduced among member states. To realize the implementation of the reform, the UEMOA allocated \$5.8 million in February 2011 for a 3-year period, and the fund was mobilized by UNESCO.

Adopting the Bologna process has also been pushed by sub-regional organizations like the Network of Excellence in Higher Education in West Africa (REESAO). The REESAO was established by several universities from seven Francophone African countries<sup>2</sup> to make possible the smooth implementation of the LMD reforms and advance higher education co-operation as a mechanism of promoting academic mobility. Apart from that, the Conseil Africain et Malgache pour l'Enseignement Supérieur (CAMES) (The African and Malagasy Council for Higher Education) has also been playing an important role in the process of

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<sup>1</sup>UEMOA member states are Togo, Senegal, Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Guinea-Bissau, Mali and Niger.

<sup>2</sup>Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger, Senegal, and Togo.

implementing the Bologna reform in Francophone Africa. The CAMES is made up of 17 countries<sup>3</sup> and has been working to enhance mutual recognition of qualifications, promotion of academic mobility and implementation of the LMD structure among its members since 2005. Moreover, it has been playing a leading role in the process of creating regional quality assurance mechanisms among member countries by coordinating national quality assurance and accreditation processes. If we look at the pattern of policy travel in the above cases, it follows pragmatic utilitarianism in a sense that taking or adopting the Bologna process is a slow diffusion process of ideas in a more bottom-up style.

### ***Bologna Process in Anglophone Africa***

The policy travel of the Bologna process in Anglophone countries has relatively been less intensive as compared to that of Francophone Africa. This is because, unlike Francophone Africa, the degree structures of Anglophone Africa are still compatible with the Bologna reform as the three-cycle degree structure had already been in place in most Anglophone countries. However, higher education systems in Anglophone Africa still have differences in terms of the number of credits and years in each cycle, as some degrees take four years and others three. Moreover, along with the growing student mobility both within and out of Africa, concerns over quality, standardization, and recognition of qualifications started to become part of policy discourses at sub-regional levels. Thus, some elements of the Bologna process have attracted Anglophone countries of Eastern and Southern Africa to adopt and adapt part of Bologna reforms through diffusion. The main lines of reform in this region have been along the issues of quality assurance, accreditation, and recognition of qualifications. In this regard, sub-regional organizations, SADC and EAC have been playing a leading role in the process of adopting some elements of the Bologna process in Anglophone Africa.

The policy travel of the creating common higher education area in the higher education systems of the SADC region, for instance, started at the same time when European Ministers passed the Sorbonne Declaration in 1997. The discussion was not however provoked because of the European initiative at that time; instead, there were sub-regional higher education challenges that led to the policy debates. After the fall of the Apartheid regime in South Africa, the higher education sector expanded not only in number but also in size and shape. The region has also witnessed the expansion of private higher education and growing number of distance education. The recent development in the fast-growing number of international students in the region, particularly in South Africa, has also made regional

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<sup>3</sup>Members of CAMES are Cameroon, Rwanda, Guinea-Conakry, Togo, Chad, Mali, Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, Burundi, Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar, Niger, Senegal Benin and Côte d'Ivoire.

collaboration and policy harmonisation issues in higher education even more pressing. As students move across borders, the issue of recognition of qualifications, quality and accreditation processes, and the issue of tuition fees demand regional frameworks. Thus, the discussion started among SADC members with the intention of creating common understanding when it comes to higher education training and qualifications (Kotecha 2012).

Apart from that, SADC also has Portuguese-speaking (Angola and Mozambique) and French-speaking (République Démocratique du Congo and Madagascar) countries that have different higher education structures. In order to facilitate student mobility and recognition of qualifications among member states, these diverse higher education systems need to be harmonised. This disparity in higher education systems among member states has also necessitated the need to look into the experience of the Bologna process so as to establish a mutual understanding of the meaning of qualifications to facilitate free movement of students across all universities in the sub-region. In this regard, SADC has been the agent of change and policy travel in the Southern African countries when it comes to adopting some elements of the Bologna process. Here, it is important to note that there are 109 public universities in the SADC region, 10 in Lusophone countries, 42 in Francophone countries and 57 in Anglophone countries. With the exception of South Africa and DRC, most countries have only a few public universities but a large number of private institutions (SARUA 2014).

After recognizing the above challenges, the SADC sub-region issued a comprehensive legal protocol called “*SADC Protocol on Education and Training*” to revitalize education in the sub-region in 1997. The protocol emphasized harmonising quality assurance systems and creating a mechanism of recognition of qualifications among member states. At that time, there was also a parallel process in Europe, Sorbonne Declaration, which later became the point of reference for the Bologna process. The Lisbon convention and the discussions that followed were important inputs for regionalization of qualification frameworks in the consecutive years among the SADC members. Since then, the members of the SADC region have been working on creating regional qualification frameworks along the Bologna initiatives. The initiative was also strongly supported by UNESCO since it was in line with the 1981 Arusha Convention.

The other important policy travel process in Anglophone Africa is the experience of East African countries. The efforts of harmonisation of specific processes of higher education started in East Africa after the Treaty for the Establishment of the current East African Community (EAC) which was signed on November 30, 1999, the same year that the Bologna process was declared. The East African Community is a sub-regional intergovernmental organization established by Uganda, Burundi, Tanzania, Kenya, and Rwanda with its headquarters in Arusha, Tanzania (EAC 2014). The EAC later incorporated the Inter-University Council of East Africa (IUCEA) as a leading institution for higher education reform in the sub-region. Since then, the IUCEA has been mandated to lead the higher education reform

processes in the sub-region and took the responsibility of developing a sub-regional mechanism for quality assurance and qualification frameworks in Eastern Africa. Currently, IUCEA has a membership of 88 universities, both public and private, which are part of the reform processes.

The quest for the Bologna approach and the collective intervention on higher education at sub-regional level in East African countries stemmed from different reasons. Just like other regions, new developments in the higher education sector including expansion of the sector itself necessitated having a regional framework to deal with higher education policy issues. The proliferation of private universities since 1994, in particular, raised the concern over quality, relevance and accreditation mechanism in the sub-region. Even though member countries of the EAC have their own mechanisms for ensuring quality in their higher education, such quality assurance mechanisms were not comparable and the processes were also highly fragmented. Recognizing the challenge, IUCEA took the initiative to develop a regional quality assurance system that harmonises quality assurance processes among the higher education institutions within EAC countries through benchmarking the Bologna experience in 2005 (Hoosen and Butcher 2012).

In order to share the experience from the Bologna process, the IUCEA arranged a visit in 2006 to Germany and the Netherlands for Vice-chancellors from 24 universities of East Africa (Joseph 2011). Not only universities but also heads of the national commissions and councils for higher education and senior government officials were part of the benchmark process. The project was jointly funded by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and IUCEA. After subsequent meetings, the members decided to develop a regional quality assurance system in line with the Bologna process. Subsequently, in 2006, IUCEA in partnership with the Kenyan Commission for Higher Education (CHE), the Tanzania Commission for Universities, (TCU), the Ugandan National Councils for Higher Education, (NCHE), and DAAD forged a partnership that was aimed at the joint implementation of a regional quality assurance system for higher education in East Africa.

The diffusion of the Bologna initiative, however, is not limited to quality assurance structures. Especially after the enactment of the EAC Common Market Protocol in 2010 which gave expanded mandates to IUCEA to handle the issue of harmonisation of higher education in the region, more elements of the Bologna propositions were recommended by the IUCEA. Among others, the IUCEA has initiated the establishment of a regional qualification framework in collaboration with higher education institutions, the national councils and commissions for higher education, East African Business Council and other actors since December 2011. In line with the 2010 Common Market Protocol, Article 11 of the protocol particularly called for “*Harmonisation and Mutual Recognition of Academic and Professional Qualifications*” in order to ensure the free movement of labour within the region (EAC 2010).

Thus, if we look at the dynamics and patterns of policy travel in Anglophone Africa, it has been a voluntary diffusion of the Bologna process into the

sub-regions. Adopting some elements of the Bologna process is considered as advantageous for newly emerging regional integration schemes since the models would have already been tested on another ground; thus, it is easy to adapt to the African context. This notion of voluntarily adopting the policy of others is described as “policy shopping” (Freeman 1999).

### *Bologna Process in Lusophone Africa*

The other important development that can be observed as policy diffusion of the Bologna process in Africa is the experience of former Portuguese colonies of Africa, namely Mozambique, Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde, São Tomé and Príncipe. The Portuguese speaking countries of Africa have adopted the Bologna process in their higher education systems and have established a Lusophone Higher Education Area (ELES—Espaço Lusófono de Ensino Superior) since 2002. The Community of the Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP) which was established in 1996 in collaboration with the Association of the Portuguese Speaking Universities (AULP) proposed the Bologna type of reform in the region at the 12th annual meeting of the AULP which was held in Luanda, Angola in 2002. At the conclusion of the 12th Annual Meeting of the AULP, it was proposed to use the experience of the Bologna Process to develop a special project within the AULP.

The reform is intended to change the higher education structures of the Lusophone countries in three major areas: mutual recognition of qualifications, student mobility, quality assurance and exchange through recognition of study periods. The above objectives are also included in a regional legal document signed at the 5th meeting of the CPLP Ministers of Education which was held in Fortaleza, Brazil in May 2004. At the end of the meeting, the member states passed a declaration called “Fortaleza Declaration” which was basically adopted from the 1997 Lisbon Convention of the EU (Declaração-de-Fortaleza 2004). The signatories of the Fortaleza Declaration agreed to work in the direction of building the CPLP Higher Education Area within four key action lines: working to build mutually acceptable and internationally recognized quality assurance structures; building solid relationships among the members of CPLP towards creating a regional higher education area; harmonisation of degree structures, promoting student and faculty mobility.

Just like the Bologna Process, the Lusophone Higher Education Area has also adopted a follow-up structure called a Follow-up Group which consists of representatives of each of the Ministries of Education and a representative from AULP. This reform has also enabled the Lusophone African countries to collaborate with Brazil in line with their own Bologna type reform practised in Latin America. In 2013, Brazil fostered collaboration with higher education institutions from the Portuguese speaking African countries and on May the same year, the



Lusophone African countries and Brazil had a conference entitled “*Education as a Strategic Bridge for the Brazil–Africa Relationship*” in which 20 Brazilian higher education institutions participated in launching the International Afro-Brazilian Lusophone University (UNILAB) in Africa.

Generally, the diffusion or transfer of the Bologna process in Africa is gradually impacting the higher education reform processes at all levels—national, sub-regional and regional. It is important to note that the Bologna process has not been considered as the ultimate remedy for the challenges of higher education in Africa but provided a policy path that brings various higher education systems together. The degree of policy travel among the Anglophone, Francophone and Lusophone African countries varies based on the extent to which the sub-regions comply with the Bologna process. For instance, the Bologna process has diffused more among Francophone systems than the others.

As noted above, transfers of policy can be voluntary or coercive or a combination thereof. Some recent works in education policy have also attempted to recognize trends towards policy convergence while acknowledging the constant effects of accommodating contexts (Lingard 2000; Ozga and Jones 2006). Policy travel is not necessarily a coercive act of imposing interests of one on another as it could also be a forum for the exchange of ideas, values, systems, and practices whereby interests are negotiated on a constant basis. Here, one should keep in mind that, even though interests are negotiated in the course of policy travel, the imbalance in capacity among the negotiating actors could shake the momentum of voluntary policy travel. Higher education policies from the North usually have more bargaining power in the course of interest negotiations since their financial and technical might would be used as an indispensable comparative advantage to impose interests. Poor infrastructure, lack of funding and the weak institutional setting in Africa, on the other hand, usually situates Africa in a vulnerable position in the process of interest negotiation since the capacity of actors to mould interests on policy process depends not only on the political constituency of actors but also on their financial, technical, and logistical strength. In the process of interest negotiation, therefore, regional actors from the South sometimes do not have much choice but to lean on and comply with the conditions of donors in the policy travelling process.

## Conclusion

Generally, there could be two lines of argument about taking the Bologna process as a model for regionalisation of higher education in Africa. The first notion could be that adopting the Bologna model may be advantageous to newly emerging higher education harmonisation strategies since the models would have already been tested on another ground; thus, it is easy to adopt to the African context. The

other line of argument, however, is more ideological and puts the notion of policy travel as instrument of neo-colonialism as it may perpetuate dependency of African policy processes on European models. But, the policy travel itself could raise practical concerns as it may not necessarily accommodate the specific context of Africa and achieve the expected outcomes.

Even though the Bologna process could provide many lessons worth noting in the course of higher education policy integrations, the difference in the context of the two regions makes the success of policy travels a challenge. The Bologna Process, from the very outset, has been created and implemented within the context of Europe which has the history of relative success in regional integration, unlike the African case. Moreover, prior to higher education integration, Europe as a region managed to create a well-structured common economic area which facilitated the development of other regional policy frameworks. Through the 1993 Maastricht Treaty, EU members even further redesigned their integration schemes to enhance European political and economic integration by creating a single currency, a unified foreign and security policy, and common citizenship rights. All these settings make not only the development of regional policy frameworks easy but also make student mobility and institutional collaboration flexible. Thus, the European higher education harmonisation process has evolved through time within the above socio-economic and political contexts in the region. The above structural context which abundantly favours the Bologna process in Europe does not however equally exist in the context of Africa.

Yet, on the positive side, there are progressive efforts to capitalize on the fact that harmonisation of higher education systems in Africa could facilitate an integrated knowledge system that informs socio-economic developments in the region. The AU and sub-regional economic communities are mobilizing their efforts to realize the effectiveness of African centres of excellence, regional and continental frameworks of collaborations to ensure the presence of common understanding among diverse higher education systems in the continent. There is no doubt that compared to 15 years ago, there is more student and staff mobility, partnership and collaborative initiatives, joint research and curriculum harmonisation, centres of excellences, integrated quality assurance processes and qualification frameworks now in Africa.

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# Corruption, the Lack of Academic Integrity and Other Ethical Issues in Higher Education: What Can Be Done Within the Bologna Process?



Elena Denisova-Schmidt

## Introduction

Transparency International (TI), an NGO working on corruption worldwide, commonly defines corruption as “the abuse of entrusted power for private gain.” In higher education, however, corruption also encompasses “the lack of academic integrity.” The second definition applies to both public and private institutions, since what they both offer—education—can be construed as a public good. Corruption might be perceived or it might not; in higher education, however, this differentiation is less relevant (Heyneman 2013). Along with the kinds of monetary and non-monetary corruption that can be found anywhere in society, such as corruption in procurement and favouritism in hiring and/or promoting employees, corruption in higher education can implicate the students themselves, thus exerting an influence over the next generation (Denisova-Schmidt 2016a, b, c, 2017a, b, c, 2018a, b; Denisova-Schmidt and de Wit 2017).

While corruption in higher education is not a new phenomenon, its unprecedented dimensions, the growing challenge of mitigating and preventing it in many academic systems as well as its international aspect are rather new. Can corruption be exported and/or imported with the rise of mobility among students and faculty and the internationalisation of educational institutions? Are universities prepared to deal with actors from endemically corrupt societies? What tools and best practices

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are particularly effective in increasing academic integrity? Or is it an irreversible process? How can the latest research contribute to the policy debate within the Bologna process?

The paper is structured as follows: first, I discuss the current trends in the general research on corruption and its implications for higher education within the Bologna context, then I give an overview of some successful tools for mitigating academic dishonesty and discuss the challenges of their implementation.

## Corruption Research as a Field of Study

What is “corruption,” really? Scholars and practitioners often work with definitions developed by international organisations such as the World Bank, United Nations (UN) and its sub-structures, as well as Transparency International (TI):

“[Corruption is] the abuse of public office for private gain” (World Bank<sup>1</sup>);

“[Corruption is] the misuse of public power, office or authority for private benefit through bribery, extortion, influence peddling, nepotism, fraud, speed money or embezzlement” (UNDP)<sup>2</sup>;

“Corruption is the abuse of entrusted power for private gain” (Transparency International<sup>3</sup>).

In spite of some slight differences in wording, the idea is approximately the same: something that was previously “public” becomes “private”, often in an improper way. How does this relate to higher education? While some might argue that these definitions apply to public universities only and do not cover private ones, these definitions, in fact, relate to both public and private institutions since what they both offer—education—is a public good. More concretely: Imagine a student writing a term paper. He or she plagiarizes, which is to say, he or she copies and pastes text from other sources without acknowledging them. The student submits this paper and receives a grade for it. This is fraud—one form of corruption. Taking it a step further, let’s say that the faculty member who is responsible for grading this paper chooses to ignore the plagiarism. In this case, the faculty member is misusing an entrusted power for private gain, in the broader sense (Denisova-Schmidt 2017a). Faculty members do not necessarily have to be bribed to do it; their reasons might vary, from being overloaded with other duties to the lack of time to investigate. Some scholars often do not dare to call it “corruption” and mitigate this small “sin” by referring to it as “student dishonesty”, “academic dishonesty”, “cheating”, or just simply “plagiarism” (s. e.g. Curtis et al. 2013; Golunov 2014; Curtis and

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.worldbank.org/publicsector/anticorrupt/corruptn/cor02.htm#note1>.

<sup>2</sup><https://www.igi-global.com/dictionary/corruption/6010>.

<sup>3</sup><https://www.transparency.org/what-is-corruption/>.

Vardanega 2016; Chapman and Linder 2016; Denisova-Schmidt 2016a; Denisova-Schmidt et al. 2016a). The challenges of defining “corruption” might also be explained by the fact that corruption is a crime. Some scholars might consider only those activities to be corrupt that have been proven as such by a judge; otherwise, they might refer to the presumption of innocence. Depending on the national context, even an obvious bribe cannot be easily judged to be a bribe, as an advantage caused by this bribe still has to be proven, among other things.

**Table 1** Selected examples of corruption in higher education

Terms/TI definitions <sup>a</sup>	<b>Bribery</b> The offering, promising, giving, accepting, or soliciting of an advantage as an inducement for an action that is illegal, unethical, or a breach of trust. Inducements can take the form of gifts, loans, fees, rewards, or other advantages (taxes, services, donations, etc.)
Examples	A student bribes a professor to change a grade in his/her favour; a faculty member bribes a ghostwriter for his/her own publication; university administration demands bribes from service suppliers
Terms/TI definitions	<b>Collusion</b> A secret agreement between parties, in the public and/or private sector, to conspire to commit actions aimed to deceive or commit fraud with the objective of illicit financial gain. The parties involved often are referred to as “cartels”
Examples	Faculty members ignore or pretend to ignore students’ academic misbehaviour; Faculty members are involved in “citation” cartels: citing each other’s works/journals without necessity; Administration chooses the winner in an open tender, based on a prior agreement
Terms/TI definitions	<b>Conflict of interest</b> A situation where an individual, or the entity for which this person works, whether a government, business, media outlet, or civil society organisation, is confronted with choosing between the duties and demands of their position and their own private interests
Examples	A high-ranking official responsible for accreditation is placed in charge of a university, for which he and/or she recently worked; A professor grades his/her nephew/niece or supervises a thesis written by his/her fiancé; A university manager responsible for catering buys food from his/her relatives only
Terms/TI definitions	<b>Favouritism</b> Patronage: a form of favouritism in which a person is selected, regardless of qualifications or entitlement, for a job or government benefit because of political affiliations or connections Nepotism: a form of favouritism based on acquaintances and familiar relationships whereby someone in an official position exploits his or her power and authority to provide a job or favour to a family member or friend, even though he or she may not be qualified or deserving

(continued)

**Table 1** (continued)

Examples	A student is admitted, or a faculty member is hired/promoted, based only on his/her personal connections and/or family relations; academic achievement and other relevant competencies are not considered
Terms/TI definitions	<b>Fraud</b> To cheat: the act of intentionally deceiving someone in order to gain an unfair or illegal advantage (financial, political, or otherwise)
Examples	A student cheats on his/her written assignment, or a faculty member plagiarizes in his/her paper; A staff member falsifies an admission application; A significant amount of a research grant goes to other purposes than what is indicated in the research proposal; Universities expect a contribution from students receiving financial support
Terms/TI definitions	<b>Lobbying</b> Any activity carried out to influence a government or institution's policies and decisions in favour of a specific cause or outcome
Examples	Some industries support research projects expecting positive and/or promising outcomes for their products/services
Terms/TI definitions	<b>Revolving doors</b> An individual who moves back and forth between public office and private companies, exploiting his/her period of government service for the benefit of the companies he/she used to regulate
Examples	An influential government official opts for employment as a university rector

Source Updated and expanded version from Denisova-Schmidt 2017a

<sup>a</sup>The Anti-Corruption Plain Language Guide. TI. 2009. [http://www.transparency.org/whatwedo/publication/the\\_anti\\_corruption\\_plain\\_language\\_guide](http://www.transparency.org/whatwedo/publication/the_anti_corruption_plain_language_guide)

Corruption is typically used as a generic term for a wide range of actions, including favouritism, nepotism, advantage granting, cronyism, and many other activities. Table 1 illustrates some other types of corruption as well as some examples from the higher education sector. All these types might be judged differently depending on the perspective (insiders or outsiders) and the national/cultural context.

## Corruption in Bologna Countries

Virtually all forms of corruption are prevalent in the Bologna countries. According to a 2015 survey conducted in Ukraine, for example, every second student reported an experience with bribery at university (Denisova-Schmidt and Prytula 2017). According to Guardian Data, the number of cheating incidents involving technology (mobile phones, smart watches, etc.) at UK universities increased by 42% between 2012 and 2016. In 2016 alone, 25% of students caught cheating used various electronic devices (Marsh 2017). Cheating and plagiarism might happen



among scholars, too. The Austrian Agency for Research Integrity reported about several recent cases, including double submission of the same proposal or authorship conflict. The latter case was a conflict between a PhD student and her supervisor, which made it impossible for her to defend her dissertation in Austria (“Research Integrity Practices in Science Europe Member Organisations” 2016). In 2016, the Ministers of Education of Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Russia, and Ukraine were all implicated in conflicts of interest. In addition, some or all the deputy Ministers of Education in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Croatia, Moldova, Serbia, and Ukraine, as well as some members of the cabinets in Armenia and Kazakhstan, have also been accused of having conflicts of interest. These ranged from an active for-profit affiliation to an expectation of going through the “revolving door” into a salaried or shareholder position at a university after leaving the public sector. For-profit affiliations with universities were also common among lower-level heads of departments for higher education in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova, Russia, and Serbia, as well as among education-focused legislators in Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Moldova, Serbia, and Ukraine (Milovanovitch et al. 2018). Milovanovitch et al. (2015) claims that the hiring of faculty members and staff in Armenia is often based on personal relationship rather than on merit; in addition, dismissals of academic staff might occur due to their activism in fighting for their rights or their membership in the political opposition. *Dissernet*, a community of Russian activities fighting plagiarism in academic writing, including dissertations, created a ranking of university rectors with questionable academic backgrounds who sought to exploit monetary interests in their positions by employing friends and relatives as employees and/or subcontractors.<sup>4</sup> Some social groups—women, for example—still face several career disadvantages in academia. While there is an increasing trend toward gender balance at the bachelor, master and Ph.D. levels in many countries, the number of female researchers holding top-level positions remains significantly low, for example, in 2013 in Cyprus (10.8%), the Czech Republic (13.1%), Lithuania (14.4%), Belgium (15.6%), the Netherlands (16.2%), Luxembourg (16.5%), Estonia (17.2%), Germany (17.3%), the United Kingdom (17.5%), Denmark (19.2%), Switzerland (19.3%), France (19.3%) and Greece (19.6%) (She Figures 2015). The reasons for this might vary from traditional gender roles in the respective societies to a lack of knowledge of how to develop an academic career more strategically to—in some cases—sexual harassment, including the refusal to provide favours in exchange for career advancement.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Rectory: prizvanie i biznes. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9xNWeAjSLsY>.

<sup>5</sup>It should be mentioned that this topic still remains taboo. The “MeToo” campaign might encourage some victims not to feel alone in their situations and even to act. Recent cases discussed in the media include the court decision against Siegfried Mauser, ex-rector of the Mozarteum University Salzburg and ex-president of the University of Music and Performing Arts Munich, who was found guilty of sexual harassment and rape (Rost 2016; Wimmer 2017).

The geography of the violence of academic integrity is wide; the scope and the techniques might vary, as might the courage of all involved actors to talk about it openly. Some scholars argue that the current situation in many countries leads to “academic collusion” (Titaev 2012), or situations in which almost all of the stakeholders involved in academia might occasionally pretend to teach, carry out research, or study due to high pressure. The following example demonstrates the challenges of this phenomenon.

## **Favouritism Versus Strong Social Ties**

The situation in which a (new) faculty member is hired and/or promoted based on his/her personal connections and/or family relationships and not on his/her academic achievement or other relevant competencies is called “favouritism”—or corruption, according to TI. Should any personal and/or family relationships be banned per se in university employment decisions? I am familiar with a case that happened at one Russell-Group University in the United Kingdom, where a new faculty member was indeed not hired because his brother had already been working for the same institution. In Germany, on the other hand, according to Kehm, it is almost impossible to get a university professorship without personal networks. This informal “... support is never made public and never openly discussed but will be able to topple ranking lists of candidates established by search commissions” (Kehm 2015, p. 130). The competition is very high: for every five successfully completed habilitations,<sup>6</sup> there is only one vacant post (Müller 2017). Stipulating the fact that the lack of a formal habilitation might be compensated by a “habilitation equivalency”, the situation is even more drastic. More influential people in academia tend to help (young) colleagues for many reasons: one of them might belong to the same research school and/or share similar research ideas and a willingness to continue the work on a particular research topic. But even powerful networks cannot always guarantee a job. A search commission might favour an average candidate over an excellent one in order not to be swayed by the fame of this great researcher when he or she becomes a colleague, or they might decide on a candidate with less informal support in order to spite the personal networks of other competitors (Denisova-Schmidt 2017c). Nevertheless, it is important to have a network and sometimes even belong to the “correct” political party or church. In 2007, for example, Alfred Scharenberg claimed that he was not appointed as a professor of political science at the Free University of Berlin due to his activity in

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<sup>6</sup>The habilitation is a formal requirement (but not a guarantee) for a full-professorship position at German universities. The search committee might consider candidates who are “habilitation equivalent”, however. In some fields such as engineering or economics, a habilitation is not required anymore (cf. Kehm 2015).

the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation (cf. e.g. FU Berlin 2007; Kirchgessner 2007; Wittrock 2007).<sup>7</sup> Moreover, Ulla Wessels sued the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg in 2012 for not hiring her as professor of philosophy because she was not Catholic (cf. e.g. Scherf 2012; Auer 2015). While this seems to be an open secret in Germany, the importance of social ties and loyalty in academic life is often stressed explicitly in other countries, as, for example, in Russia (cf. Yudkevich 2015) or the practice of *cooptation* in France.

## Anti-corruption Research and Anti-corruption Measures

A great deal of contemporary research into corruption assumes that corruption can be defined and quantified clearly, thus allowing it to be combatted successfully (for a contrasting view, see Ledeneva 2009, 2013; Barsukova and Ledeneva 2014; Denisova-Schmidt et al. 2016b; Ledeneva et al. 2017; Denisova-Schmidt and Kryzhko 2018). In such theoretical approaches as the principal-agent (Klitgaard 1988) and rent-seeking models (see Graeff and Grieger 2012), corruption is often defined by researchers as a “deviation from the norm” that can to be eradicated. There are, however, other approaches that examine corruption in its own indigenous context, where it might be considered as a “norm”. These approaches are particularly useful in endemically corrupt countries (see, for example, Mungiu-Pippidi 2011; Rothstein 2011), where the fight against corruption is often more difficult since it is deemed to be a collective action (Marquette and Pfeiffer 2015). When people believe that corruption is already widespread, it can even lead to more corruption (John et al. 2014; Corbacho et al. 2016). In Ukraine, a country with a high rate of corruption, two recent experiments have shown that anti-corruption campaigns can actually have the opposite effect: rather than reducing corruption, such campaigns might, in fact, promote it. Examining the effectiveness of anti-corruption measures at state universities in Lviv, Ukraine, a pair of recent studies (Denisova-Schmidt et al. 2015; Denisova-Schmidt et al. 2016a) indicated that young people with previous experience with corruption at university level were not influenced by anti-corruption campaigns based on TI materials, though these students still often judged corruption in negative terms (corruption is “bad” or corruption is a “crime”). For those students who had not encountered corruption at university, however, the studies showed that anti-corruption programs can have the opposite effect: students are able to learn new cheating techniques, and their assumptions about the widespread nature of corruption are confirmed. Marquette and Pfeiffer (2015) argue that anti-corruption measures often fail not because the theories they are based on (i.e., the principal-agent or collective action models) are inadequate (Persson et al. 2013; Mungiu-Pippidi 2011), but rather because such

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<sup>7</sup>The Rosa Luxemburg Foundation is a German organisation affiliated with the political party The Left.

measures do not allow for the fact that corruption can be a necessary instrument that helps people deal with the problems of everyday life, particularly in an environment of weak institutions. Therefore, those who make policies need to recognize the important role corruption plays and develop equally effective alternatives to replace it. This consideration would boost the efficacy of anti-corruption measures significantly (Denisova-Schmidt and Prytula 2016; Ledeneva et al. 2017).

## Remedying Corruption Within the Bologna Process

In order to combat this corruption, the faculty should present their assignments and expectations more clearly to the students, stipulating their educational and cultural backgrounds. In some cultures, for example, students might have a different concept of the term “plagiarism”: some material might be widely considered to be common knowledge and, therefore, does not need to be cited properly. While editing three books<sup>8</sup> with young Russian authors (undergraduate and graduate students), my colleague and I observed that some of them simply copied and pasted without acknowledging any sources, especially when describing the state of research. One student even argued, “this is only theory”. Only after some discussions with those students did we realize the problem: Russian students need to be taught such basic concepts as a precise definition of plagiarism in their academic writing courses. One of the useful arguments here might be mentioning several recent examples of high-profile politicians accused of plagiarism during their university years and the consequences on their professional future.<sup>9</sup> Additional courses on academic integrity might increase students’ awareness significantly (Curtis et al. 2013). Faculty members should serve as role models, however. If they also cheat, they might not be able to demand the opposite behaviour from their students. A large number of (external) proctors for supervising examinations might be an effective remedy, as well as the use of randomized seating and several versions of the same examination (if possible) to prevent copying from a neighbour (Denisova-Schmidt 2017a).

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<sup>8</sup>Denisova-Schmidt, E. and Leontyeva, E. (2012a), *Korrupciia v povsednevnoi zhizni, biznese i kul'ture. Vzgliad rossiiskikh studentov* (Corruption in Everyday Life, Business and Culture. A Russian Student Perspective), Europäischer Hochschulverlag, Bremen; Denisova-Schmidt, E. and Leontyeva, E. (2013a), *Korrupciia v Rossii: aktual'nye tendencii i perspektivy. Vzgliad rossiiskikh studentov* (Corruption in Russia: Current Trends and Outlooks. A Russian Student Perspective), Europäischer Hochschulverlag, Bremen; Denisova-Schmidt, E. and Leontyeva, E. (2013c), *Siuzhety o korrupcii v rossiiskikh fil'mach i serialach: Vzgliad rossiiskikh studentov* (The Representation of Corruption in Russian Movies and Sitcoms: A Russian Student Perspective), Europäischer Hochschulverlag, Bremen.

<sup>9</sup>Just to name a few examples: German Defense Minister Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg in 2011, Hungarian President Pal Schmitt in 2012, German Education Minister Annette Schavan in 2013 and Romanian Minister President Victor Ponta in 2016.

In addition to training and raising awareness, creating appropriate policies and procedures on academic integrity might be another very important step for orienting all of the involved stakeholders: students on what is right and what is wrong, as well as faculty members and university administration on what to do in detected cases of academic dishonesty. The University of St. Gallen (Switzerland), for example, defines in its regulations academic dishonesty as follows: “falsifying a candidate’s own or another candidate’s examination paper, using or making available inadmissible aids or information, failing to comply with general or specific instructions for the conduct of the examination or arrogating other people’s intellectual property (plagiarism)” (Examination Regulations 2014). Even attempted dishonesty might be punished. The punishment might include a reduced grade or grading with the lowest possible mark 1.0 (inadequate) or some other sanctions including removal from the university. Sanctions for misconduct and malpractice might be an effective remedy among scholars, as well. The survey report “Research Integrity Practices in Science Europe Member Organisations” (2016), for example, recommended that sanctions be applied for individuals as well as for institutions. Depending on the national context, sanctions against individuals might be covered by (a) *employment law*, ranging from a written letter of reprimand to dismissal; by (b) *civil law*, such as financial penalties for copyright infringement or repayments of received funds; and/or by (c) *academic policies or professional standards*, whereby the tools might include withdrawal of a degree, academic title, or licence, as well as exclusion from membership in an academic society, team, or pool of future grant applicants. Sanctions against institutions are also possible, though uncommon, “because usually it is an individual who has transgressed, not the institution”. These sanctions might include repayment of a research grant or a ban on further funding (often for a limited period of time). These issues might be outsourced or they might be regulated by a third agency, as in Austria, for example, with the Austrian Agency for Research Integrity (OeAWI).<sup>10</sup>

Many national governments have implemented programs to promote women in academia, from mentoring to fellowships and vacancies for female researchers only. The Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF), for example, has offered the Marie Heim-Vögtlin<sup>11</sup> Program (2001–2016) “for female doctoral students and postdocs in Switzerland who had to interrupt or reduce their research activities due to family commitments”.<sup>12</sup> Since 2017, the SNSF has continued its support for female scholars through the new PRIMA (Promoting Women in Academia) program for

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<sup>10</sup><http://www.oeawi.at/en/index.asp>.

<sup>11</sup>Marie Heim-Vögtlin (1845–1916) was the first female Swiss physician.

<sup>12</sup>See <http://www.snf.ch/en/funding/discontinued-funding-schemes/mhv-grants/Pages/default.aspx>.

“excellent female researchers from Switzerland and abroad who aspire to a professorship in Switzerland”.<sup>13</sup> Two additional programs for female researchers are named after Lise Meitner (1878–1968), an Austrian-Swedish physicist; these are administered independently by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF)<sup>14</sup> and the German Max Planck Society,<sup>15</sup> both with the goal of addressing gender inequality in academia. Several universities have established career paths for women only; in the Netherlands, these include, for example, the University of Groningen, offering Rosalind Franklin Fellowships, or the Delft University of Technology (TU Delft), providing highly qualified women with the Delft Technology Fellowship.

It is crucial to acknowledge this problem and not to treat it as the elephant in the room. General research on corruption suggests not fighting corruption in general but rather focusing on specific malpractices (cf. Shekshnia et al. 2017). The German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), for example, established the Akademische Prüfstelle (APS) in 2001 in Beijing to prevent Chinese applicants from coming to German universities with fake diplomas. The agency is responsible for validating certificates awarded in China and assessing young people in appropriate discipline. Now German, Austrian, Swiss, and Belgian universities require this document for Chinese applicants. The UK battle against plagiarism might consider this as another ongoing successful example. The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) recently published a report on the “growing threat to UK higher education from custom essay writing services” or “essay mills”. The agency develops concrete actions to be taken against companies providing such services. Inspired by the experience of New Zealand, which has fined and even frozen the assets of essay mills, QAA suggests the introduction of the same procedure. Milovanovich et al. (2015) in their study on academic integrity in Armenia suggest first to look at a single case of suspected integrity violation, then describe and determine the factors that create incentives for the integrity violation and, based on this analysis, develop pointers for action. The researchers name two main reasons for the widespread cheating among Armenian students: “the lack of intrinsic motivation to study” and “overloaded and/or outdated study content” and argue that, by addressing these two issues, cheating might decrease.

Some measures might be easily implemented, so why have not all universities within the Bologna process done it? Why do not all universities clear procedures and policies on the ethical behaviour? Why do not all universities use anti-plagiarism software programs and take legal actions against companies providing questionable services? Some of the measures might be costly. Take for example the use of anti-plagiarism software in Ukraine: a company offering such

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<sup>13</sup>See <http://www.snf.ch/en/funding/careers/prima/Pages/default.aspx>.

<sup>14</sup>For more about the “Lise Meitner Programme”, see <https://www.fwf.ac.at/en/research-funding/fwf-programmes/meitner-programme/>.

<sup>15</sup>For more about “The Lise-Meitner excellence programme”, see <https://www.mpg.de/11767653/lise-meitner-programme>.

services currently charges 1 hryvnia per page<sup>16</sup>; therefore, many universities can only afford to check bachelor/master/Ph.D. theses (if at all) and not term papers. Some measures mean more additional resources and/or obligations for already overworked faculty members and university administrations. Some measures might not be implemented yet due to weak management, while other measures might be not implemented concisely. Corruption seems to be a very effective tool to respond to massification, falling or insecure financial support, and growing competition among institutions on the national and international levels, as well as to the increasing demands on university researchers and instructors. Tackling these issues might be a good and effective strategy for tackling corruption.

The negative consequences of corruption in higher education are particularly severe: in their last formative years, students consciously and/or unconsciously learn that corruption is widespread and even “normal”—behaviour that these young people might transfer to their future professional lives (Heyneman 2013; Denisova-Schmidt 2013, 2016a, b, c). No one should ever wonder if graduates in medicine would become involved in promoting drugs without evidence, if managers would cheat and steal, or if lawyers and bankers would develop new schemes for tax evasion and fraud. Universities should incorporate ethical issues into their curricula and certainly act ethically and transparently themselves, as was suggested in the Poznan Declaration—“a formal statement aimed at mainstreaming ethics and anti-corruption in higher education” endorsed by 68 member universities of Compostela Group of Universities, the World University Consortium, the World Academy of Art and Science and TI. The decision-makers within the Bologna process should support and encourage exchanges on this topic among all involved stakeholders on practical issues, as well as more reflection and research on blind spots and borders between legal and illegal, good and bad, acceptable and unacceptable practices.

## Conclusion

What can educators and decision-makers within the Bologna process learn from general corruption research? First of all, many anti-corruption reforms failed not because they were based on inefficient theories, or because the involved stakeholders lacked the courage to implement the new reforms, but because the decision-makers did not consider the functions that corruption might serve, especially in weak institutional environments. In higher education, corruption might often be considered an effective tool to address the challenges of massification, internationalisation and shrinking financing. Hence the latter issues should be considered when developing anti-corruption strategies and measures within the higher education sector. Secondly, such measures should not attempt to address

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<sup>16</sup>The current average monthly salary in Ukraine is 750 hryvnias (about 275 USD).

corruption in general, but rather focus on specific practices, such as the recent initiatives of the UK government to hinder the operations of essay mills within the country or the “old” practice developed by the German Akademische Prüfstelle (APS) of checking the creditability of Chinese students applying to study in the German-speaking countries. Such remedies might have a controlling function, as in the case of anti-plagiarism software programs, or a preventing function, as in training on academic integrity. Last, but not least, it is crucial to start addressing this phenomenon using all the available resources within the Bologna process, to admit its existence and scope and to work together to mitigate it.

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# Effects of the Bologna Process on Quality Assurance Regimes in the Post-Soviet Space: Isomorphism and Path Dependencies in Moldova, Russia, and Kazakhstan



Lukas Bischof

## Introduction

### *The Global Context*

When the Soviet Union broke apart in 1991, Central and Eastern European countries such as Russia, the newly independent republics of the Baltics, the Caucasus, and Central Asia needed to redefine their political, cultural, and economic orientation vis-a-vis each other and the world (Silova 2011a). A global and a European trend can be observed in these developments: Since the late 1990s, both Eastern and Western European HE systems have become increasingly embedded in a transnational environment which promoted changes to traditional governance structures of their higher education systems in the spirit of *New Public Management* (Leišytė et al. 2006). By the 1990s, virtually all Western European countries were implementing reforms aiming at transforming HEIs into “complete organisations” (Hüther and Krücken 2007, p. 28) and were moving from a “state control” model to a “state supervising” model (Goedegebuure et al. 1993) in which the state is steering from a distance (Marginson 1997; Meek et al. 1996). While highly heterogeneous themselves, reforms generally aimed at delegating greater organisational, financial, personnel and academic autonomy to the leadership of HEIs and at using competition and markets as steering mechanisms (e.g. through the use of project funding or through the promotion of student choice based on league tables and rankings). Direct state control over operations was eased while, at the same

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time, more explicit standards and performance measures were introduced, which placed greater emphasis on outputs vis-a-vis processes.

These policies were promoted globally by international organisations like the OECD, UNESCO and the World Bank to such a degree that a new “global model” has been said to now dominate the international discourse on higher education governance (Baker and Lenhardt 2008). The same organisations promoted these reforms as parts of the “Post-Socialist Reform package” in former socialist countries (Silova and Steiner-Khamsi 2008). They have become part of official policy discourse in almost all countries of the region, if not necessarily in practice, alongside privatisation, marketization of financing, stakeholder governance, and standardisation of student assessment (Silova 2005).

### **European Influence in Higher Education in the Post-Soviet Space**

In parallel to global trends, the influence of European Integration grew visibly since the early 1990s when the Baltics states and other EU accession countries began participating in a wide range of EU-funded educational programs designed to prepare them to join the EU. In 1999, 29 European countries signed the Bologna declaration. The Bologna Process continued to extend into the Post-Soviet space when Russia joined the Bologna Process in 2003, the rest of Eastern Europe in 2005, and Kazakhstan in 2010. By 2017, even non-signatory and non-eligible states like Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and—at least on the rhetorical level—Uzbekistan, have started implementing Bologna-inspired reforms of their own. A multitude of EU-supported policy and cooperation platforms such as TEMPUS projects, Erasmus Mundus cooperation, the EU-Central Asia Education Initiative, and activities within the “Eastern Partnership” with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine have provided high-level meetings, HEI cooperation projects, technical working groups, national level dialogue, and funding promoting the action lines of the Bologna Process in these countries.

Quality assurance (QA) gained a particular prominence within the Bologna Process with the development of the *European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance* (ESG). The ESG represent a set of guidelines on internal and external quality assurance of HEIs and their study programs. A key principle of the ESG is autonomy: HEIs are primarily responsible for the quality and that Quality assurance agencies (QAAs) should be organisationally independent and operate without third-party influence such as from HEIs, governments and other stakeholder organisations (ENQA 2005, 2015). Substantial compliance with the ESG has become a prerequisite for QAAs to become members of ENQA, the European association of QAAs; and EQAR, the *European Quality Assurance Register*, which is intended to promote trust and cross-border cooperation in quality assurance across the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Both memberships are highly coveted among national governments and QAAs.

Within my Ph.D. thesis conducted between 2014 and 2017 at the University of Leipzig (Bischof, *under review*), I have studied the changing governance of higher

education systems in Post-Soviet countries, applying the “*glonacal agency heuristic*” (Marginson and Rhoades 2002) to identify the global, regional, national, and local driving forces and path-dependencies, which have shaped the development of three distinct governance frameworks from their common Soviet origins. In this paper, I will give an overview of the developments in quality assurance in the three Post-Soviet countries Russia, Moldova, and Kazakhstan, focusing on the role the Bologna Process has played in the complex interplay of global, regional, and national forces shaping the systems of quality assurance in the Post-Soviet space.

## Three Country Cases

### *Russia*

In Russia, in higher education as in other areas of state and society, the 1990s were a period of decentralization, liberalization, and marketization (Adrian et al. 2000; Bain 2003). The increase in university autonomy compared to the Soviet era was enormous: Appointment of rectors by the state was replaced with elections by academic councils. HEIs received the right to enrol students on a tuition-fee basis and to open new study programs. HEIs received considerable financial autonomy and became free to define their internal organisation, to employ their own staff, to set their own salaries, to rent and lease assets, and to establish branches campuses (Beliakov et al. 1999). Because of the budget contractions during the 1990s, however, the majority of HEIs used their new organisational autonomy mainly for economic survival. As a former vice-minister for education remembered in a personal communication, the spirit of the 1990s was “*We cannot give you money, but we can give you freedom*”.

In order to assure the basic quality of more autonomous HEIs, as well as to maintain a unified educational space in Russia, a set of State Educational Standards (SES) were developed which defined common standards for structure and contents of study programs. A system of State *licensing*, *attestation*, and *accreditation* was established to control and certify that HEIs complied with these standards. This meant that the QA system changed from a model of state control and inspection to one based on regulation, something that had never existed in Russia previously (Motova and Pykkö 2012). Under the new system, **licensing** verified whether an HEI had sufficient *resources* (premises, equipment, information and library resources, or teaching staff) to carry out educational activities. Attaining a license meant that HEIs were authorized to deliver instruction and could benefit from certain tax benefits. **Attestation** consisted of verifying that graduates’ *performance* was on par with SES. Lastly, **accreditation** granted the accredited institution the right to award nationally recognized state diplomas and to participate in state budget funding and exempted its male students from obligatory military service. All

procedures were administered by a *Department of Licensing, Accreditation, and Attestation* within the Ministry of Education<sup>1</sup> (MoES) with a plethora of specialized centres under its purview. Decisions were taken by an *Accreditation Board* composed of heads of HEIs, and representatives of associations of HEIs and sectoral ministries (Chistokhvalov 2007).

## Turning Towards Europe

In the beginning of the 2000s, the government began to reassert itself as an actor in the higher education system. Rising oil prices and the ruble depreciation of 1998 had laid the basis for rapid economic growth. Along with reforms in the economy, the state re-identified education as a priority (Semyonov and Platonova 2017). The introduction of a centralized national admission exam (the so-called *Unified National Exam*) was launched to combat corruption in admission and support student mobility.

The year 2000 marks a turning point also for the QA system in Russia which opened itself to European influences in higher education. Attestation and accreditation were merged into a single procedure. Accreditation became compulsory for all HEIs (before, it had been only for state HEIs), and the MoES began organising a competition for the best quality management systems within universities (Forrat 2012). After Russia joined the Bologna process in 2003, Russia launched a number of legislative initiatives and regulations regarding the introduction of a two-tier system of degrees, introduced a new generation of educational standards granting greater freedom to HEIs to define their own contents of study programs. There was also continued support for the development of internal quality management, such as a “Coordination Council on Quality Provision” which in 2005 issued recommendations on internal quality management systems (Motova 2015). The effectiveness of internal quality management systems became one of the indicators for accreditation (Forrat 2012). During the period between 2002/2003 and 2009, related to Russia’s ascension to the Bologna Process, proposals within the MoES were continuously being discussed that independent accreditation agencies should be certified by the state and their accreditation be recognized as equivalent to state accreditation. An incorporated “guild of experts” received support from the state oversight body for education *Rosobrnadzor* to conduct trainings for reviewers, and independent QAAs were given signals that they might be recognized by the state replacing state accreditation.

The development of an independent accreditation system as it has become the norm (if far from ubiquitous) in the European Union, however, never came to fruition in Russia. On the contrary, since 2004, the state began to reassert itself as the steering *and* intervening actor.

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<sup>1</sup>The Ministries of Education and that of Science were merged in 2004.

The new framework for quality assurance which successively emerged between 2004 and 2017 was guided by the idea that public resources in HE should be concentrated on so-called “pivot points” (*tochki rosta*), a smaller number of high-quality HEIs while the overall number of HEIs should be radically reduced. In interviews Fursenko gave in 2004 and 2005, he argued that instead of the then over 1000 HEIs, there should be 20–50 leading HEIs and 150–200 HEIs of second rank to provide highly qualified specialists to the economy (Fedyukin and Froumin 2010). This new system rested on support and incentives through a redistribution of funding, on the one hand, stricter state monitoring of performance indicators, state inspections, closures and mergers of HEIs, on the other, and a redistribution of public funding from the weaker HEIs to the stronger ones.

The first pillar consisted of support for leading universities. Since 2005, a series of support programs were launched to support *Federal Universities* (in 2005/2006), *National Research Universities* (in 2008), world-class research universities (*program “5–100”*<sup>2</sup> in 2012) and *flagship universities* (in 2016). Participants were chosen in an open competition<sup>3</sup> and were allocated considerable additional funding but at the price of losing the right to elect their own rectors, who were appointed by the government (Froumin and Povalko 2014). They also had to submit to a regime of regular evaluations of their implementation progress towards their HEI’s development program. HEIs which do not meet their own goals can be expelled from the program, although so far none ever was.

The second pillar of the strategy rests on tighter control and intervention by the state. In 2009, by decision of the new head of Rosobrnadzor, a staff reshuffle took place at the National Accreditation Agency (*Rosakkredagenstvo*), and almost all of the staff left due to disagreements over the role and functioning of the agency. The centralization was completed when the seat of *Rosakkredagenstvo* was moved from Yoshkar-Ola to Moscow in 2011 where the agency now shares offices in the same building with Rosobrnadzor. At the same time, Rosobrnadzor received the right to conduct unannounced inspections of HEIs at any time as well as the power to revoke a license of a university, which earlier could have been done only by a court decision. This change converted the system of licensing and accreditation from fairly bureaucratic, yet predictable process into a powerful instrument of state steering and control in the hands of *Rosobrnadzor*. As a high-ranking staff member of Rosobrnadzor explains its significance:

The assessment and accreditation of HEIs are now a prerogative of Rosobrnadzor. This is a very strong instrument of power: You give to some, you don’t give to others. [...] It is clear that the loss of a license or of accreditation is a really big loss [...] Therefore, there is an infinite number of issues related to the objectivity of decision-making” [...] Now there will be a trial of the European university, a good university. They will sue Rosobrnadzor. [...] There were many attempts [to close a university], but earlier we decided these issues through the courts, as we could not decide on accreditation ourselves. [...] The courts are in

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<sup>2</sup>The designation “5–100” refers to the program’s goal of at least five Russian universities being represented among the top one hundred in global university rankings by 2020.

<sup>3</sup>Except for the Federal universities.



favour of the government, but this is a long, tedious process, a large machine which accompanies these things. [...] Now it is easier: Rosobrnadzor cancels [accreditation] and [the universities] need to go to court and try to protest [...] For many this already means a loss of reputation, a loss of students, and you will go to court? You already have nothing.<sup>4</sup>

With the ground thus laid, the so-called “effectiveness monitoring” (*monitoring effektivnosti*) was launched in 2012 with the purpose to identify HEIs with low performance based on centrally collected indicator data<sup>5</sup> (Froumin et al. 2014). HEIs which did not meet performance standards set by the MoES were labelled as ‘ineffective’ and subsequently investigated by Rosobrnadzor. If sufficient shortcomings are found, HEIs can be merged with other institutions, partially restructured or lose their license or accreditation altogether and have to close.

Finally, a third pillar can be seen in the new mechanism of allocation of state funding for HEIs that was introduced in 2013. HEIs which perform well on a set of state-defined performance indicators (similar to the ones used in the efficiency monitoring) are now getting a preferential allocation of state-funded study places. This puts further pressure on weak HEIs and increases their risk of being investigated by Rosobrnadzor (*pillar two*). Since 2012, decisions by Rosobrnadzor have resulted in mergers and liquidations of a large number of HEIs and an even higher number of branches. In 2014 alone, Rosobrnadzor closed 357 HEIs and branches. In the first half of 2015, 151 Russian HEIs and branches had their license withdrawn, 34 lost their accreditation.<sup>6</sup>

## ***Moldova***

During the early Post-Soviet regulatory vacuum, there was no formal quality assurance procedure in Moldova. Soviet regulations were quickly abolished by the Moldovan government, without a coherent strategy to replace them. As Padure (2009) quotes a policymaker of the time “...*the first years of independence represented a period of legal nihilism in education, when Soviet regulations were declared invalid in the Republic of Moldova, while local regulations were missing*”. As a consequence, the number of public and private HEIs mushroomed, often to the detriment of their quality (Tofan and Bischof 2017).

Only during the second part of the 1990s, did the state try to reassert its regulatory role with the first law on Education (1995), the *Law on the Evaluation and Accreditation of Educational Institutions* (1997), and the *Law on the Endorsement*

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<sup>4</sup>Personal interview.

<sup>5</sup>Indicators relate to quality of student intake, teaching effectiveness, research, faculty, infrastructure, finance, labour market outcomes of graduates, and internationalisation.

<sup>6</sup><https://www.uceba.ru/article/1041>.

of the *Regulations on the Evaluation and Accreditation of Educational Institutions* (1999). Prior to 1999, the assessment and accreditation of educational institutions were seen as a prerogative of the MoE which had failed, however, to establish transparent criteria and procedures. The steep increase of the number of private HEI—which were, not rarely, even using the same physical spaces, learning resources, and teaching and administrative staff of public HEIs—was seen as a sign that the system was ineffective or even corrupt (Toderăș 2012).

The law of 1997 established a quality assurance system through state control and accreditation similar to the Russian model. Between 1997 and 1999, CNEAA was supported by the US-embassy with study trips and consultations by US experts<sup>7</sup> and developed a peer-review system for the accreditation of HEIs and study programs based on international practice. In 1999, the National Council for Academic Evaluation and Accreditation (*Consiliul Național de Evaluare și Acreditare Academică—CNEAA*) was established as the Quality Assurance Agency for study programs. While the process of accreditation was formally independent, however, final accreditation decisions needed to be confirmed by the MoE and the government. This led to a series of conflicts with influential interests over the non-accreditation of certain study programs.

The CNEAA had started to conduct its first accreditations when in 2001 the communist party came into power and the new minister Gheorghe Sima abolished it as of August 2002. The former head of CNEAA relates this to their independent stance:

We began to critically evaluate their work [...], we criticized the ministry in that it did not fulfil certain [of its] tasks. Well, they did not like this, they wanted the council [CNEAA] to be subordinated to them, as a unit of the ministry. And that the minister could give it orders “do this, or do that”. This did not happen, and in principle, because of it, they completely transformed us. Not one [of the staff of CNEAA] was kept on the new team [at the ministry]<sup>8</sup>

All of its functions were transferred to the MoE. Nevertheless, the procedures and criteria CNEAA had developed for the accreditation of study programs and HEIs remained in place after 2002, although the government gained more immediate influence over final decisions which it did exercise in a number of cases in which accreditation was granted against the results of the evaluation. Nevertheless, the Directorate of Higher Education Accreditation conducted evaluations and accreditations from 2002 until 2008, bringing a degree of order back into the higher education system. During this time, a number of private HEIs were closed down or voluntarily ceased operations due to stricter accreditation requirements. All public HEIs retained their accreditation.

In 2003 Moldova began to prepare to join the Bologna Process, which officially took place in 2005. This required changes to a number of laws, structural reforms in higher education, a new nomenclature of study programs and a number of other

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<sup>7</sup>Personal interview with CNEAA's founder.

<sup>8</sup>Personal interview.

changes, among them an orientation of the quality assurance system at the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG). In 2006, trying to adapt to the ESG and responding to a certain pressure from the Council of Europe and the European Commission to separate the MoE from evaluation, authorization and accreditation of HEIs, the Moldovan government decided to close the department for quality assurance within the MoE and to transfer its responsibilities to a newly created Agency for Assessment and Evaluation (*Agenția de Evaluare și Examinare—AEE*), a public institution under the remit of the MoE. While already charged with a very wide range of responsibilities, this agency was burdened with additional tasks for which it was ill-prepared, such as the organisation and administration of examinations in secondary education, or the organisation of science Olympiads and national and international competitions. As a consequence, the communist government had difficulties finding a director who was knowledgeable in both secondary and tertiary education, willing and capable to run the agency, as well as politically opportune. In the end, the agency only occupied itself with non-tertiary education, and the MoE continued to conduct accreditations itself.

By 2008, however, it had become obvious to the Communist party that they would lose the next elections and they would lose their influence in the MoE. Among other decrees, in November 2008, the Government issued a decree creating the **Quality Assurance Agency** (*Agenție de Asigurare a Calității—AAC*) and approved a set of new regulations. The objective was to create a transparent, integrated quality assurance system for both secondary and tertiary education. Possibly due to the lack of time for its elaboration, instead of clarity, the concept for the new agency created even more confusion and uncertainty among its stakeholders. The QA processes foreseen for higher education and those for primary, secondary and upper secondary education were not clearly differentiated. Toderăș (2012) claims that in addition to these design flaws, some structures and departments were created not to best serve the foreseen processes, but to guarantee the influence of certain individuals and their special interests within the future structures.

When the communist party lost their parliamentary majority to the Alliance for European Integration, the Department of Accreditation within the MoE had been closed, but the new agency had not been founded. Without any legal procedure in place, study programs which were established after 2008 could not undergo the mandatory periodic evaluations and accreditations and were, therefore, operating in a state of semi-illegality (Ciurea et al. 2012). As one former ministry official remembers:

In the context of the Bologna Process we studied the experience of other countries and it was clear that within the framework of the MoE it is not good to have such a structure. [...] This is why they closed it within the Ministry, because it did not correspond with the tendencies in Europe. It was clear that we needed to create another structure [...] but, unfortunately, they closed one but did not establish the other<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Personal interview.

For the new government, integration into the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) remained a priority, however, and having a functional QA system at institutional and country-level was seen as crucial not only for achieving this goal. Work on a new code of education began shortly after the elections. While all stakeholders were, in principle, in agreement that an agency for quality assurance and accreditation was urgently needed, disagreements between the Moldovan Rectors' Council, the Academy of Science and other interest groups in the parliament dragged the discussion out to almost four years. The frequent changes of ministers at the head of the MoE further complicated reaching a consensus.<sup>10</sup> The first draft was published for debate in early 2010. Several times, a new version of the Code of Education was worked out by the Council of Rectors and the MoE, only to be sent to the parliament to be refused or changed.

During this process, the TEMPUS project “*Development of Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Moldova*” (QUAEM)<sup>11</sup> (2012–2016) contributed to the development of the new QA system by conducting trainings and discussion sessions of different European models of internal and external QA, as well as pilot evaluations and accreditations by a German QAA. The new code of education was finally passed in 2014, providing the framework for the new quality assurance agency ANACIP. Its practical establishment, however, was a fraught journey: Rifts quickly appeared between the agency-to-be and the MoE on the structures, procedures and evaluation criteria. Limited funding, personal and institutional independences in a small country and political pressure from opponents like the Academy of Science still threaten its work as an independent agency.

## ***Kazakhstan***

In Kazakhstan, as in other Post-Soviet countries, the economic collapse and the disappearance of the central authority and funding from Moscow made the creation of state institutions the first order of business to assure the short- and mid-term survival of the educational system. A new legal framework was formulated in the laws “On Education” in 1992 and “On Higher Education” in 1993 which regulated the overall operations of HEIs (Brunner and Tillett 2007). These laws, along with other regulations and standards re-created the high degree of centralized curricular design and control that had existed under the Soviet regime and which HEIs were used to (Ahn et al. 2017). Accompanying state curricular standards, the government launched a ministry-controlled QA procedure which obliged all HEIs to receive a license to operate and undergo periodical attestation by the State. While the initial chaotic growth of HEIs and study programs had eschewed regulation, by 1996, the

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<sup>10</sup>With Leonid Bujor, Mihail Șleahțițchi, and Maia Sandu, there were three different ministers of education between 2009 and 2012 alone.

<sup>11</sup>530537-TEMPUS-1-2012-1-DETEMPUS-SMGR.

vast majority of HEIs had been brought under the supervision of MoES (McLendon 2004). By 1999, a highly centralized and detailed system of standards and control of study programs was in place for all subjects.

In 1999, the system was further centralized through the introduction of a *Unified National Test* for university admissions and a voucher-based system of state financing for HEIs. This way, the quality of students entering HE should be increased, corruption eradicated, and incentives created for HEIs to become as attractive as possible for students. Both reforms had been inspired partially by Russian developments but were implemented much more swiftly. While this system improved the quality of top-tier HEIs, there still remained a large segment of HEIs which fully depended on tuition fees and pursued a strategy of low-tuition, low-quality study programs, which in some cases amounted to little more than diploma-mills. The period between 2000 and 2004 was marked by a series of state measures to eradicate low-quality HEIs. In 2001, the first attempt to combat these was to introduce a system of state accreditation, which was based on an assessment of quantitative indicators (Kalanova 2014). The new methodology was launched prematurely, however, as neither standards nor procedures had been developed yet. Within the first three days, 59 universities had been officially accredited. Following heavy criticism of the system from the academic community as non-transparent and ultimately pointless exercise, in 2002, state accreditation was suspended for almost a decade. Instead, from January 2002, the MoES began to conduct a series of inspections of HEIs. Until 2003, 166 HEIs were controlled, of which 12 HEIs and 32 branches were closed down, and 170 licenses for study programs were withdrawn from 42 HEIs and 75 HEIs and 64 branches had their licenses suspended for different periods of time (Lyal'kina and Kanafina 2016). Later, branches were made illegal altogether and a cap on the ratio of students enrolled in distance versus full-time education was introduced. Even though several HEIs had been forced to cease their operations, many little selective, low-tuition HEIs continued to operate. In order to expose and regulate such HEIs, in a following step, the MoES in 2003 introduced “*Comprehensive National Mid-Term Tests*” to be conducted at all HEIs after the second year of studies on the contents of the compulsory subjects foreseen by the state standards. Students who failed the test were not allowed to continue their studies to the third year (World Bank and OECD 2007). By 2003, a heavily regulated quality assurance system resting on detailed standards and top-down control was in place.

### **The State Program of Education Development 2005-2010 and the Appearance of Accreditation**

By order of the President, the first State Program of Education Development in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2005–2010 was passed in October 2004.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Presidential orders play a significant role in Kazakhstan, as they are binding orders to the government and its often-changing ministers.

The overarching objective of the program was to adapt Kazakhstan's education system to international practices in many aspects. This concerned the structure of education (such as introducing 12-year pre-tertiary education and a three-tier structure of higher education), governance of higher education (introduction of cooperative governance and the expansion of autonomy for HEIs, the integration of external stakeholders into the governance of HEIs), and the participation in international studies such as PISA, TIMSS, CIVIC, SITES, LES. Regarding quality assurance, it called for an overhaul of external and internal quality assurance and the participation in international networks of quality assurance agencies such as ENQA, and INQAAHE. The SPED 2005–2010 outlined for the first time an integrated perspective on the “*national system of quality assessment in education*” which structured the existing instruments of quality assurance (licensing, state attestation, the UNT and intermediate state control) to which independent accreditation, internal quality management were to be added (Kalanova and Omirbayev 2009). Quality management systems and institutional and specialized accreditation were explicitly related to “*implement[ing] the key principles of the Bologna declaration and the WTO*” (SPED 2005–2010).

The international dimension of this reform program cannot be overstated. According to one of the authors of the program, the SPED “...*promoted HEI to international standards, and in particular to European ones. [...] It created a powerful impetus and created the preconditions for the realization of the action lines of the Bologna Process. [...] It was important to do this so that we would be noticed and understood in Europe and the world.*”<sup>13</sup> Implementing the SPED, a *National Accreditation Centre* was founded under the MoES to develop a new methodology for accreditation, which began to develop its own standards based on American QAAs and the ESG. In 2007, accreditation was introduced in the law on education as a voluntary procedure to be conducted according to the standards of the accreditation agency carrying it out. This allowed NAC to instantly start working on the basis of the ESG without waiting for the government to develop their own set of standards and created an important precondition for the independence of Quality Assurance agencies in Kazakhstan. Thanks in part to the changes in study structures and quality assurance reforms of the SPED 2005–2010, on March 12, 2010, Kazakhstan became the first Central Asian Republic to sign the Lisbon Convention and become the forty-seventh member of the Bologna Process (BP).

As part of the efforts to align Kazakhstan with international practices in higher education, a review of Kazakhstan's education system was commissioned from the World Bank and OECD (2007) which made a strong case for further reforming the system of higher education, investing in quality, and decentralizing the system of bureaucratic governance. In 2010, the next “*State Program of Education Development in the Republic of Kazakhstan*” was passed (SPED 2011–2020), which called for independent accreditation to replace state accreditation and

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<sup>13</sup>Personal interview.

attestation by non-commercial, non-government accrediting agencies, which would be listed members in a register of recognized accreditation bodies. The absence of independence had been criticized in several external reviews (World Bank and OECD 2007; Raza 2009). The process of state *attestation* had also been receiving a lot of criticism from the academic community for being both too inflexible and indicator-oriented as well as for being conducted in the spirit of distrust and control. Within the MoES and the responsible committee for control in education, however, there was a strong reluctance to let go of these instruments of state control. During the preparation of the SPED, the President himself held several meetings where he urged all ministries to reduce the amount of oversight-related controls and the number of inspections in their areas. This top-down push, in concert with the international models and advice, was instrumental in the subsequent policy changes. As a former senior official from the MoES describes the impact of the Bologna Process on the development of independent accreditation:

As a country which joined the Bologna Process and took upon itself the responsibility to correspond to these criteria, we started to reform our system of quality assurance in accordance with these requirements. As you have seen, as the system changed from government accreditation to independent accreditation which corresponds to European standards. If we had not been in the Bologna Process, of course we would have said, “oh no, we will do it our way”<sup>14</sup>

In 2008, the first *Independent Kazakhstan Quality Assurance Agency for Education (IQAA)* had already been founded by the former head of NAC and, when NAC ceased conducting accreditations in 2011, part of its staff founded the *Independent Agency for Accreditation Rating (IAAR)* as the second non-governmental quality assurance agency after IQAA. The 2011 law on education also included powerful incentives for HEIs to undergo independent accreditation (Sagintayeva et al. 2014): HEIs that passed institutional and program accreditation in recognized accreditation agencies would be exempt from state attestation for the period of accreditation. More significantly, only accredited HEIs would be allowed to enrol state-funded students.

The move from state attestation to independent accreditation represented, for the first time since independence, a transfer of powers from the MoES to bodies not under its direct control. It went even further than most EU-countries, as it recognized national reviews as well as accreditations conducted by international agencies. As one representative of a quality assurance agency comments:

Kazakhstan in this respect is at the forefront of probably the entire planet. Even among European countries you hardly find a country which has completely opened its market for international agencies. You see, in 2011 when we conducted the reforms, we implemented the Bologna Process [...] There were recommendations that there should be an independent agency and the system should be open and so our government opened the system so that it would be competitive, that there should be competition on this market. Maybe we approached the [Bologna] ministerial recommendation a bit overeagerly, but on the other

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<sup>14</sup>Personal interview.

hand, it is good, even for national agencies, because for us this is an incentive to develop because we have strong international competition<sup>15</sup>

The degree of resistance against this change should not be underestimated, however. When in 2015, according to the SPED, accreditation should have fully replaced state attestation, the MoES initially submitted a draft law for state attestation to remain in place while accreditation would be uncoupled from financing in any way. A public conflict erupted between the Ak-Zhol opposition party and the minister of education over this issue. Finally, the authority of the presidential status of the SPED prevailed over the MoES's position, as non-implementation of independent accreditation would have implied a failure to implement a presidential order.<sup>16</sup> Finally, a compromise was reached and from January 2017, state attestation was discontinued for the majority of HEIs. Licensing, intermediate testing and licensing controls remained in place as instruments of control within the purview of the MoES. This is not to say that the changes are all "locked-in". Attestation remains for some ministry-affiliated HEIs, and the quick succession of ministers looks unlikely to change, and the pace of legislative changes remains high as factions in parliament, government, QAAs and the HEI lobby for their interests and their vision of governance of the HE system.

## Conclusion

After 25 years of transformations of higher education systems in Post-Soviet countries, the single Soviet model of higher education has evolved into fifteen unique national systems, shaped by economic, cultural, and political forces of national, regional (European) and global nature. On the one hand, it is visible that no country has been left completely untouched by the "global model" of HE governance. It has become clear that the Bologna process and the ESG principle of independent external accreditation have exerted a considerable isomorphic influence on quality assurance in all three Post-Soviet countries under analysis. On the other hand, the specific developments in quality assurance in the three countries illustrate clearly diverging trajectories, driven and influenced by different national forces:

- In Russia, during the 2000s, there was a clear openness to adopting a "European" model of quality assurance; the support this movement enjoyed among the top echelons of the MoES and the Russian government as a whole was never sufficient to overcome the resistance within the state bureaucracy and parts of the higher education establishment. In 2009, adapting to the ESG ceased to be a relevant consideration altogether, as Russia developed its own

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<sup>15</sup>Personal interview.

<sup>16</sup>Several personal interviews.



governance model based on the three pillars of financial support, financial redistribution and administrative intervention. Independent accreditation continues to exist at the fringes of the system but demand remains low, and the agencies offering it have never come to play a significant role in the overall governance of the higher education system.

- In Moldova, the ascension to the Bologna Process did create a situation of “coercive isomorphism” insofar as the ESG provided a strong model of what kind of quality assurance system would have to be developed in order to become part of the European Higher Education Area (Toderas̆ 2012). Significant resources and support were made available, primarily by the European Union, to support policy convergence in Moldova. On the other hand, the often-changing political landscape in the country, political inter-dependencies of key actors, vested interests of the academic oligarchy, corruption in the HE system and the overall economic and financial difficulties of HEIs acted as powerful forces of inertia and resistance to any systemic change in quality assurance as in the overall governance of higher education (Ciurea et al. 2012). To what degree the new QAA will indeed be independent and successful in the long run, remains to be seen.
- In contrast, Kazakhstan, even though joining the Bologna Process much later than the other two countries, has become a type of “model student” of the Bologna Communiqués on QA. Not only did the country introduce independent accreditation, but also allowed international QAAs to operate on par with national agencies. Looking at the national factors underlying this apparent policy convergence, however, three stand out: Firstly, Kazakhstan did not have a strong entrenched higher education lobby rejecting reform that conflicted with past ideals. Secondly, a number of key experts in the MoES and the presidential administration, have lobbied for reform on accreditation and have succeeded to include it in the presidential development programs. Lastly, and most importantly, the president of the country has acted as a decisive proponent of reform (not only) in the sphere of higher education pushing for the adoption of international practices, inviting international organisations and pursuing membership in international bodies from the Bologna Process to the OECD. Presidential support for the state strategies for education development was undoubtedly a key factor in overcoming (or overruling) resistance and scepticism in the ministerial bureaucracy. This factor sets Kazakhstan apart also from other Central Asian countries, where “travelling policies” promoted by international organisations have increasingly clashed with the desire of policy-makers to maintain Soviet education legacies (Silova 2011b).

The review of the three countries makes it clear that mere surface “convergence” of policies (“e.g. the existence of independent accreditation agencies”) hides a considerable diversity of actual practices. Considering national contexts, development trajectories, actors and formal as well as informal institutions is key to a deep understanding of the nature of institutional change and the necessary foundation for any form of sound policy advice.

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# National Policies for Higher Education Internationalization: A Global Comparative Perspective



Daniela Crăciun

## What Do We Know About Higher Education Internationalization so Far?

Higher education has always been international in scope (Guruz 2008; Matthews and Sidhu 2005). Nevertheless, against the backdrop of globalization and neoliberalism, nation-states—and, by extension, universities—have faced pressure to internationalize their practices at an increasing pace (Altbach et al. 2009; Brooks and Waters 2011). As such, higher education internationalization is talked about as a strategic priority for governments and is considered to be at the forefront of policy agendas around the world (Brooks and Waters 2011). Since the beginning, the main goals of the Bologna Process—specifically the harmonization and mobility aspects—have underscored an interest in internationalizing national higher education systems in Europe.

Despite this, there is little large-scale comparative research on the actual policies deployed by nation-states to internationalize their higher education systems. With some notable exceptions [see de Wit et al. (2015); Helms et al. (2015)], country level studies on internationalization policy typically focus on in-depth case studies or small-n comparative research. Nevertheless, internationalization does not occur in a vacuum. It only occurs at the intersection of cooperation and competition between nation-states, institutions, and individuals. Therefore, studies that have a narrow geographical scope—while providing valuable insights into the multidimensional fabric of the process—are limited in their ability to map the global reach and impact of internationalization. For instance, while it is commonly argued that internationalization and globalization phenomena have changed the face of higher

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education across the globe (Altbach 2016), it is less clear what this transformation entails on a country by country basis (Altbach et al. 2009).

This is not to say that internationalization has been a neglected phenomenon in higher education research. In fact, quite the opposite is true. In the last couple of decades, the topic has received so much attention from researchers that it would be “impossible to provide an overview claiming to be somewhere near complete” (Kehm 2003, p. 112). The fact that there is no universally accepted definition of internationalization (Altbach et al. 2009), is an important clue that it has taken different forms in different contexts. It is precisely because of this multi-faceted nature that “there is no simple, unique or all-encompassing definition”, but it is also “not helpful for internationalization to become a ‘catch-all’ phrase for everything and anything international” (Knight and de Wit 1995, p. 16). This perpetual quest for generalization has led to a situation where internationalization is applied both when a university introduces an English-taught course and when the whole higher education system is overhauled to integrate an international dimension into its functioning and purpose.

The ubiquitous use of the concept (Teichler 2009) has resulted in what could be called a “Hegelian night in which all cows are black and eventually the milkman is taken for a cow” (Sartori 1970, p. 64). Namely, the process of conceptual traveling (applying the concept of internationalization to new contexts and cases worldwide) has led to concept stretching which has reduced the analytical purchase of ‘internationalization’ (Crăciun 2015). The lack of conceptual clarity has important implications not only for research, but also for public and institutional policy formulation and funding (Matei et al. 2015).

On the one extreme, one may ask whether internationalization is only a fad that has been boosted by semantic inflation aimed at giving birth to an ‘internationalization industry’ (Healey 2008) or ‘business’ (Jones and de Wit 2014). On the other extreme, the lack of clarity may lead to deficient policies that are not equipped to deliver the intended outcomes. For instance, in spite of the rhetoric support for internationalization from institutional and national leaders, many of the articulated objectives of internationalization have not been operationalized for implementation (Knight, 1994 cited in Childress 2009).

While these cases may seem to overstate the actual situation, they point towards the need for a broader and more systematic approach to make sense of the complexity and variety of national higher education policies. The present chapter takes this observation as its point of departure, and suggests a way forward by conducting a global census of national internationalization strategies and revealing the insights that such an extensive data collection exercise brings to light. As such, it argues that internationalization can better be understood if one looks at what governments actually do to forward internationalization. It attempts to answer questions like: Is strategic thinking about internationalization a widespread phenomenon? Is it an old or a new phenomenon? Which are the countries that pursue internationalization in a strategic fashion? What common characteristics do they have?

To answer these questions, the chapter proceeds as follows. Section “[What Is Internationalization and What Role Does the Nation-State Play?](#)” establishes a

working definition of internationalization and delineates the importance of the nation-state in forwarding the process. Section “[Data Gathering Protocols](#)” discusses the data gathering protocol and the measures designed to ensure the reliability of the collected data and, as a result, of the findings that derive from it. Section “[What Does a Global Map of National Higher Education Internationalization Strategies Reveal?](#)” presents the insights that a global census of nation internationalization strategies reveals and their implications for internationalization research and practice. Finally, section “[Conclusions and Further Research](#)” summarizes the main arguments of the chapter and points towards some limitations and avenues for further research in this direction.

## **What Is Internationalization and What Role Does the Nation-State Play?**

As we cannot dig for any construction without landscaping, it is important to establish how internationalization is understood in the wider literature and provide a working definition for the current study. The prevalent definition of internationalization (Childress 2009; de Wit 2010; Qiang 2003) sees it as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural, and global dimension into the purpose, functions (teaching, research and service) and the delivery of higher education” (Knight 2004). In other words, internationalization is taken to mean a shift from previously inward looking national higher education systems to outward looking ones. Moreover, internationalization is a multi-level phenomenon that spans across scales, including institutional, national, regional, international and transnational efforts (Altbach et al. 2009). Adopting such a broad definition has the advantage of catering for an eclectic mix of developments that have impacted on higher education systems and institutions. Nevertheless, this comes at the cost of watering down the concept and seeing any process that spills over or into the national borders as internationalization.

In this chapter, internationalization will be taken to mean the active engagement with the design of policies, plans, programs, strategies and approaches at various levels of decision-making so as to promote the idea of internationality in higher education.<sup>1</sup> In other words, internationalization is seen as a process forwarded by active policy-making, not by drift. While this definition does not provide a more

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<sup>1</sup>The chapter makes a clear distinction between two key concepts: ‘internationality’ and ‘internationalization’. In order to differentiate these terms, the conceptualizations proposed by Brandenburg and Federkeil (2007) are employed. On the one hand, internationality refers to a *state*, and can be used to characterize an institution or a country’s higher education system “current status or the status discernable at the date of data acquisition” (p. 7). On the other hand, internationalization refers to a *process* in which a university or a national system shifts—in a steered manner—“from an actual state of internationality at time X towards a modified actual status of extended internationality at time X + N”(p. 7).

exact account of what internationalization entails, it allows for the identification and investigation of specific and explicit policy endeavors to promote the process. In this context, understanding the role of different actors in the internationalization of higher education becomes crucial.

Traditionally, the University has been a medium for promoting national cultures through standardized teaching and research methodologies, which was dependent on the nation-state for funding (Scott 2000; van der Wende 2001). It is generally argued that globalization has challenged the very nature of higher education, pushing it to reform “both the content and scope of its activities” (Guruz 2008). Starting from the proposition that there is an inherent contradiction between “internationalization” which “reflects a world order dominated by nation-states”, and globalization which involves a “process of global competitiveness”, Scott contends that the very existence of the University has been challenged (2000, p. 4).

On the national level, internationalization is just “one of the ways a country responds to the impact of globalization, yet at the same time respects the individuality of the nation” (Knight, 1997 quoted in Kreber 2009, p. 2). However, these national response strategies impose two competing ‘laws of motion’ upon higher education: the internationalization of learning and the nationalization of its purposes (Kerr 1990). In other words, there is a tension between ‘the internationality of substance versus the nationality of form’ (Teichler 2002).

## Data Gathering Protocols

The proposed analysis was carried out at the national policy level. This stance was taken for many reasons. To begin with, as a plethora of studies have shown, nation states still play a central role when it comes to steering higher education (Beerens 2004; Enders 2004; Vlk 2006; Witte 2006). As such, higher education policy “still tends not only to reflect but to underscore the specific traditions and circumstances of individual countries” (Enders 2004, p. 361). Empirical research has shown that even countries with similar socio-economic and political conditions have distinct higher education internationalization policies (Callan 2000; Graf 2009; Luijten-Lub et al. 2005; Matei and Iwinska 2015).

Next, these plans express a political commitment to internationalization, and not just political rhetoric. In other words, they are an integral part of the policy output of any government that promotes a supportive culture towards internationalization. There are countries in which national policies are implicit rather than explicit, the USA being but one example of such a case. However, these cases are not dealt with in this chapter as internationalization by stealth is not the focus of the current investigation. Also, such plans push governments to operationalize their understanding of internationalization. Having a well-defined and coherent strategy has been shown to be an important ingredient for moving forward with internationalization efforts (British Council 2011; Henard et al. 2012).



Lastly, the advantage of employing this strategy is that the unit of analysis remains constant on a cross-national basis. In turn, this allows for a consistent mapping and comparison of the cases. Moreover, it helps to establish the parameters of the study and represents a guide for data sourcing (Yin 2009).

In order to collect systematic information about national higher education systems and policies put in place to forward the internationalization process, the World Higher Education Database built by the International Association of Universities was used as a data sourcing guide. Because the website where the database is located was hard to use for such a comprehensive data collection exercise, a web scraping application in Python was built to gather the relevant information. This meant acquiring an offline library of documents with systematic, reliable, and valid information on national bodies responsible for international cooperation in higher education for 189 countries.<sup>2</sup>

Two steps were taken to ensure the reliability of the collected data. First, at the moment of data collection, the existence (or non-existence) of a higher education international strategy was verified against scholarly literature and reports on the state of internationalization in the particular national context. Second, using groups of graduate students from various countries studying higher education policy, the results from a convenience sample of 11 observations<sup>3</sup> were verified once again. For the test, intercoder reliability was adapted from manual content analysis to ‘intercollector’ reliability—the extent to which two or more independent data collectors agree on the coding of the content of interest (i.e. existence/non-existence of a higher education internationalization strategy). The measure of percent agreement was used a diagnostic tool for reliability and yielded a result of 100%. All in all, the tests conducted attested to the reliability of the data collection process.

## **What Does a Global Map of National Higher Education Internationalization Strategies Reveal?**

“Classifying is an activity inextricably linked to the human desire for creating order out of chaos” (van Vught et al. 2005, p. 9). Classifications—of which mapping is a sub-type—are spatial and/or temporal dissections of the world which “provide a systematic, nominal distribution among a number of classes or characteristics without any (intended) order of preference” (Ziegele 2013, p. 79). By assessing the similarities and differences between units and clustering them based on empirical information, they provide a description of the diversity within a system. As such, classifications are not aimed at assessing or establishing causality, but at promoting

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<sup>2</sup>The final list of countries surveyed was 195, as the World Higher Education Database and the United Nations country lists were merged.

<sup>3</sup>The convenience sample included: Hungary, USA, Philippines, Albania, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Greece, Croatia, Brazil, and South Korea.

transparency. In other words, mapping is a purely descriptive endeavor that establishes indicators of diversity without assembling “a specific normatively fixed combination of features that stands for a type” (Ziegele 2013, p. 80). Mapping allows for the flexible combination of indicators and leads to the possibility of dynamic clustering.<sup>4</sup>

This extensive data collection exercise carried out for this research brought to light some interesting insights and patterns into higher education internationalization. Figure 1 presents a global map of national internationalization strategies around the world: the countries in dark grey represent those which do have a national strategy for internationalization, the countries in light grey represent those which have a section on internationalization in their general higher education strategy, and the countries in white those which do not have a higher education internationalization strategy.

Looking at the map, it becomes immediately apparent that thinking about higher education internationalization strategically is not a very widespread phenomenon: 80% of countries worldwide do not have any national higher education internationalization strategy. In fact, only 11% of countries—to be precise, 22 out of 195 countries—have an official strategy in this direction. Moreover, looking at the publication years of these documents shows that thinking strategically about higher education internationalization is a new phenomenon (see Fig. 2). Most of these strategies have been published in the last 5 years and, as a result, it is difficult to assess their results and impact.

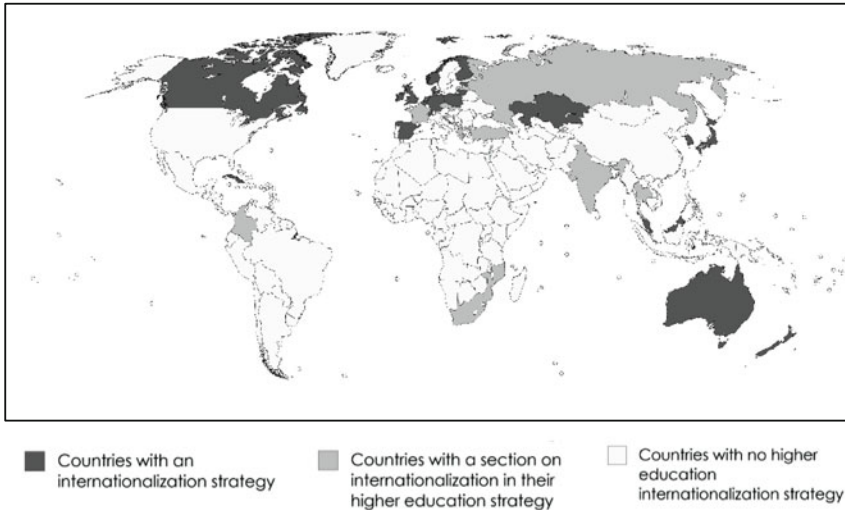
These findings are surprising considering that national policies and the national context are considered to play the most important part in internationalizing higher education (Enders 2004; Graf 2009; Luijten-Lub et al. 2005). It is all the more surprising, if we consider that, since years, not only higher education institutions (Egron-Polak and Hudson 2014; European University Association 2013) but also supranational organizations (European Commission 2013; Henard et al. 2012) have encouraged and supported the participation of the nation-states in the process.

In alphabetical order, the countries that have a higher education internationalization strategy are: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Cuba, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Japan, Kazakhstan, South Korea, Lithuania, Malaysia, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Singapore, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. Looking at the characteristics of these countries, various findings in relation to internationalization become apparent.

First, thinking about higher education internationalization strategically is mainly a European phenomenon. If we look at the distribution of the countries according to world regions (based on United Nations Country Grouping) we find the following distribution of countries which have a national higher education internationalization strategy: 13 in Europe, 5 in Asia, 2 in Oceania, 1 in North America, 1 in the

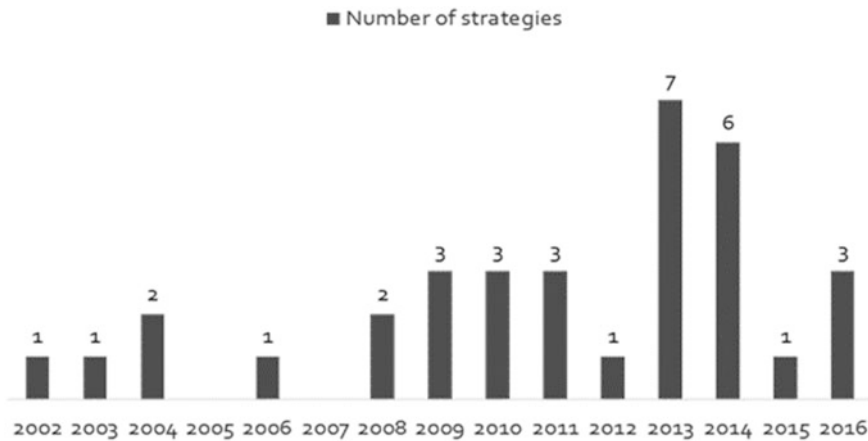
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<sup>4</sup>Per se, classifications and maps are static because they portray a structure at a defined point in time (i.e. when data was collected). However, what is meant here is that users can dynamically combine indicators to produce different classifications.



**Fig. 1** A global map of national internationalization strategies. *Source* Compiled by author

### Publication years of strategies



**Fig. 2** Publication years of national internationalization strategies. *Source* Compiled by author

Caribbean, and zero in Africa, Central America, the Middle East, and respectively South America. Nevertheless, internationalization is not so much related to the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area (which have 49 member countries) as it seems to be to the European Union (11 out of the 13 countries are EU member states). An explanation for the lack of national internationalization

strategies in so many of the Bologna countries could be that the Process already covers some of the central aspects of internationalization and also promotes a sort of regional internationalization in the area through its harmonization policies.

Second, thinking about higher education internationalization strategically is mainly a developed country phenomenon. If we look at the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) membership—which is an intergovernmental organization with 35 member countries founded in 1960 to stimulate economic progress and trade—we find that 77% of the countries which have a higher education internationalization strategy are OECD members ( $n = 17$ ).

Third, the countries that have a higher education internationalization strategy receive the lion's share of internationally mobile students. Out of over 4.1 million higher education students who studied abroad in 2013 (Project Atlas 2016), the 35 OECD countries attracted 73% of them (OECD 2016). By comparison, nine of the countries with a national higher education internationalization strategy hosted 41% of all students who studied abroad in 2013: 12% UK, 7% in Australia, 6% Canada, 6% Germany, 4% Japan, 2% The Netherlands, 2% Spain, 1% Finland, 1% New Zealand (Project Atlas 2016).

It is already common knowledge that “the reality of international education is geographically uneven and far from global in scope and reach” (Brooks and Waters 2011, p. 45). Internationally mobile students are not evenly distributed across countries, but they are highly concentrated in economically advanced states, especially Anglo-Saxon societies (Guruz 2008). Research has shown that more than 50% of the students who study abroad are clustered in just four English-speaking countries: United States of America, United Kingdom, Australia and Canada (Hughes 2008). These countries have benefited from English being “the Latin of the 21st century” (Altbach 2005, p. 66) and the reputation and capacity of their higher education systems (Hughes 2008). If data were openly available for all the countries, it is safe to say that the 22 countries with national internationalization policies probably receive more than half of the internationally mobile students worldwide. This is also because two-thirds of these countries have English—the academic *Lingua Franca*—as (one of) the official languages of instruction.

Certainly, the USA is the ‘odd man out’ in this respect as it does not have a national policy for internationalization. This can be explained by the fact that, unlike in most other countries, the responsibility for steering higher education in the USA does not fall on the national government, but on the state government. While there have been calls for a federal level policy, the main arguments against it have been the size, institutional diversity, and decentralization of the US higher education system (Helms 2015). The question then becomes, what is the state level engagement with higher education internationalization?

Traditionally, “states have been ambivalent, if not outright hostile, toward the international engagements of their colleges and universities” (Lane et al. 2014, p. 24). Recent research on the current state of affairs has concluded that support for internationalization at state level is quite limited as there are: very few states with an international higher education policy agenda (mostly *Study in* initiatives that are in fact run and financed mostly by higher education institutions through membership

fees), little state funding (in 2016 only 5% of universities had received state funding for internationalization), and a lack of a formal administrative structures to manage internationalization (Helms 2015; Helms et al. 2017; Lane et al. 2014). In fact, it continues to be the case that “most international efforts continue to come from faculty members, students, and staff members” (Lane et al. 2014, p. 3), and that “internationalization-related support is still very much centred on individual opportunities and activities” (Helms 2015, p. 27).

A possible explanation for this state of affairs could be that other countries adopted comprehensive internationalization strategies as a catching up mechanism to compete with USA (this claim is supported by the fact that the adoption of national policies in other parts of the world is very recent). Further research on the matter would be needed to test this hypothesis. However, it can be reasonably concluded that while US higher education is at an advanced level of internationality, there is little system-level support for internationalization.

## Conclusions and Further Research

The internationalization of higher education remains a messy field, as only timid attempts were made to systematize the process (Kehm 2003). The chapter showed how large-scale comparative research of national higher education internationalization strategies can bring to light new aspects of the process that would otherwise be obscured in small-n in-depth case studies. All in all, the chapter advocated for mapping higher education internationalization policies around the world to make the diversity of the system transparent. In itself, the mapping exercise is purely descriptive. However, it allowed one to observe variations in the data and pose tentative questions about the causality of patterns. More empirical work is needed to catalogue these strategies.

Some of the main conclusions drawn from this global map of national internationalization policies were discussed. First, thinking about higher education internationalization in a strategic manner at national level is a relatively new phenomenon that is not as widespread as the literature might suggest. Second, strategic thinking about internationalization is mainly concentrated in developed countries more generally, and European countries more specifically. Third, 41% of all the international students worldwide are received by just nine of the countries that have an internationalization strategy in place. Finally, two thirds of the countries with a national strategy for internationalization also have English as (one of) the language (s) of instruction.

While these findings bring a new perspective on higher education internationalization around the world, further research is needed to dig deeper into the different rationales, approaches, and substantive measures that the countries employ to forward the process. A content analysis exercise on these strategies could easily reveal the similarities and differences between them, and open avenues for cooperation or completion between countries. Such a comparative perspective could also help to

characterize and contextualize the European Higher Education Area within a global reference framework and highlight the particular aspects of regional internationalization forwarded through the Bologna Process. The main contribution of such an endeavor would be to increase the transparency of higher education policies for students, universities, policy makers, and businesses, and to ease consortia formation between universities and mutual agreements between states.

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# A Collaborative Approach in the Internationalisation Cycle of Higher Education Institutions



Adriana Perez-Encinas

## Introduction

Internationalisation as a concept has been extensively researched in the field of higher education as well as in other fields. In an attempt to outline the concept, many authors have agreed on a number of broad definitions to conceptualise the new, global phenomenon. The Bologna process was a key component catalysing the internationalisation efforts of European institutions. It aimed to make higher education more attractive to students from other parts of the world and to facilitate intra-European mobility (Teichler 2009); moreover, it sought to standardise system-wide European higher education processes that indirectly supported the internationalisation efforts of European higher education institutions.

The number of mobile students has grown significantly in the last twenty years, reflecting the expansion of tertiary education systems worldwide: according to the last report from Education at a Glance, nearly five million students may be included in this category (OECD 2017). European higher education institutions have also been focusing on international strategies and cooperation agreement to attract international students from all parts of the world, the ERASMUS programme being the most well-known and successful evidence of the mobility exchanges within the European Union and an important part of the internationalisation efforts of institutions. Nevertheless, mobility is not all, and a more comprehensive approach to the internationalisation of higher education is called for (Hudzik 2014), increasing awareness that internationalisation has to become more inclusive and less elitist.

One of the key parts of the internationalisation as a process is to offer internationalisation opportunities for all stakeholders within the institution. In this sense, the Bologna Process has been a great initiative to provide an accepted structure of programmes and activities that affect all parts of the institutions.

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The aim of the Bologna Process (1999) was to make higher education systems more compliant and to enhance their international visibility. This unique approach aimed to establish a system that provides a convergence of higher education systems in Europe, as well as to gain visibility in other parts of the world. In fact, the Bologna Process has reached other continents and create awareness of a system that connects different higher education institutions in different regions, and therefore also their staff members and students.

Thus, this paper focuses on a key aspect of the internationalisation cycle of higher education institutions. It encourages a supportive culture that will facilitate not only mobility schemas but also the integration of internationalisation in all aspects of institutions by using a collaborative approach between formal, informal services and all stakeholders.

## **How Do We Define Internationalisation to Be More Inclusive and Supportive of All Stakeholders Inside the Institution?**

The term began to be used widely by higher education sector in the 1980s (Knight 2012, p. 27) and over the years, the meaning of the term internationalisation has changed and, in some cases, its purpose. This has resulted in differing definitions and agreements about terminology, leaving out some misconceptions about the term. The definition of internationalisation has evolved since 1994 when internationalisation was first defined by Knight (1994, p. 3) as “the process of integrating an international dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of higher education”.

The definition of internationalisation evolved to highlight its international and intercultural dimension: “Internationalisation of higher education is the process of integrating an international/intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of the institution” (Knight and de Wit 1997, p. 8). It is important to note that Knight and de Wit identify three components in this definition: internationalisation is, first, process and second a response to globalisation (not to be confused with the globalisation process itself). Third, it includes both international and local elements, represented in the definition by the term “intercultural” (Knight and de Wit 1997).

In 2002 Söderqvist (2002, p. 42) introduced a new definition that, for the first time, described internationalisation as a change process from a national to an international higher education institution. Moreover, she added a holistic view of management at the institutional level, an inclusive approach engaging more stakeholders in the process. In fact, definitions started to move forward to a more comprehensive understanding assessed by Hudzik (2011, p. 6) as a:

[...] commitment, confirmed through action, to infuse international and comparative perspectives throughout the teaching, research, and service missions of higher education. It shapes institutional ethos and values and touches the entire higher education enterprise. It is essential that it be embraced by institutional leadership, governance, faculty, students, and all academic service and support units.

Consequently, it is claimed that a more comprehensive approach to the internationalisation of higher education (Hudzik 2014) will increase the awareness that internationalisation has to become more inclusive and less elitist by not focusing predominantly on mobility but more on the curriculum and learning outcomes (de Wit et al. 2015). One indicator of the inclusiveness and the change of focus is the recent definition of internationalisation by the Internationalisation of Higher Education study, which was requested and published by the European Parliament (de Wit et al. 2015, p. 33):

the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society.

This definition is heavily informed by the commonly-used definition provided by Knight (2003). However, it extends Knight's definition to represent the inner culture of institutions and to reflect the importance of internationalisation as an ongoing, comprehensive and intentional process that gathers together all stakeholders as internationalisation agents, focusing on all students and staff rather than only the few who have the opportunity to be mobile. Indeed, more inclusive and supportive actions were taken towards a more comprehensive internationalisation process. The next part of the chapter focuses on internationalisation strategies and the internationalisation cycle of higher education institutions, where all stakeholders play a role.

## **Internationalisation Strategies and Support Services**

University strategic management covers a series of actions and services taking place at the institution. There are different support services (formal and informal) that impact the internationalisation process. Bianchi (2013) identifies the provision of two types of services: core (which are related to teaching and learning) and peripheral (those related to the living conditions and the environment of the host country, such as security, cultural and social activities, accommodation, transportation and visa/entry requirements). Knight and de Wit (1995) highlight the relevance of extra-curricular activities and institutional services by identifying a list of special services that are needed to support a university's internationalisation strategy: international students' advice services, orientation programmes, social events and other facilities for foreign guests, international student associations,

international houses for students and scholars, international guest organisations, and institutional facilities for foreign students and scholars (such as libraries, restaurants, medical services, sporting facilities, etc.). According to a recent doctoral study (Perez-Encinas 2017), as well as sources including the UNESCO Book titled “Student Affairs and Services in Higher Education: Global Foundations, Issues and Best Practices” (2009) by Ludeman et al., the ESNsurvey 2016 (Josek et al. 2016), and the ISANA guide (2011), among others, a list of services that universities can offer is presented. These include: admission offices, administrative services, academic support/advising, international offices, IT and system support, counselling services, careers advisory service/employability, library, language courses, buddy/mentor systems, orientation and welcome activities, healthcare and safety, accommodation offices, campus engagement, campus eating places, student organisations, disability support office, alumni service, emergency numbers, family support, community services, sports, cultural adaptation, student affairs assessment and city offerings.

The provision of the aforementioned support services can enhance and strengthen the internationalisation strategy of higher education institutions. As a first step, institutions should analyse and develop their internationalisation plans in accordance with their needs, aims and priorities. Second, they can incorporate some of the relevant activities and support services into their strategic plans (de Wit 2002; Knight and de Wit 1995). Third, they may seek to integrate the views of key stakeholders of higher education institutions in all actions and activities to promote a more inclusive and supportive educational environment. And, finally, they may re-assess the internationalisation plan in collaboration with these critical stakeholders on an intermittent basis.

Support services and diverse activities taking place in higher education institutions under the auspices of overall university strategies have been categorized by Knight and de Wit (1995) in two main groups: programme strategies and organisational strategies. The first category relates to academic activities and services that integrate the international dimension into the higher education institution. The second category refers to the development of appropriate policies and administration systems in order to maintain that international dimension (de Wit 2002; Knight and de Wit 1995). Therefore, we may observe that support services and internationalisation activities may fall under both of those categories, which are indeed of equal importance. In order to provide a holistic approach to the internationalisation of higher education, all aspects, activities, and university strategies (programme-based and organizational) must be in focus in order to reach the mission of the institution.

## Trends and Issues in International Student Services

As stated previously, there are different activities and support services that universities can offer to (international) students to support the internationalisation process of universities. Internationalisation of higher education seeks to include not only foreign or mobile students but rather all types of students in higher education. In most cases, institutions offer support services specifically oriented for international or foreign students and have a designated office for that purpose. International student services (ISS) has been an evolving concept in some institutions of higher education, while it is regarded as a well-established practice in others. Although its definition might differ from country to country or among organisational types, institutions that host international students share one mutual goal: to support international students in their educational and cultural transition during their studies abroad.

Recognising the potential impact on the students' experiences and success, as well as recruitment and retention efforts, some institutions are becoming more intentional about equipping their ISS with the necessary resources and staffing to serve the complex needs of international students and help them develop global and intercultural competencies during their stay on campus and in the community (Ward 2016). Although the structure of ISS might differ from institution to institution, and be organised in the form of centralised or decentralised services, it is tied to programmes and services provided to students in relation to their formal and informal education at postsecondary level (Osfield et al. 2016). According to the European Union's Erasmus Impact Study (Brandenburg et al. 2014), the increase in the number of both inbound and outbound students has led to an increased awareness of the necessity of providing support services and streamlining administrative procedures. At many universities, this has, in turn, resulted in the establishment and further strengthening of support services for international students. Providing support services does not only enhance the internationalisation vision of a university but also has a potentially important role to play in terms of attracting and retaining international students (Kelo et al. 2010), as well as building momentum for the future recruitment of high-quality students.

These trends have been identified and categorised into five major groups (Ammigan and Perez-Encinas 2018): (1) increased responsibility for providing immigration services to the international community on campus; (2) the importance of developing strong support through a collaborative programming and outreach model; (3) using key strategic communication strategies to maintain contact with international students; (4) the need for assessing international student satisfaction as a way to improve support services; and (5) the preparation for managing crisis and response to emergencies.

## *Collaborative Services Inside Institutions*

The role of international student support services is an important driver in the internationalisation efforts of a university (Perez-Encinas 2017). In fact, due to the growing numbers of mobile students, the provision of student services has become a key topic among academics and other stakeholders involved in the process of internationalising higher education. Therefore, providing support services and integration activities by and for staff members, faculty members and students will increase the internationalisation of the campuses and, moreover, enhance their attractiveness in comparison to other institutions (Perez-Encinas 2017).

Additionally, institutions seeking to attract and retain international students are adopting student services and programming to meet their expectations (ACE 2016), in order to not only create an international campus but also to offer an inclusive environment that meets the needs of international students, both academically and culturally, not to mention personally. Indeed, figuring out the best way to meet the needs of international students is not an easy process (ACE 2016), although more programmes and services are being provided to more international students because this is becoming central to the work of all student affairs professionals at the university, not just those who work in the international office (ACE 2016). Hence, a collaborative approach is encouraged for all stakeholders within higher education institutions, with the goal of working together towards supporting an international culture with international and domestic students and staff members. Student support is requested not only by international students; domestic students may well be “interculturally deficient”. Leask (2009) suggests that international educators “move away from deficit models of engagement, which position international students as interculturally deficient and home students as interculturally efficient, when both need support”.

Another important service where a collaborative approach is important relates to the integration of international and domestic students. Besides attracting and receiving international students to enrich the campus and provide an international atmosphere, the integration of international students on the campus is desired. Unfortunately, there is still much to be done to socially integrate international students and local students. Key actions to foster integration include: (1) to identify students’ needs in the institution, regardless of whether they are domestic or international students, (2) to include all stakeholders and community members to foster engagement and (3) to associate and collaborate with different services and organizations on campus for a better social integration provided by and with different agents. Social integration has been defined by (Rienties et al. 2012) as the extent to which students adapt to the social way of life at university. Some studies have addressed the integration of students in higher education. Tinto (1975, 1998) notes that students have a variety of educational experiences, competencies, skills and values, as well as family and community backgrounds before they enter into higher education. These previous personal experiences might influence how

students integrate in higher education, socially and academically. Another interesting finding from Tinto (1975, 1998) is that students do not only need to focus on their studies to graduate and succeed academically, they also need to participate in the student culture that universities provide. Authors such as Wilcox et al. (2005) found that social support by family and friends (i.e. social networks of students) had a positive influence on the study success of first-year students. This data can be related to international students and to the efforts of an inclusive and comprehensive strategy for internationalisation.

Some recommendations for the strategic development of an international community include: to connect international initiatives with the institution's existing strategic priorities; to focus on continuous data-driven approaches to decision making; and to forge flexible coalitions with key campus stakeholders. Another recommendation is to collaborate with the international student community, which involves empowering international students to participate in open forums, serve as representatives at fairs, be responsible for the organisation of events, etc.

All these endeavours may positively impact students' social and academic experiences. The American Council on Education (2016), in their report on "Integrating International Students", highlights four key methods to provide the best possible experience for international students: welcoming international students, adjusting services and programmes to meet their needs, facilitating interaction between international and other students, and assessing students' experiences. Subsequently, de Wit has identified a missing component (related to a collaborative approach); this will be explored in the following section.

## The Internationalisation Cycle and the Missing Component

An internationalisation cycle has been developed to facilitate the phases and the process of internationalisation in higher education institutions. The modified internationalisation cycle described below by de Wit (2002) highlights that all phases of the internationalisation process in a given institution combine distinct points of view. The proposed cycle, a combination of Van der Wende and Knight's internationalisation cycle, takes into account several variables. Van der Wende (1999) puts emphasis on the internal and external factors affecting the environment (the analysis of the context), and the implementation and long-term effects, while Knight's cycle (Knight 1994) relates more to the awareness, commitment, planning, organisation and review. The internal circle, an addition by de Wit (2002), represents the supportive culture that will facilitate the integration of internationalisation into all aspects of institutions. There is an implicit emphasis that internationalisation is not a goal in itself, but a means to enhance the quality of education, research and service function of the university (Fig. 1).

In fact, de Wit's (2002) modified version brings a comprehensive perspective to the internationalisation cycle by combining approaches and including the



**Fig. 1** Internationalisation cycle. Modified version de Wit (2002)

integration effect: it gathers together the six elements of Knight’s cycle (1994) with three elements from Van der Wende (1999). This means that the internal circle acts as an integration effect promoting a supportive culture in the institution. In addition, I argue that there is a missing component in the internationalisation cycle, highlighting the key inclusion of all stakeholders in the decision-making process, which undergirds the supportive culture of an institution. This is a collaborative approach. By including a collaborative approach into all services, I offer a more comprehensive and inclusive view of the internationalisation process. Internationalisation can be seen as a strategy in itself (de Wit 2009) that can be integrated into all the aspects, functions of higher education institutions, and collaborate with different networks and stakeholders. Thus, internationalization as an approach should be inherently collaborative. The distinction proposed here is to include collaborations among formal and informal services, as well as all stakeholders, to enhance the quality of education, research and service.

In Fig. 2, I offer a representation of the newly added component (on the left side) of the collaborative approach, to be taken into account along all parts of the internationalisation cycle of higher education institutions.



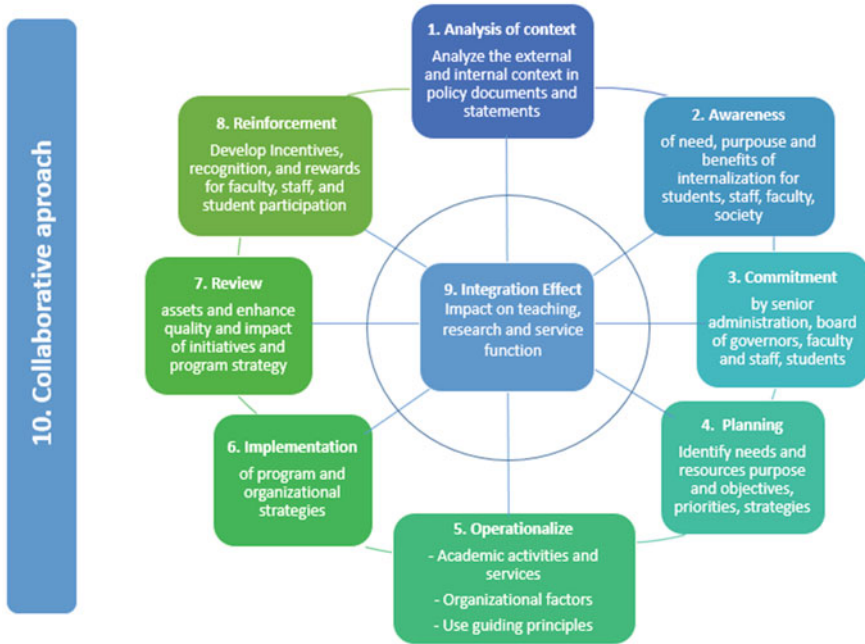


Fig. 2 Internationalisation cycle. Modified version (2017)

## Conclusion

Throughout this paper, I present an evolving concept of how internationalisation is moving towards becoming more inclusive and collaborative within the internal culture at higher education institutions. The Bologna Process has been a great initiative to promote collaborative schemas and to internationalise higher education systems. Also, to create awareness for the need of an educational system that connects different higher education institutions and internationalization strategies, staff members and students in different regions. Indeed, the paper reflects on a missing component in the internationalisation cycle of higher education institutions. This is a collaborative approach that can be included as part of the internationalisation strategies to foster community engagement and more integration among students and staff members on campus.

It is important to note that internationalisation of a university is not only aimed at those mobile or foreign students but at all stakeholders playing a role in a higher education institution. In fact, it is ever more important to have an internationalisation strategy that not only focuses on programmes and actions abroad but also at home. Under the larger heading of internationalization strategy, I have identified trends in ISS in higher education institutions as falling in five major groups (Ammigan and Perez-Encinas 2018): (1) more responsibility in providing

immigration services; (2) a collaborative programming and outreach model; (3) key strategic communication strategies; (4) the need for assessing international student satisfaction as a way to improve support services; and (5) the preparation for managing crisis and response to emergencies. In order to follow the aforementioned trends and actions to be taken into account, the participation and work together of all stakeholders in and outside the campus are essential. For this purpose, student affairs associations in different regions of the world serve as an umbrella for emerging issues and work to promote a social infrastructure at the higher education level.

A collaborative approach among support services at higher education institutions can enhance and strengthen the internationalisation strategy of higher education institutions by (1) identifying internationalisation needs, aims and priorities; (2) incorporating some of the activities and support services into their strategic plans; (3) integrating the view of all stakeholders of higher education institutions in all actions and activities to promote a more inclusive and supportive educational environment; (4) by assessing the internationalisation plan together with stakeholders' perspectives intermittently. Thus, I propose that internationalization as an approach should be inherently collaborative between formal, informal services and all university constituents to enhance the quality of education, research and service function of the universities.

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# Student Perspective on the Institutional Efforts to Develop Internationalisation Within Romanian HEIs



Cristina Ramona Fiț and Delia Gologan

## Abbreviations

ANPCDEFP	The National Agency for Community Programmes for Education and Professional Development
EHEA	The European Higher Education Area
ESU	European Students Union
IEMU	Internationalisation, Equity and Institutional Management for a Quality Higher Education
HE	Higher Education
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
UEFISCDI	The Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding

## Introduction

This study has been developed considering the context of the Bologna Process, as well as the 18 years of experience that Romania has gained while implementing the educational policies that are part of EHEA. Therefore, the aim of this study is to increase the awareness on the strengths and weaknesses of the internationalisation dimension of education in Romania. We intend to do this by better understanding students' perspective on this phenomenon and the range of internationalisation activities initiated by various universities. In the first part, the paper analyses stu-

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dents' perception on internationalisation, presenting the conclusions of a survey taken by 5126 Romanian and foreign students enrolled in the 17 target HEIs, including reasons for or barriers against taking part in a study or placement mobility. Also, the paper offers an analysis of the university strategies on internationalisation, thus showing the perspective of Romanian universities in terms of what dimensions they prioritize, and what institutional measures are taken to integrate internationalisation into the teaching, research, or services of HEIs using as a proxy the objectives found in their strategic documents on the subject. Clarifying these aspects as well as discussing students' recommendations for improving the international dimension of education will help identify, in the final part of this paper, potential solutions to improve the international dimension of the Romanian educational system.

The purpose of this endeavour is to contribute to the improvement of the internationalisation dimension of education in Romania, by understanding more thoroughly the perspective of students, one of the biggest stakeholders in the field of HE and the potential solutions to improve it.

## Methodological Aspects

This paper focuses on a combined qualitative and quantitative analysis of data collected through a perception survey, followed by a scan of the conclusions emerging from the analysis. Choosing this combined methodological approach served as a driver for reflecting the complexity of the issues tackled by this research paper and the availability of data from multiple sources that needed triangulation in order to answer the RQs. This approach also has some connected limitations that we describe at the end of this paper. For the quantitative part of the analysis, we have investigated the relationship between different variables using nonparametric correlations and the variability among some of the correlated ones using factor analysis.

Data was collected through a survey designed and applied during the “Internationalisation, Equity and Institutional Management for a Quality Higher Education” (IEMU) project.

Section “[Internationalisation of HE in Romania—Short Introduction](#)” of this paper presents the qualitative analysis of institutional documents from 19 HEIs that included their objectives regarding the development of the international dimension of their activity.

We are aware of the limitations of this study that have two main sources: the unbalanced sample of respondents and the impossibility of presenting the perspective of other stakeholders regarding the efforts put up by the HEIs. The first of them derives from the fact that an uneven number of students from different universities took part in our survey, thus the sample is not representative for the entire

student population of the institutions that are part of the study. This could have been solved by factoring-in the sample, but we considered that, at this stage of the analysis, the reached conclusions are relevant even if not representative for the Romanian student or academic population. The second limitation would have been overcome if similar surveys were distributed among teachers and representatives of the HEIs management. This will be done through further initiatives and projects of the authors. However, for this paper, the mitigating strategy that includes analysing the official documents of the institutions that referred to the institutional objectives for internationalisation, reflects both the academics' and the management's perception of the priorities in this domain. (Since these documents were adopted through the voting procedure within the HEIs Senates).

## **General Context**

### *Relevance Issues*

The relevance of this paper is given by the fact that it innovatively considers students' opinion on the international dimension of education. The reasons behind this decision lie on arguments of the dimension of this stakeholder, their stake in the process of internationalisation and their characteristics as parts of the HE governance. Students are the largest stakeholder in HE—fulfilling both the role of beneficiaries of the educational process, and that of partners in policy development and implementation, since this was agreed in the context of the Bologna Process, by the Ministers of the EHEA states, in 2001. Moreover, we agree with the ESU arguments that the student input can be not only strong and unbiased but also extremely relevant, as students are, above all, the most interested academic category in providing useful feedback for the improvement of the educational system (ESIB 2001). Their stake is, therefore, bigger in what internationalisation is concerned as it is one policy area dependent on their involvement in the process from the beginning.

Students have already proved their interest in educational policies and perseverance in making a point according to their interest in all the international structures they have been represented since the establishment of The European Students' Union (ESU) in 1982. They have contributed to the development of EHEA and the implementation of the Bologna Process policy lines at national and local level. This is also true for the Romanian students.

As highlighted in the next subsections of the paper, there is a favourable context for discussing manners of improving the dimension of internationalisation in the Romanian educational system. Thus, there is no better moment for surveying the perception and opinion of all stakeholders, especially students, than now.

## *Concepts and Definitions*

Given the absence of an agreed-upon definition for internationalisation—the main concept the paper works with—as well as the many perspectives on it, the authors have chosen as a working definition for the paper the one developed in a study and revised Jane’s Knight definition (de Wit et al. 2015). This definition describes it as “[t]he intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of postsecondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society (de Witt et al. 2015). Just as the definition proposed by Jane Knight, the above-mentioned description includes two main related components—“internationalisation at home” and “internationalisation abroad” within the one of internationalisation of Higher Education (2008). And this way of perceiving internationalisation as a process or a set of measures that authorities, at different levels, can implement, stood at the basis of the study presented by this paper and developed the survey questions. It also emphasizes the importance of internationalisation in enhancing the quality of education. Last but not least, it also conveniently builds upon the idea of students as a major stakeholder in the HE system, as well as one of the major beneficiaries of this process and of all public policies and activities related to comprehensive internationalisation.

## **The Romanian Situation**

### *Internationalisation of HE in Romania—Short Introduction*

During the communist period, Romania was actively involved in the internationalisation of HE. “As part of a wider foreign affairs agenda of the pre-1990 communist regime, Romania implemented several strategies to attract foreign students. These strategies included applying lower tuition fees compared to other countries, providing specific services for foreign students, such as Romanian language courses, facilitating access to libraries, and introducing special university regulations, canteens and accommodation arrangements as well as providing a small number of government-funded scholarships” (Pricopie 2004). These policies were successful and, at the beginning of 1980s, Romania was among the top 15 countries in the world providing academic services for foreign students (by then foreign students accounted for 10% of total enrolments). The number of foreign students declined in the late 1980s and early 1990s, despite new bilateral agreements with Europe, Canada and the US and Romanian membership of the Socrates program (Deca and Fiț 2015).



After the fall of the communist regime, the Romanian ethnicity was addressed as part of a new government policy in the field of education creating a special type of mobility programs. At that time, through the policy, the Government offered students coming from The Republic of Moldova special study grants to attract them towards Romanian universities and determine their enrolment in the Romanian HEIs. This policy is still in place and it has extended the pool of potential beneficiaries to all ethnic Romanians living abroad, though it specifically targets The Republic of Moldova, Albania, Bulgaria, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, Ukraine and Hungary, as well as other ethnic Romanians living abroad.

Romania has been part of the Bologna Process since 1999 when it signed the Bologna Declaration. From 2004 through 2007, Romania implemented the main Bologna Process reforms, such as switching to a three-cycle system of HE, developing a qualification framework, implementing the ECTS system, issuing a diploma supplement, facilitating recognition of study periods abroad (Egron-Polak 2014).

A strategic influence on Romania's policies on internationalisation and more attention to their implementation was brought along with the opportunity to host the Bologna Ministerial Conference Secretariat in Bucharest, between 2010 and 2012 and organize the eighth Ministerial Conference in Bucharest. During this period, young experts were involved in the Bologna Secretariat, where they contributed to raising awareness on the importance of following the Bologna Process commitments and the specific issues where Romania still had to work on. During that conference, the strategy "Strengthening Mobility for a Better Learning" (EHEA 2012) was adopted as an addendum to the Bucharest Ministerial Communiqué. As a result, most of these Ministerial Conference recommendations were integrated in the most recent Romanian National Education Law no. 1/2011. Unfortunately, that did not automatically mean instant or full implementation in the Romanian HE system. Lack of secondary legislation, lack of funding or implementation capacity or simply the fact that the provisions changed many times since then are just some of the reasons for this situation. Therefore, Romania has only a few national public policies or strategies targeting the development of and support for internationalisation (UEFISCDI 2013).

Another reason for the prioritization of internationalisation could also be the decrease in the number of students in the Romanian HE system, hence the need to target new potential recruitment pools. However, to attract foreign students, universities needed to become more international. Attracting more students became essential for the survival of universities, which were otherwise forced to gradually resume their economically inefficient study programs.

However, the reality of the Student mobility in Romania is difficult to analyse especially because there is no robust data collecting system for internationalisation, as many experts have noticed, over the years. In many cases, both national and international experts recommended the improvement of the data collecting system

in order to be able to develop coherent and evidence data-based public policies. That is why, when describing the Romanian situation, one has three alternatives: (1) to initiate an individual effort in collecting raw data and analyse it; (2) to use data collected in European-funded projects and reuse it; or (3) use the only set of data available that dates back to 2011 from the classification initiative of the Ministry.

### *Student Mobility in Romania—Trends*

Since 2010, Romania has registered a positive trend in international degree-seeking students, their number reaching 5% of the student population (with an EU average of 7%). However, more than half of them are Romanian ethnics living abroad. Thus, Republic of Moldova is the no. 1 country of origin for international students studying in Romania. They benefit from bilateral agreements allowing them to study in Romania in their native language. For the rest of the international students, low tuition fees, low living costs and a large number of available study places—especially in medical programmes, are very attractive, and less attractive is the level of development of the international dimension of the Romanian HE system.

Compared to these students, there are almost three times more Romanian students seeking degrees outside of the country—the top three destinations for them are the UK (5900 students), Italy (5700 students) and France (4200).<sup>1</sup>

The same proportion is reflected among students involved in credit mobility programs: there are three times more students going abroad to study or work (6885 outgoing students in 2014–2015), than those coming to Romania (3418 incoming students in 2014–2015), but the overall number of students involved in such mobility programs is still low (ANPCDEFP and CPEDU 2015).

In terms of a strategic document in the field, Romania has no national strategy on internationalisation of HE endorsed by the Ministry of Education, only a proposal developed during the IEMU project, in 2015. In 2016, the Ministry created a working group appointed to finalize a national strategy on internationalisation, but unfortunately, in 2017, it did not record any progress (the Government changed and meetings of the WG were resumed).

To conclude, this article takes all these observations—the status of the internationalisation dimension, the demographic challenges, the opportunity to develop the internationalisation etc.—and suggests a way forward. This refers to using the perspective of students on this area in order to develop it. The following two sections of the paper aim to do exactly this.

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<sup>1</sup>Dataset available online, here: <http://data.uis.unesco.org/Index.aspx?queryid=172> (UNESCO Institute for Statistics—Outbound internationally mobile students by host region).

## Results and Discussions

### *The Perspective of Romanian Universities*

An analysis (during the IEMU project<sup>2</sup>) of the strategic plans of 19 HE institutions (UEFISCDI 2015) was conducted and revealed the goals and objectives for internationalisation of Romanian universities. Despite the natural differences between universities, as well as their mission and context, that determined normal differences in their strategies, the authors of the UEFISCDI study also observed some similarities (2015). For example, most of the institutional strategies covered the areas of internationalisation at home, mobility, research, marketing, partnerships, services for international students and areas regarding the quality of education and internal organization matters. All universities had goals related to internationalisation at home, namely developing programs taught in foreign languages, developing foreign language skills for the teaching staff, attracting international speakers and staff. The authors considered this as a proxy for the interest the university has for these aspects of the international dimension of education. Unfortunately, the study also revealed a limited understanding of the concepts linked to internationalisation, as there were no signs of intending to internationalize the curricula of the offered programs—for example. Moreover, there were no signs of their intention to develop internationally relevant competencies as part of the intended learning outcomes. Increasing mobility was also a goal of all institutional strategic plans, focusing on both incoming and outgoing mobility, and only in few cases, the importance of the qualitative aspects of mobility was highlighted. Research is still one of the main areas that universities are very interested in, this being the area that enables teachers to improve their career and that supports other initiatives in internationalisation. The goals for this area of interest were related to increasing research partnerships and attracting new funding opportunities and researchers. More attention was paid to increasing the number of partnerships than to the importance of choosing them strategically. Marketing and promotion were, as well, a core goal focusing on increasing the university's international visibility and developing a dedicated marketing strategy to become more visible in the international area, thus attract more students. In terms of partnerships, the focus was on increasing the number of partnerships and involvement in international networks, without taking into consideration the importance of choosing these in a strategic way. Half of the analysed universities had goals related to improving student services, but none of the institutions mentioned improving staff services. It is a positive thing that most of the institutions developed institution goals based on results of surveyed international students.

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<sup>2</sup>IEMU—Internationalisation, Equity and University Management for a Quality Higher Education—project developed during 2014–2016 by UEFISCDI.

Other goals mentioned in their institutional strategies were related to the third mission of the institution, involvement in the local community and start partnerships with local businesses (companies, local branches etc.), becoming an important regional stakeholder, building an alumni network, developing online and/or blended programs, including the use of MOOCs.

## *The Student Perception*

### **Demographic Profile of Respondents**

The results of the survey (developed during the IEMU project) taken by 5126 Romanian and foreign students enrolled in the 17 target HEIs are presented below. Out of the total number of respondents, 5.7% are foreign students and 94.3% are Romanian students, while 61.7% are male and 38.3% female. Most of the respondents were at the time enrolled in a BA programme—83%, while 21% in a MA programme. Out of the total number of respondents, 2.1% were Ph.D. students and 2% identified themselves with none of the categories, which means they were probably post-doc students or individuals following post-university studies etc.

As far as their distribution over the study fields, respondents cover all major study fields and reflect more or less the student population in Romania: 41.3% study Social Sciences and Sport, 17.7% Engineering Sciences, 17.1% Mathematics and Natural Sciences, 10.6% Humanities and Arts, 7.8% Biological Sciences. 5.4% of the respondents gave invalid responses, thus falling in the *Not defined* category.

### **Perception of the Level of Internationalisation of the Romanian HEIs**

Most of the students consider that their HEI is internationalized, but not in a very deep and meaningful way or they consider that their university is channelling only a small percentage of their resources towards internationalisation. However, students from various fields of study have considerably different perceptions on the internationalisation activities performed by the university. This could be explained in two ways. First of all, certain universities or faculties might have at hand more resources to spend on these issues, thus their efforts to internationalize their institution would be more visible. For example, students in the Economic field of study are privileged in this way, as their faculties attract many students, most of them paying high tuition fees, thus their institutions have a large budget to work with.

On the other hand, there are certain study fields that traditionally attract many foreign students in Romania. For example, 50% of the students enrolled in Medical programmes are foreign students choosing to study in Romania due to the low tuition fees, compared with their countries, or due to the severe quotas on these programmes in their home states. Obviously, the HEIs with Medical programmes

are more advanced in implementing all the mechanisms and instruments of the international dimension, thus the respondents coming from these universities are prone to considering their institution more international.

These aspects could be further explored in order to answer the questions about the source of the observed dissimilarity among study-fields and/or institutions in what perceived internationalisations is concerned. It could be due to the fact that different institutions have differentiated access to international activities because students are involved differently, or because these students have distinct expectations from their universities regarding its international activity, therefore they are not satisfied with the same initiatives undergone by the institution.

However, these observations might be hindered by the fact that the study did not include a stage of pondering the results from different clusters of respondents in order to unify the difference in volume of the clusters—as explained above.

Our first hypothesis was that the perception of internationalisation differs with the field of study and there were signs pointing into the direction of verifying this premise. However, no statistically significant correlation was identified between the study field of the respondents and their perception of the level of internationalisation of the institution they are enrolled in (Fig. 1).

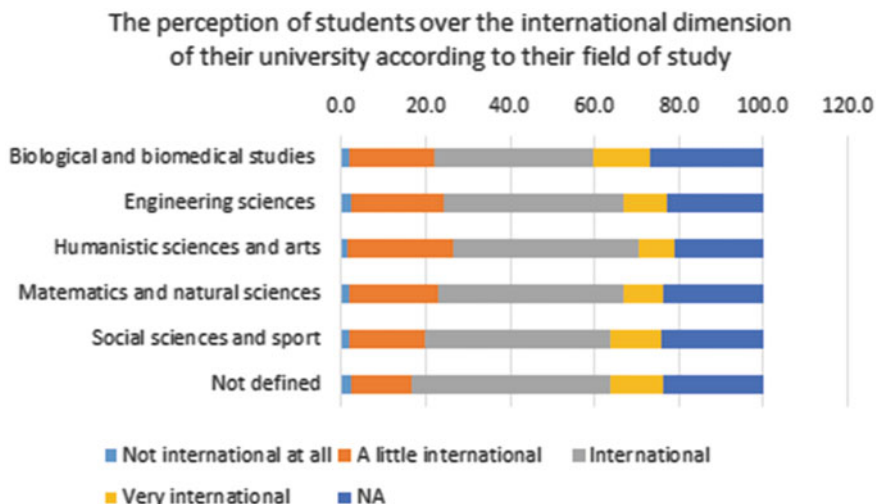
As explained in the previous sections of this paper, internationalisation means different things to various people, therefore it was of interest for us to explore the possibility of understanding what are the proxies considered by the students when thinking about an internationalised university. We used the responses to answer the following question: *“What do students take into consideration when they say their university is very international?”—a question that could also offer insights over “What efforts undertaken by universities to develop more internationalized HEIs do students perceive as being implemented and working?”*.

From the respondents that consider their university “very internationalized”, 81% responded that their HEI has the website available in different languages, 86% that there is a variety of international subjects to choose from, 82.8% said that some programs or courses are delivered in English, or other foreign languages. Moreover, 74% consider that the university looks international when you walk around, 85% consider that there are international activities and events, 73% find that the library has a wide range of international texts and 57% agreed that signs are written in different languages. All these proved to be positively correlated with having international students (Table 1).

In terms of information, 89.5% of the respondents consider that their HEI gives opportunities to study, work, or volunteer abroad, 82.6% find that there is good information about study, work, or volunteering abroad and 70.4% find the International Relations Department as helpful (Table 2).

However, when testing the relationship between grading one’s university as very internationalised and all the elements of internationalisation, a correlation proved to exist with the following affirmations:

- My programme prepares me to work in an international environment (prepare).
- Teachers encourage study/work/volunteer abroad (encourage).



**Fig. 1** Perception of students on the international dimension of their university according to fields of study

**Table 1** Correlation between (1) being perceived as able to welcome international students and (2) being perceived as offering them opportunities to mingle, with all the tested elements of internationalisation (website in a foreign language, English study programmes, etc.) all gathered in one overstanding indicator—I1

		Welcome	Mingle
I1	Correlation coefficient	0.306**	0.330**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000
	N	3913	3913

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

**Table 2** The link between the perception over the activity of the international department and the perception over the availability of data about the mobility opportunities, as well as the link between the perception over the number of mobility opportunities (study, working or volunteering) and the perception over the availability of data about them

		Opps_A	Depart
Info	Correlation coefficient	0.429**	0.331**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000
	N	3913	3913

\*Info = There is good information about study work volunteering abroad

\*Depart = There is a helpful International Relations Department

\*Opps\_A = There are opportunities to study work volunteer abroad

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

- My programme helps me develop an international outlook (outlook).
- International opportunities are included in the programme (Opps).
- There is the opportunity to study another language (languages).
- Academics and support staff are aware of European global issues
- There are teachers from other countries in my programme (Acad\_foreign).

A complementary correlation was tested positive with the elements that influenced the respondents to rate their university as very poorly internationalised—the university is perceived as lacking:

- A choice of international study subjects (IntlSubj).
- International activities and events (intlAE).
- Signs in different languages (sings).
- Capacity of welcoming international students (welcome).
- Activities and events that help home students and those from other countries to mingle (mingle).
- Openness of Support staff (staff\_open).
- Capacity of support staff to speak other languages besides Romanian (staff\_global).
- Capacity of academic staff to speak other languages (languages\_A).

The third hypothesis tested was whether there is a positive correlation between the participation in a mobility program facilitated by the university and the perception that it is “internationalised”, thus that students who have been in an international mobility tend to say their university is international.

As seen in Table 3, we have failed to reject this hypothesis, since we have a correlation level between the two variables of  $r = 0.475$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , that is participants in a mobility program tend to perceive their home institution as more internationalised. This could be explained in two ways: either, these students consider their institution internationalised based on the fact that it offered them the opportunity to study, work or volunteer abroad and this is enough for them; or they are more perceptive to the elements of internationalisation, thus more easily observing them among the efforts of their university. This was surprising since our expectation was that students who have participated in an international mobility, and have already met another international institution, thus being able to compare it with their home university, will be more critical with the latter.

When testing for the relationship between the perceived internationalisation level of HEIs and other characteristics of academic and support staff, we found only one statistically significant relationship. In universities where support staff is perceived as being open to international students, it is more likely for respondents to perceive the institution welcoming to international students.

**Table 3** Relationship between level of internationalisation and participation in a mobility

Correlations			Internationalization	Mobility
Kendall's tau_b	Internationalization	Correlation coefficient	1.000	0.417**
		Sig (2-tailed)	.	0.000
		N	5126	5126
	Mobility	Correlation coefficient	0.417**	1.000
		Sig (2-tailed)	0.000	.
		N	5126	5126
Spearman's rho	Internationalization	Correlation coefficient	1000	0.475**
		Sig (2-tailed)	.	0.000
		N	5126	5126
	Mobility	Correlation coefficient	0.475**	1.000
		Sig (2-tailed)	0.000	.
		N	5126	5126

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

### ***Mobility Programs: Reasons and Barriers***

One of the most well-known aspects of internationalisation is mobility of students. In Romania, mobility programs are sometimes mistakenly associated as the only part of the internationalisation dimension of the university, thus the only one that is in the focus of data collection efforts—as section “[General Context](#)” has shown. Mobility programs are more or less the only activity in which students are directly involved, not only as beneficiaries but also in the process of decision-making or implementation of public policy. That is why a great part of our questionnaire addressed the issue of student mobility programs in trying to find out the students' perspective on their implementation. The aim was to identify the positive aspects/reasons for and barriers in the way of attracting more students in participating in mobility programs. The other aim was to identify potential solutions from the students' perspective to improve the mobility programs and the international activity of the university.

Out of all responses, 19% have participated in a mobility program (study mobility, placement/internship programs), 37% did not take part in any mobility, but they would like to try one in the future, and 19% of respondents did not participate in a mobility. Unfortunately, 23% did not answer this question, thus their status is unknown.

Out of the total mobile students, 61% had a study or research mobility experience, 36% underwent a placement mobility (being involved in a job/internship) and



**Table 4** Distribution of respondents according to the perceived level of internationalisation of their institution and their previous experience in a mobility program

	Yes (%)	No (%)	NO, but I would like to go (%)	NA (%)
Very international	3.14	<b>2.30</b>	5.63	0.11
International	<b>11</b>	11.21	20.85	0.17
A little international	<b>4.60</b>	5.22	9.91	0.01
Not international at all	0.56	<b>0.42</b>	1.09	0

Yes—they have already been part of one; No—they did not get this chance; No, but would like to go

**Table 5** Contingency table of conditional proportions for the two variables: owning a website in a foreign language and having an international student community

Website in foreign language	International student community		
	Yes	No	Not know
Yes	0.789617	0.65625	0.714286
No	0.076503	0.16875	0.061224
Not know	0.13388	0.175	0.22449

12.9% had a mobility as a volunteer. Only 2.92% out of all mobile students had the chance to take up all three types of mobility opportunities.

According to this contingency test, one can conclude that providing a website translated in a foreign language can have a direct impact on the potential of growing the international student community.

Our hypothesis as for the reasons that determined students to follow a mobility program was confirmed, as respondents mentioned, among the most important reasons for choosing a study mobility, the following: personal development opportunities (88% of respondents), new career opportunities (83%), and taking up the financial opportunity (67%). In addition to these reasons, students also mentioned that an element they considered attractive and a good reason for them to go on a study mobility was the opportunity to follow a course or a program unavailable in their home-institution (38%). The support of their family and friends was one of the reasons encouraging 18% of the respondents to take up this opportunity.

The lack of financial resources is one of the well-known issues linked to lack of access to education or the reason for early drop-out, and one of the most frequently mentioned barriers (47%) that stands in the way of more students embarking on a mobility program (study/research/working mobility). It is commonly known that the Erasmus + grant is not enough to cover the real costs of the mobility, thus universities request students to manage the difference (e.g. by requesting financial support from their families or taking up loans with this purpose). However, many of them cannot receive this kind of help. In this position, one can observe especially those students coming from categories that are already under-represented within the educational system and face high risks of social exclusion. They are usually students with several combined risk factors, namely they come from rural environments, from poor families, with parents who do not have high levels of education, thus have small chances to earn enough in order to support them financially.

Moreover, they lack the appropriate previous education (e.g. high levels competencies in languages or knowledge about the cultural aspects of other countries) or the life expectations to motivate them to engage in this effort and to believe they deserve such an experience and can make it possible. These elements would prevent them not only from applying for a mobility grant but also from having a pleasant and successful experience abroad, should they be given this chance.

However, there are other reasons that make students reluctant to apply for a mobility, such as incomplete information about the process (18%), few opportunities available—that are distributed based on merits, thus only very few privileged students benefit from them—(18%). In addition, the lack of moral support from families or friends (14%)—for e.g. the fact that none of their friends/colleagues participated in such a mobility (11%), or the anticipated difficulties upon return is a turn-down (6%) too. As a conclusion to the information above, we could say that there is not enough counselling (from the HEI level) and information sharing regarding the process of applying and the benefits of taking a mobility.

### ***Students' Recommendations for Developing Internationalisation***

Students were asked to suggest a few ways in which they consider their university could improve its international dimension. 49% of the respondents mentioned the importance of developing more international cooperation opportunities, inviting more foreign academics to teach within the university (39%), offering more courses in English even for home-students (31%), and attracting more international students (32%) in order to ensure a more diverse learning environment (32%). Courses taught in foreign languages would contribute to the development of appropriate language competencies among students, thus helping them when applying for a mobility abroad.

Other suggestions were to raise the level of decision-making transparency, improve the promotion of mobility opportunities, and raise the capacity of teachers to teach in foreign languages, develop MOOCs and online courses, adapt the curriculum so that it follows international trends, organize alumni events, and invite professionals to share their previous mobility experience. They considered that organizing events where students can share their international exchange experiences would be of great help, as well as hiring new/more staff for coordinating the process and organizing a “buddy system” (tutoring) or finding manners to expose home students to multicultural environments (ANPCDEF 2013). All these would also help increase the participation of students in mobility programs.

Other similar studies in the field revealed in 2015 other student recommendations that included (ANPCDEF and CPEDU 2015):

- Increasing the transparency of study/exchange programmes by offering relevant information in a way that best suits the needs and expectations of the interested parties;
- Making the funding available upon departure;
- Increasing the value of the grant;
- Offering more support to beneficiaries in covering the paperwork, finding accommodation, and solving other logistic issues; Reducing paperwork and bureaucracy specific to the programme.

Looking at the suggestions offered by students, one could say they have a good understanding of the HE policy-making processes, some of the recommendations are consistent with the agreed directions of the Bologna Process in the Ministerial Communiqués, and their recommendations are aligned with the authors' opinion. However, they are obviously not familiar with all the elements of internationalisation at home, thus not many of them are found in the list of students' recommendations.

## **Conclusions**

Having analysed all these data, we conclude that despite the already registered efforts of the universities regarding the development of their international dimension, they have a long way to go to fully develop it.

## ***Strengths***

Even though students from different fields of study have very polarized perceptions of the internationalisation of their university, most of the respondents consider that their university is internationalised. When characterising their university as such, students appreciated different efforts undertaken by their institutions. Some considered that the most important thing is to have a website available in a foreign language, some courses or programmes delivered in English or the possibility to choose from a course offer that included international subjects. Others appreciate more an international-looking campus, the availability of international texts or materials in the library, the offer of events or activities with international participation etc. However, the majority of the survey respondents still appreciate the most the efforts made by their HEI regarding the opportunities to study, work or volunteer abroad, and mobile students tend to appreciate that their university is more internationalised.

### ***Weaknesses of the Internationalisation Dimension***

However, the general perception is that the efforts towards internationalisation are only occasional and lack in depth and a strategic approach, while many of them still only refer to organizing mobility programs. Unfortunately, students do not perceive many of these efforts, thus proving that one of the main weaknesses of the internationalisation initiatives is communication with the students. In the absence of other efforts, these mobility programs will only be able to send Romanian students abroad, to study, work or volunteer, and not to attract international students or academia. Thus, the number of mobility beneficiaries is still small, as students are not motivated to embark on such experience, nor helped to overcome the perceived barriers.

The study reveals the student perception on internationalisation is limited and that only some of its elements have an impact or are actually visible to students. This makes us believe that it would be useful to teach students what is comprehensive internationalisation, through trainings or lectures, in order for them to fully understand the internationalisation of HE and see all the possibilities they have at hand to further contribute to the development of this. This can enable them to provide comprehensive feedback not just for mobility programs but for all internationalisation processes undergone by their university.

### ***Motivations and Barriers Encountered by Students When Considering Being Part of a Mobility Program***

Furthermore, this study provides relevant data and observations of the obstacles and barriers to mobility, which can be connected with institutional and national policies on internationalisation as a good starting point to improve these policies. Out of these results, we can understand the type of policies or regulations universities could develop in order to encourage students to go on a study or placement mobility, leading to prepare active citizens for the global market and meet the EHEA target of 20% of international students abroad by 2020. Even though this target is set at a European level, Romania still has to improve its percentage of outgoing and incoming student mobility. In addition, we recommend that universities focus more on implementing and developing new policies such as creating special scholarships or other financial incentives for those who want to go abroad. It is well known that EU grants are not enough for students, and not being able to cover the remaining costs is the main reason why most students do not want to take part in a mobility. As recommended in the 2012 “Mobility for a better learning” strategy, there is a need for developing awareness campaigns for students, academics and parents in order to better understand the goal and importance of a short-term mobility abroad and the impact these could have on the development of a student in becoming an EU active citizen with a complex skill set. Furthermore,

counselling centres for students who want to go on a mobility would also be helpful in order for students to have the courage to take a mobility opportunity, be prepared for such an experience and understand the impact this activity could have on his/her personal and professional development.

The choice of going to study abroad for a period is justified by the possibility to personally and professionally develop during that period, thus becoming more employable. The most common reasons for students not engaging in outward mobility are financial difficulties experienced abroad or inadequate support from the home university. The latter translates in a small number of opportunities, lack of updated information and of cooperation for recognition of the study period abroad for the student returning home. Students provided their feedback on the exchange/mobility program in terms of positive aspects and issues that still require fine-tuning in the recommendations section.

### ***Institutional Perspective on the International Dimension***

From the analysis of the institutional documents regarding internationalisation, one can conclude that endeavours towards it represent small efforts directed towards many elements, with no prioritised directions that could add value to the university. Unfortunately, most of the efforts are still built around the mobility programs and sometimes for research.

### **Recommendations**

It is important to emphasise the need for more efforts to be directed towards making these processes more transparent, better promoted and communicated among the potential beneficiaries. Also, there is a need for a better-facilitated access to the information regarding the mobility process through specialized centres. The available support regarding the mobility process through specialized centres. The available support needs to cover financial needs, emotional needs (empowerment, motivation) and academic needs (academic requirements to study in another country and ease of recognition of the mobility program upon return). As well, there is a need for understanding the students' perception of the benefits and risks of internationalisation and align more the mobility aspect of internationalisation with the internationalisation of the curriculum, teaching and learning.

As a recommendation, we suggest developing internationalisation at home in all its aspects (internationalised curricula, more international students and international staff etc.)

More funding is needed both for developing more international cooperation opportunities, offering more English-taught or internationalised courses or improving the marketing of mobility opportunities, but also for investing in developing the institutional and human capacity of HEIs for internationalisation.

Better funding would allow the use of technology for improving the bureaucratic processes related to internationalisation as well as enabling more support to mobile students (moral and logistical), both before, during and after the mobility period. All these and a consistent data collection system for making informed decisions that might help improve the international dimension of the Romanian educational system.

As a recommendation on the Bologna Process, in order for the 20% mobility goal to be achieved, there is a need for more financial investment from all participating countries, as well as empowerment policies and programmes for students in order for them to understand the importance of internationalisation in all its aspects (internationalisation at home, curricula, teaching or mobility etc.). In the context of current heavy migration, the EHEA should take serious action and develop possible national/European policies and include workshops, courses and programmes in the members' institutions regarding diversity with all its aspects. Withal, better marketing for placement mobility together with special benefits for companies and institutions that could financially support students during their mobility period should take students' perception of the importance of internationalisation and the fact that internationalisation (e.g. mobility) can happen to another level of trust and awareness. As well, more policies and programmes dedicated to national and local level institutions could be developed in order to better align the mobility aspect of internationalisation with the internationalisation of the curriculum, teaching and learning. And as a final recommendation, to better understand students' perception of the benefits and risks of internationalisation together with possible improvements within EHEA, more studies at an institutional, national and European level should be done.

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**Part II**  
**Social Dimension Within a Quality**  
**Oriented Higher Education System**  
**(Coordinated by Jalmi Salmi)**



# Social Dimension Within a Quality Oriented Higher Education System



Jamil Salmi

## Introduction

*Equality of opportunity: the impertinent courtesy of an invitation offered to unwelcome guests, in the certainty that circumstances will prevent them from accepting it.*

*R.H. Tawney*

The European higher education systems have experienced two major transformations in the past decades. First, traditionally elite systems have become mass education systems as a result of the rapid increase in the proportion of each age group entering higher education. Today the EU-28 countries enrol close to 20 million of students. Second, the Bologna process has led to the harmonisation of degrees and quality assurance approaches within the European higher education space.

However, in spite of the spectacular growth in student numbers, higher education generally remains elitist, with a disproportionate share of students enrolled in the best institutions coming from wealthier segments of society (Marginson 2016). The various Excellence Initiatives aiming at making research universities more globally competitive, such as those in France and Germany, bear the risk of accentuating this trend. Even when they get access to higher education, students from under-represented and traditionally excluded groups tend to have lower success rates.

Even though the social dimension was not specifically mentioned in the 1999 Bologna declaration, it was explicitly underlined in the 2001 Prague communiqué as an important area deserving further attention. The 2007 London communiqué defines the social dimension as follows:

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Higher education should play a strong role in fostering social cohesion, reducing inequalities and raising the level of knowledge, skills and competences in society. Policy should therefore aim to maximize the potential of individuals in terms of their personal development and their contribution to a sustainable and democratic knowledge-based society. (p. 5).

Since then, European higher education systems have worked to ensure that efforts to raise the quality of teaching and research would go hand-in-hand with raising opportunities for under-represented groups, instead of bringing about increased social exclusion. The commitment to making higher education more socially inclusive was firmly inscribed in the 2015 Yerevan communiqué announcing the implementation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) social dimension strategy.

Looking at the social dimension in higher education requires focusing on the needs and trajectories of at least four equity target groups:

- Individuals from the lower income groups,
- Women,
- Groups with a minority status linked to their ethnic, linguistic, religious, cultural, or residence characteristics, and
- People with disabilities.

These categories are not mutually exclusive. In fact, quite the opposite is true. The principal dimensions of inequalities often overlap in several ways. For example, ethnic minorities tend to be more predominant in rural areas and are commonly affected by poverty. Being a girl with a disability in the Roma community is almost certainly the passport to a life of exclusion and discrimination.

In the European context, the drastic increase in refugees and illegal immigrants, fuelled by conflicts in South Asia and the Middle East, has translated into an additional category of students deserving careful attention from an equity viewpoint: refugee students.

Against this background, this introductory chapter explores various aspects of the social dimension in the European higher education space. After presenting a theoretical framework explaining the importance of the social dimension and explaining how under-represented students are defined in Europe, it reviews the articles included in this section and draws broad conclusions based on the findings of the studies.

## Theoretical Framework<sup>1</sup>

Given the extensive social and private benefits that result from higher education, inclusive access and success are essential for achieving social justice and ensuring the realisation of the full potential of all young people. While acknowledging fully

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<sup>1</sup>This section builds on earlier work by Bassett and Salmi (2014).

the impact of disparities in primary and secondary education which shape the size and characteristics of the pool of potential students at the tertiary level, there is no doubt that improvements in equity in higher education can offer meaningful and sustainable development potential.

Eliminating inequality is imperative for two complementary reasons: fairness and efficiency. In the first instance, religious, philosophical and legal traditions in most cultures emphasize equity as a pervasive concern. The 2006 World Development Report (WDR) on Equity and Development documents how several major religions endorse the notion of social justice as a basic tenet of their beliefs and values (World Bank 2006).

The WDR also analyses notions of equity as a fundamental theme in secular philosophical traditions. In ancient Greece, for example, Plato maintained that “if a state is to avoid [...] civil disintegration [...] extreme poverty and wealth must not be allowed to rise in any section of the citizen-body because both lead to disasters” (Cowell 1995, 21). Modern theories of distributive justice have shaped societies’ thinking about equity. The contributions of four prominent thinkers, John Rawls, Amartya Sen, Ronald Dworkin, and John Roemer, are particularly relevant in that respect. While their theories are characterized by significant conceptual differences, they all converge in moving the traditional focus of social justice from outcomes—such as welfare or utilities—to opportunities (World Bank 2006).

The economic efficiency argument in favour of equity promotion is just as strong. A talented, low-income and/or minority high school graduate who is denied entry into higher education represents an absolute loss of human capital for the individual person her/himself and for society as a whole. The lack of opportunities for access and success in higher education leads to under-developed human resources and a resulting shortfall in the capacity to generate and capture economic and social benefits (Harbison 1964; Bowen and Bok 1998; Ramcharan 2004). The public, societal benefits accrued by having higher levels of education present in the workforce include low unemployment rates, increased tax revenues, greater inter-generational mobility, greater civic and volunteer participation and lessened dependency on social services. Research has shown the positive effect of educational attainment on crime reduction, improved health and better citizenship (Lochner 2011).

Thus, in the interest of both social justice and economic efficiency, every individual must be given an equal chance to partake in higher education and its benefits irrespective of income and other individual characteristics including gender, ethnicity, religion, language, and disability. Considering the strong correlation between higher education enrolment and family background (McPherson and Schapiro 2006), concrete initiatives are necessary to provide better opportunities of access and success for students from lower-income families and disadvantaged minority groups. Without such purposeful action, the cycle of inequity can only continue, and disparities will endure.

The importance of ensuring equal opportunities is reinforced by recent advances in biology, neurology and genetics, which are challenging traditional views about the distinction between innate and acquired abilities. A growing body of evidence is

showing that the line between what is attributed to genetic heritage and the psychological, on the one hand, and cultural and social factors that shape each individual's development, on the other hand, is much finer than previously thought. Robert Sternberg from Tufts University leads this movement, which views intelligence as a set of competencies in development (Sternberg 1997; Sternberg et al. 2001).

## Defining Underserved Students in the European Context

Despite the common goal of increasing participation in higher education, there is hardly a common European definition of under-represented groups. Instead, it is up to each country to define how it views underserved categories of students according to its specific social context. With respect to national widening participation policies, very few systems in Europe set targets for specific groups. The majority tend to set general objectives and mainstream their policy approach instead of identifying specific groups (Eurydice 2015a). In addition, few institutions collect social data on their students. In countries such as France, Germany and the Nordic countries, strict privacy laws make it illegal to gather such data.

Similarly, a recent report on “study success” in 35 European countries revealed that the definition varies across Europe (EC/EAC 2015):

- Completion: students succeed when they have completed their study and earned a degree.
- Time-to-degree: students succeed when they have earned their degree within a set period (e.g., during the nominal period, plus one year).
- Retention or dropout: students re-enrol in a program until they earn a degree successfully; students fail when they drop out before completing their studies.

Almost half of the countries included in that report places a high policy priority on student success. Nevertheless, there is a dearth of data on completion. Only 12 countries report regularly data on completion and even fewer countries report on retention, dropout rates and time-to-degree. Referring to previous work done in this area, the study stresses the need (i) to harmonize definitions and data collection in Europe to allow meaningful comparisons and (ii) to promote research to evaluate which policies are effective.

Eurydice notes that, in most cases where completion and dropout rates are monitored, this is done without distinguishing students' profiles. Only ten countries look more specifically at under-represented groups. These groups are defined differently depending upon contexts.

The first academic year is critical to student success. “Yet, only about half of the EHEA countries have developed policies and practice focusing on the retention of first-year students”; of those, only one half (12) apply the full set of measures: introductory or insertion courses, tutoring and mentoring, and specific courses and supports to acquire learning and organisational skills (Eurydice 2015b).

## Overview of the Contribution of the Papers to the Social Dimension Theme

The eight contributions included in this sub-theme on the social dimension within a quality higher education system come under three categories. The first three articles analyse national level conditions and factors that influence inclusion. The second group reviews policies that have the potential of improving inclusion. The last group of articles is devoted to institutional responses to growing numbers of refugee students in Germany and Turkey.

The full list is as follows:

1. A Typology of Admission Systems Across Europe and Their Impact on the Equity of Access, Progression and Completion in Higher Education (Cezar Mihai Haj, Irina Mihaela Geanta and Dominic Orr).
2. The Social Dimension and the University Rankings (José M. Nyssen).
3. Study Success at the Clash Point of Excellence and Social Dimension? (Aleš Vlk and Šimon Stiburek).
4. Studying and Working—Hurdle or Springboard? Widening Access to Higher Education for Working Students in Malta (Christine Scholz Fenech and Milosh Raykov).
5. The Role of Student Counselling for Widening Participation of Underrepresented Groups in Higher Education (Janine Wulz, Marita Gasteiger and Johannes Ruland).
6. Inclusive Practices in Response to the German Refugee Influx: Support Structures and Rationales Described by University Administrators (Lisa Unangst and Bernhard Streitwieser).
7. A New Aspect of Internationalisation? Specific Challenges and Support Structures for Refugees on Their Way to German Higher Education (Jana Berg).
8. Access, Qualifications and Social Dimension of Syrian Refugee Students in Turkish Higher Education (Armagan Erdogan and M. Murat Erdogan).

The first paper, by Mihai Haj, Geanta and Orr, is based on a comprehensive study of admission systems in the European higher education space. In spite of the complexity of admission modalities and contrasting approaches across European countries reflecting a variety of philosophical views regarding access to higher education, the authors were able to create a comprehensive classification of admission systems. They identified four main categories along the two dimensions of (i) selectivity upon entering higher education and (ii) degree of streaming in upper secondary education. They then proceeded to analyse the implications of each model in terms of equity and social inclusion, complementing their comparative assessment of the admission system of the 34 members of the European Higher Education Space with in-depth studies of eight countries.

The first group of countries—including for example Germany and the Netherlands—are those that stream students in high school, but where higher

education institutions are not allowed to select incoming students (*selection by secondary schools*). The researchers found this model to be the least favourable to low-income students.

The second group of countries—including for instance Finland and Portugal—are those where there is no streaming, but where higher education institutions are allowed to apply additional criteria to select their students (*selection by higher education institutions*). This model is not as restrictive as Type 1, but nevertheless higher education institutions tend to use academic achievement as a main selection criterion, which generally plays against under-represented students.

The countries in the third cluster have neither streaming in secondary education nor further selection upon entering higher education (*least selection*). Students in these countries—including, for example, Ireland and Sweden—have the widest options for choosing an academic pathway and the most equitable education attainment results.

The last group of countries—including for instance Romania and Spain—have both streaming at the secondary education level and additional selection upon entering higher education institutions (*double selection*). Paradoxically, these systems do not have the worst equity results but come in second place after the third model. This unexpectedly good result is due to the fact that these systems are doing relatively well in terms of female completion and participation of mature students.

The comparative evaluation of admission systems carried out in this article led the authors to make a few policy recommendations. First, the data suggest that, among the most effective ways of improving equity in higher education, eliminating early streaming comes as a priority. Second, the evidence shows that, by and large, higher education institutions in Europe do not consider the pursuit of inclusion as their responsibility. It is, therefore, important that governments put in place incentives to increase inclusion, following the example of Ireland and the United Kingdom. Finally, a closer articulation between secondary and higher education would go a long way towards increasing inclusion, particularly through joint services for academic and career counselling and bridge programs to improve the transition from high school to university education, as happens, for instance, in the United States.

The second article, written by Nyssen, looks at the relationship (or lack thereof) between university rankings and a range of purposes linked to the social dimension, stressing not only equity aspects but also those relating to democratic citizenship, sustainability and human rights. The author starts from the observation that, in spite of their many methodological flaws, the rankings have come to be seen as a proxy for quality in higher education by a wide range of stakeholders. Bearing in mind the advantages and disadvantages of university rankings, rather than just criticising them, it may, therefore, be more useful to see how they can foster the social dimension outcomes of higher education.

Nyssen goes on analysing the most frequently mentioned international rankings, (ARWU, THE, QS, Webometrics and U-Multirank) to find out whether they include any indicators related to the social dimension of higher education. The main

finding is that U-Multirank is the only ranking with a few relevant indicators, namely those on gender equity and community service learning. The other rankings are all biased in favour of the research function of universities.

In the second part of the article, Nyssen proposes a set of indicators reflecting the social dimension of higher education that international rankers could take into consideration to widen the scope of their university classifications. The choice of indicators is based on a review of EHEA, UNESCO, UN, Council of Europe and EU statements about equity, inclusion and others aspects of the social dimension and also on the results of a Delphi survey made in the context of the Global University Network for Innovation (GUNI).

The third article, prepared by Vlk and Stiburek, examines the tension between the search for excellence and the concern for equity, with a focus on four former socialist countries in Eastern Europe, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. The authors use study success, completion and dropout as a filter to assess the impact of national and institutional policies to foster excellence in research and teaching. The purpose of their research is to test whether excellence and inclusion can be promoted at the same time.

Relying on information from the Europe-wide report on success (HEDOCE study), data from the OECD's Education at a Glance and national reports for each of the four countries reviewed in their article, Vlk and Stiburek review the range of national and institutional approaches used to promote success. In all four countries, the government introduced negative financial incentives to discourage students from taking too long to complete their studies. This meant, concretely, that they would have to pay fees if they exceeded a set time for finishing. Acting in a more proactive way, the Czech Republic has established social scholarships targeted for students with special needs. The beneficiaries appear to be more successful than the other students. Besides financial incentives, Poland and Hungary are providing students with detailed information on labour market outcomes to help them in their choice of academic programmes. Some universities have put in place counselling and support services for at-risk students.

Looking in more depth at the Czech experience, the article finds out that, due to the high degree of institutional autonomy, the government's ability to boost completion rates and reduce the number of dropouts is limited. The main instrument is the funding formula which takes graduation rates into account in the budget allocation to universities. The Ministry of Education also relies on institutional performance plans to boost social integration and improvements in academic success among at-risk students. At the same time, however, the priority given to excellence and increased research productivity appears to take the attention of university leaders away from teaching effectiveness and the need to decrease dropouts.

Based on the results of their case studies, the authors conclude that striving for excellence may lead universities to neglect important aspects that are not at the heart of national policies or measured by international rankings, such as the quality of teaching and learning, student support, diversity and other key elements of the social dimension. To reverse this trend, they argue convincingly in favour of

devoting additional resources to curriculum reform and innovative pedagogical initiatives to stimulate student engagement and recommend that QA evaluations take completion rates more systematically into consideration.

The article written by Scholz Fenech and Raykov is a case study of working students in Malta, investigating whether the fact that they are studying and working at the same time is an impediment in terms of social inclusion opportunities or an advantage from a skills building viewpoint. Relying on the results of the 2016 Eurostudent survey carried out in Malta, the authors analyse the profile and experience of working students and compare them with the situation of non-working students. The specific context of Malta is that of a still under-developed higher education system because of the lasting dependence on Great Britain, the former colonial power, even after independence, resulting in many labour market opportunities for unskilled workers and a higher share of students from well-off families than in other EU countries.

As reported in the article, the literature on working students points to the additional difficulties that these students encounter. In many cases they are at risk of enjoying the education experience less fully, suffering from mental stress, achieving lower levels of academic achievement and dropping out more easily because of the conflicting demands on their crowded schedule as working students. At the same time, some researchers argue that working students enjoy a motivational advantage in so far as they can more readily see the positive impact of their studies on their labour market situation.

The results of the Malta Eurostudent survey are consistent with what has been observed elsewhere. Close to 53% of all Maltese students work and study simultaneously. Working students tend to be older and come from under-represented groups with limited financial resources. Combining work and studies is more frequent among those students with a delayed entry into higher education, who tend to prefer part-time, short-cycle programmes. A positive finding of the survey is that students who combine work and studies are often enrolled in programs directly related to their job, despite the increased workload. This means that they are likely to improve their labour market outcomes in the long run.

One important finding of the study is that the impact of students' work on their academic achievement depends on the characteristics of their job and the intensity of their work. Students working more than 20 h per week alongside their studies are challenged by a considerably high workload resulting from the combination of their paid job and studies. The policy implication is that offering part-time and/or short cycle study programs with flexible hours is likely to encourage workers to pursue their studies and help low-income students who must work and study at the same time. Under these conditions, combining work and learning can be a springboard to increase the share of non-traditional students in higher education, thereby contributing to raising educational attainment in Malta.

The fifth paper, authored by Wulz, Gasteiger and Ruland, gives a student perspective on the role and importance of academic and career counselling for widening the participation of under-represented students. Using survey data collected in nine European countries, it explores how counselling services offered by



student unions operate, what challenges they face, and what contribution they make to promoting the social dimension in higher education.

Together with financial aid and student-centred teaching and learning, counselling is considered to be one of the most effective measures to reduce dropout rates, especially among disadvantaged students. The literature reviewed in the article confirms that counselling helps students make the right choice of study programmes, thereby increasing their motivation and the likelihood of academic success.

In three out of the nine countries (Denmark, Spain and the United Kingdom), the student unions do not provide counselling services as such, the task being undertaken by the universities themselves. But in the other six, the student unions are all directly involved in such activities. The survey results show a wide range of practices. The student unions offer both services to the general student population and targeted counselling in support of carefully identified groups of underserved students, the definition of these groups varying from one country to the other. They also work closely with other actors (government agencies, higher education institutions, NGOs) to coordinate counselling services and avoid duplications.

The article highlights two interesting trends regarding evolving practices in the area of student counselling. First, there is increasing reliance on online and social media mechanisms to support students in need of academic and career advice. Second, a growing share of the advice is provided by other students, confirming that peer counselling can be as effective or even more effective compared to advice offered by professional counsellors, especially when the role model relationship involves a student who comes from an under-represented group.

In the first of three papers on student refugees, Unangst and Streitwieser study the responses of German university administrators faced with rising numbers of refugee students in the wake of the Syrian civil war. Combining background reports and interviews with administrators and academics in 12 universities, they explore the main barriers encountered by would-be refugee students and the range of measures put in place by universities to facilitate access for refugee students.

Even though higher education policies are set in Germany at the state level rather than the federal level, several mechanisms operate at the national level to help universities confronted with the challenge of welcoming a larger number of refugee students. These include funding provided by the Federal Government and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) through the *Integra* programme, a central system to recognize foreign qualifications, a testing platform to evaluate the scholastic aptitudes of potential students, and language proficiency assessment tests. At the university level, however, few institutions have put in place a clear information system to monitor the academic progression of refugee students. This is further complicated by the strict privacy laws enforced in Germany, which make it difficult to access and analyse the personal data of students. Some universities have also been overwhelmed by the surge of applications in 2015 and 2016.

Based on the results of their interviews and review of relevant reports, the authors found that many refugee students interested in studying do not succeed in enrolling partly because of the language proficiency barrier. There is a considerable

variation in the type of support programs offered by German universities linked to differences in institutional decisions and administrator experience/interests regarding the refugee issue. Most universities, however, show an explicit effort to increase access for Muslim refugee women. The authors conclude that university administrators and academics involved in supporting refugee students would highly benefit from sharing relevant information and experience across universities and identifying which practices seem to be most effective in promoting success among refugee students.

The second article on refugee students in Germany, written by Berg, looks at the challenges experienced by refugee students in a complementary way, introducing a new angle by examining the role played by international offices at five universities. The paper reports on the findings of a series of interviews of international office officers at five universities in four states. In addition to the standard difficulties identified in the case of refugee students (funding, language, administrative requirements to prove one's academic qualifications, residential status and conditions), the study documents the social isolation and psychological distress experienced by Syrian students as a key integration barrier at German universities. In response to these challenges, most universities in the study sample have created positions to deal specifically with refugee students, most often as part of their internationalisation activities.

In the conclusion, the author underlines the positive contribution of preparatory colleges in preparing potential refugee students for the achievement and language tests. She also innovatively suggests that German universities, or for that matter all universities enrolling refugee students, should view the presence of refugee students as an enriching element of their internationalisation strategy with potential benefits for the entire student community.

The article ends with a few policy recommendations concerning the need for dedicated financial resources to institutionalise support structures for refugee students and help fund their living expenditures, and the usefulness of establishing networks bringing universities and outside agencies together to share relevant information and good practices. Regarding the general topic of social dimensions, the article argues that the implementation of support structures for refugees can, on the long-term, apply in a beneficial way to addressing the needs of other equity groups.

The last article, written by Erdogan and Erdogan, focuses on the experience of Syrian refugees in Turkey. Out of a 3.3 million refugee population, close to 15,000 Syrian students are enrolled in about 140 Turkish higher education institutions. The article, which draws on the findings of a survey of a representative sample of refugee students, analyses the challenges faced by these students in being able to access higher education and successfully complete their degree.

As mentioned in the two Germany cases discussed previously, Syrian refugees in Turkey must also overcome the language barrier and get their prior qualifications recognized in order to be able to study successfully in a Turkish university. In addition to these factors, the survey revealed the importance of providing specific information for refugee students about academic opportunities and funding sources.

While the Turkish government provides grants earmarked for refugee students, only 20% of Syrian students actually receive financial assistance. The majority of the students is funded by their families.

In spite of all the difficulties encountered, the Syrian students report that they are happy with the quality of education received and that they are achieving satisfactory results in terms of academic progression and success. This confirms that a high level of motivation—what some education researchers now call mindset—helps overcome the academic and financial barriers that refugee students are confronted with (Claro and Loeb 2017).

## Conclusion

*The willingness of nations to work together not just for refugees but for the collective human interest is what is being tested today, and it is this spirit of unity that badly needs to prevail.*

*Filippo Grandi, UN High Commissioner for Refugees*

The collection of articles presented in this book section on the social dimension of higher education shows that the Bologna process and the creation of the European Higher Education Space have resulted in a growing emphasis on equity and inclusion for all groups in society. At the same time, some of their findings illustrate the persisting gaps between policy and practice, between intentions and reality, between rhetoric and concrete actions.

Studying the social dimension in higher education from an international perspective reveals striking differences between policies in Europe and approaches in other parts of the world. By and large, most European countries do not have systematically targeted policies to support clearly identified underserved groups, unlike what happens for instance in the United States or in Australia. A possible exception is Ireland, which is a clear outlier in that respect with its well-articulated equity plan and sets of measures to promote access and success for students from a low-income background. European nations tend to implement mainstreamed strategies to expand access and success on the assumption—not necessarily well founded—that all groups will benefit equally.

An additional complication, in some European settings, is that student background data are not readily available, which makes it difficult to analyse equity needs and design targeted policies to implement the social dimension of higher education. The data limitations sometimes arise from a weak technical capacity at the national or institutional levels. But in some cases, ethical and privacy considerations can result in legal barriers to data collection on the personal characteristics of students, as is the case in France where universities are not allowed to collect or disseminate information on the socio-economic, ethnic or religious background of students, or in Germany and some of the Nordic countries where privacy laws are very strict about the kinds of data that can be collected about individual students.

European nations have sometimes adopted divergent approaches. For example, as documented in the case studies, some countries (Slovakia for example) try to discourage students from enrolling in part-time programmes on the assumption that full-time studies are of higher quality. But there is a growing consensus—illustrated by the results of the Malta Eurostudent survey analysed in this book—that offering flexible pathways is one of the most important ways of supporting underserved students.

On the positive side, a number of important lessons can be drawn. It appears that the most effective ways of increasing opportunities for underserved students are those holistic strategies that combine financial aid with measures to overcome non-monetary obstacles such as lack of academic preparation, information, motivation, time, and cultural capital. Thus, European policy makers, institutional leaders, student unions and NGOs can work together to address the social dimension comprehensively, instead of relying on piecemeal approaches for overcoming barriers to access and success.

Many of the learning difficulties that students bring with them to institutions of higher education result from inadequate secondary education. This is particularly true for students from rural areas and low-income students. Students with inadequate academic preparation and insufficient motivation are more likely to struggle in higher education and are at a higher risk of dropping out before earning a degree. Therefore, secondary and higher education systems can intervene more purposefully by engaging in coordinated interventions—both academic and non-academic—to support success among students from under-represented groups.

Many European countries are dealing with a major new equity challenge due to the rapid rise in the refugee population and the necessity of attending to the higher education needs of refugee students. As demonstrated by the three case studies included in this book, refugee students face significant barriers in the host countries. They must have a proper visa to live and study, get their prior academic qualifications recognized, learn the language of instruction, and find financial resources to study.

The success of refugee students in overcoming these barriers is determined, to a large extent, by the existence of national policies to provide the necessary academic and financial support and the willingness of higher education institutions to put in place adequate systems to orient and accompany their refugee students. Many universities and civil society organisations have established programs to help refugees overcome the various barriers mentioned above. However, three changes are needed in order to scale up the most effective programs. First, rather than compelling refugee students to fit rigidly into existing systems and processes, universities should evolve and adapt to the new groups of incoming students. The same principle should apply to other categories of “equity” groups, for example working students. Second, what is likely to make a real difference in terms of expanding refugee student programs is the direct support from governments and the availability of public funds to help refugees with their higher education. Finally, the dissemination of innovative practices in the area of refugee education is beneficial to spread peer learning about good practices and facilitate collaboration across universities.

Focusing on new challenges, such as the influx of refugees, should not distract policymakers and university leaders away from their efforts to address long-standing equity concerns such as the low participation of students from underprivileged families or the absence of women from engineering and science, especially in top academic positions. All stakeholders interested in developing the social dimension in higher education should embrace a comprehensive view of equity groups.

Finally, one area where Europe seems to stay behind developments in retention policies is the use of learning analytics and big data to identify at-risk students and set support interventions into motion. A recent survey estimated that about 40% of US universities have experimented with novel data analysis methods to follow the digital footprint of their students and detect, very early on, behavioural changes associated with potential academic difficulties (Ekowo and Palmer 2016). European universities could use smart applications of learning analytics to improve their interventions to improve the learning experience and achievements of underprivileged students.

No country or institution has found a magic answer to the question of how best to overcome the historic, cultural and psychological barriers faced by underserved groups. Nevertheless, the components of successful policy approaches outlined throughout the articles in this section provide a useful blueprint for developing new and innovative responses down the road and orienting much-needed further work in the critical area of equality of opportunities in access and success at the higher education level.

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# The Social Dimension and University Rankings



José María Nyssen

## The Quality of Higher Education in University and Its Link to the Social Dimension

The concept of *university quality* and a number of initiatives set up in order to improve this quality in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) serve the particular objectives that have been assigned to universities by society. Therefore, “quality criteria must reflect the overall objectives of higher education” (UNESCO 2009a).

These objectives, among others, are focused on the key role of a Higher Education oriented to increase social and human development and also to give its citizens “the necessary competencies to face the challenges of the new millennium, together with an awareness of shared values and belonging to a common social and cultural space” (European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education 1999).

A number of relevant supranational institutions have stated a broad scope of aspects related to the social dimension to which Higher Education has been invited to be fully involved for their development.

The most recent UNESCO Communiqués focused on Higher Education (1998, 2009a) stress the important role that this Education should play worldwide, not only for economic but also for social development. The above mentioned Higher Education objectives are guided by the commitment to leading society to generate global knowledge so as to address global challenges of the utmost importance (UNESCO 2009a)—for instance, developing quality programmes geared to bridging skill gaps for advancing sustainable development objectives (United Nations 2012), and they “should aim at the creation of a new society consisting of

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highly cultivated, motivated and integrated individuals, inspired by love for humanity and guided by wisdom” (UNESCO 1998).

These Communiqués are in keeping with an idea of *quality education* as “an effective means to fight poverty, build democracies, and foster peaceful societies” (UNESCO 2005). Actually, the Framework for the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (UNESCO 2006) as a precedent of the current UN Global Education 2030 Agenda, underlined the close relationship between sustainability learning outcomes and quality education.

In the European context, along with supranational institutions like European Union (2010, 2012) and Council of Europe (2006, 2010), which are also concerned about the impact of Higher Education in improving social development, the Bologna Process and the EHEA have played an important role by defining the “social dimension”.

The Bologna Declaration (European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education 1999), that marked the beginning of the construction of the EHEA, put forward an overview of key goals for the society in which Higher Education can contribute to their achievement. Therefore, these declarations identified a set of aspects linked to the development of economy and labour market, and also defined the cultural, intellectual and scientific progress in an international context. Furthermore, taking a historical perspective into account, the importance of some aspects closely related to social development (e.g. democratic citizenship, intercultural respect, peace, international cooperation, etc.) has been stressed.

On the basis of this Declaration, the “social dimension” in the Bologna Process was mentioned by European ministers for the first time in the Prague Communiqué (European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education 2001) two years later. This “social dimension” on that phase of the Process still had to be defined in its objectives, scope and contents, but there was anticipated concern in a number of aspects embedded in its scope, including mobility and its relationship with democratic values, diversity of cultures and languages, and the diversity of the higher education systems. Likewise, linked to the lifelong learning strategy and equity in the access to tertiary education, attention has been paid to improve social cohesion, equal opportunities and the quality of life.

But it is during the Ministerial Conference of Bergen (European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education 2005) when an initial definition for the “social dimension” in this European framework was created, and within this definition, the main objective of “making quality higher education equally accessible to all, and stress the need for appropriate conditions for students so that they can complete their studies without obstacles related to their social and economic background”.

Bearing in mind all these elements, the London Communiqué (European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education 2007) presented in a more precise manner the Bologna Process vision about the aims of Higher Education, including “preparing students for life as active citizens in a democratic society; preparing students for their future careers and enabling their personal development; creating and maintaining a broad, advanced knowledge base; and stimulating research and innovation”. And according to the above-mentioned vision, it went further than the



previous Communiqué in the range of purposes of the “social dimension” stressing not only equity aspects but those related to democratic citizenship, sustainability and regard for diversity.

Finally, the recent Yerevan Communiqué (European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education 2015), that is aligned with a vision of the “social dimension” mainly focused on aspects of equity and reduction of inequalities, stated on the previous Ministerial Conferences (European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education 2009, 2010, 2012), also lays down a “renewed vision” of the EHEA and its role in addressing serious challenges, in which democratic citizenship and human rights issues have been outlined.

In conclusion, despite some differences in the scope of the social dimension fostered by these supranational frameworks, all in all, they underline the importance of this dimension and furthermore reflect a common interest in its strengthening.

## **The Impact of University Rankings in Defining “Quality” in Higher Education**

If there is any consensus on rankings, it is on their considerable and growing *protagonism* as “quality measure” instruments, despite the weaknesses known to be associated with them (Altbach 2006: 77; Altbach et al. 2009: 11; Gutiérrez-Solana and Valle 2013: 27; Hazelkorn 2013a: 49–55, 59, 2013b: 85, 87; Marginson 2007: 131; Martínez 2013: 61; Rodríguez 2013: 151, 153; Saisana and D’Hombres 2008: 5–6; Salmi and Saroyan 2007: 82) and the mismatches between indicators of league tables and indicators of educational quality (Salmi and Saroyan 2007: 85). Attention is repeatedly paid in the literature to the problems found in these resources; for example, conditioning derived from: lack of data for calculation of fundamental aspects; lack of rigour in the methodology employed; lack of information and transparency in this methodology and in the dissemination of results; etc.

This work will not attempt a broad or complete discussion of the lively debate that has in recent years surrounded the proliferation of university rankings, though those interested in such a discussion will find it in such works as Dill and Soo (2005), Usher and Savino (2006), Marope et al. (2013) and Rodríguez (2013: 151–265). Rather, we will focus here on setting forth some key “narratives” of the idea of *quality* linked to these instruments that aim *prioritize* a range of aspects still under discussion.

The literature reveals a number of advantages and strengths of the facilitating character of university rankings:

- In their synthesis, university rankings “simplify” the information on the current state of higher education for various of the interested parties, supplying, in the strongest terms, a verdict on the quality, excellence or distinction of institutions or educational programs (in this respect, see Hazelkorn 2013a: 49; Marginson

and van der Wende 2007a: 55; Marginson 2007: 131; Marope and Wells 2013: 9; Rauhvargers 2011: 12; Rodríguez 2013; Safón 2013: 73; Santiago et al. 2008, vol. II: 254, 279).

- They also prioritize and make public information presumably “of interest” on certain aspects of institutions and programs of higher education (Buela-Casal et al. 2007: 2; Dill and Soo 2005; Hazelkorn 2007; Federkeil 2002; Marginson and van der Wende 2007b; Marope and Wells 2013: 12; Rodríguez 2013; Vlăsceanu et al. 2004: 52).

On the other hand, however, there is a notable conditioning derived from a reductionist construction of the concept of “quality” in university rankings that is not adjusted to the diversity of the demands that society places on Higher Education (Altbach et al. 2009: 11; Ellis and Weekes 2008: 494; EU High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education 2013: 36; Hazelkorn 2013a: 52–53; Marope and Wells 2013: 13; Rodríguez 2013; Scott 2013; Usher and Savino 2006, 2007). And among the above-mentioned demands, it is important to take into account those relating to the social dimension.

Habitually, the selection and weighing of “quality”—configuring indicators in international rankings—has the impact of prioritizing indicators associated with size and age of the institution, and with the volume of scientific research and production, fundamentally in English, all of which implies, a priori, the predominance of a particular institutional profile found mostly in a reduced group of countries (Altbach 2006: 79; Marginson and van der Wende 2007a: 62; Rauhvargers 2013: 19; Rodríguez 2013; Saisana and D’Hombres 2008: 8; Salmi 2009: 17; Salmi and Saroyan 2007: 84–85; Santiago et al. 2008, vol. I: 279; UNESCO 2009b: 25; van der Wende 2008: 60, 62). In short, there is a strong bias in favour of research universities, and less attention is paid to good practices of teaching and learning or to the regional engagement of the universities. “Institutional diversity”, in objectives and ways of reaching them, is radically diminished in terms of its compatibility with this particular idea of “quality”. Therefore, it would be difficult for any university not adjusted to this model to reach an advantageous position in relation to it. Despite this, all universities in the international context are, explicitly or implicitly, examined and evaluated through this *prism of quality*, which scarcely takes into consideration other enriching and relevant aspects nor any historical, disciplinary, contextual or cultural circumstances.

Another example of this is the type of expression used to denote the ideal position to attain, that of the highest esteem and value. This is frequently encapsulated in terms such as *quality*, *excellence*, *World-class*, *success* at a *Global scale*. However, the use of these concepts is habitually criticized as mistaking the part for the whole and for making an attempt to express complex concepts and objectives with very few and not always well-chosen aspects. Furthermore, these terms suggest an ideal state of *purity*, supposedly desirable in and of itself, though not effectively delineated into substantive components fundamental to higher education objectives such as social development or attainment of *capabilities* (Nussbaum 2012) by individuals in society.

In this sense, two points are of further importance:

- Firstly, the prioritisation of certain aspects established by the organisations and bodies setting the rankings disregards any accordance to the set of Higher Education objectives outlined by EHEA and organisations such as UNESCO. Therefore, such prioritisations can lead to the reorientation of Higher Education objectives ignoring the agreements of member states in this respect (some authors qualify this prioritisation as arbitrary or even to be in self-interest).
- Secondly, the idea of “quality” used in rankings, particularly in reference to the concrete aspects supporting it, does not correspond to a democratic criterion, but nonetheless it strongly affects Higher Education as a *public good* (United Nations 2010: 9) because university systems as a whole cannot escape being affected by the strong effects of rankings in the shaping of this idea, which is not including important demands in society.

Thus, there is a notable change in the behaviour of universities resulting from the effects of these evaluation resources and their results.

However, beyond the presumed virtues of rankings, and considering all of the problems we have seen, might there be an additional element explaining the enormous and growing influence these resources exercise on the policies of Higher Education?

A partial answer may be that these rankings, on top of everything else, offer something “of interest” which other resources do not offer in such evident and immediate form: participation in the social dynamics of self-esteem and explicit public recognition (Rauret 2013: 90; Rodríguez 2013: 152).

More concretely, rankings bestow public recognition upon universities, academic programs, and people connected to them (for example, research personnel or students), recognition which, both in and of itself and because of its frequent consequences, creates an incentive to upgrade in: (a) certain assessed factors, and (b) the supply of visibility—conveying information on advances in these factors (Hämäläinen et al. 2003: 12; Kaiser et al. 2007: 40; Marginson and van der Wende 2007a, b: 326; Marope and Wells 2013: 17; van der Wende 2008: 64; Westerheijden et al. 2009: 80).

It is clear that this pursuit of social recognition is no simple allegorical exercise, as this recognition is seen as a means towards access to resources and opportunities (Clarke 2007; Martínez 2013: 63; Liu 2013: 35) in a competitive institutional field.

With rankings, the better-classified institutions obtain, in many cases, superior resources and more prestigious professionals. Their students frequently have access to better jobs and contacts in higher positions with more responsibility. In short, there is a clear relationship between the idea mentioned above and *capital*<sup>1</sup> growth in a type of *Matthew effect* (Merton 1968, 1988; and also in this respect Altbach et al. 2009: 11, 32; Archer 2007: 641; Hazelkorn 2007: 4–5; ESU 2009: 39); so that institutions in better positions at the start tend to garner resources that allow them to maintain their positions.

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<sup>1</sup>“Capital” in a wider sense such as that used by P. Bourdieu (2000).

Also importantly, the dynamic of the *pursuit of social recognition* flourishes in the university context at various levels, reaching a point where it displaces other, presumably objectives of higher priority, and becomes essentially predominant. Put another way, *demonstrating its own value itself* becomes a primary objective over other elements.

On top of this, the semantic and formal elements of the university ranking narrative also convey a value judgment. For example, the highest ranked institutions are frequently alluded to as “elite” institutions, as opposed to “massified” institutions. This discourse invites a reading of the university reality in terms of the dichotomy elite/masses (Altbach et al. 2009: 84; Bjarnason et al. 2009: 15; Hazelkorn 2013a: 49, 2013b: 86; Marope and Wells 2013: 17; Rauhvargers 2013: 17; Santiago et al. 2008, vol. I: 308) and assumes an aspiration on the part of all universities to reach a state of identification with the elite and flee as far as possible from any connotation of “massification”.

However, instead of viewing the university world through the lens of “massification”, why not interpret this reality in other terms? For example, given the challenge of making a quality higher education accessible to an always greater and more diverse number of people all over the world, are not the very universities ranked at the “massification” extreme of the scale contributing in greater measure than those considered “elite” towards the goal of making education accessible to those of economically disfavoured social origin?

Further than this, there is a key conclusion. Rankings are oriented toward making social recognition possible through the valuation of very particular aspects and also map out a tangible route to its procurement, centred on improvements in these aspects. Thus, rankings are a powerful conduit not only for the public display of recognition but also for determining which efforts are to be made in its pursuit. For instance, some universities are using league tables for goal-setting purposes (Salmi and Saroyan 2007: 89).

In this lively debate about university rankings, an important question arises: *can rankings be used in a constructive way?* (Salmi and Saroyan 2007: 88). Given the impact of university rankings and the great importance of advancing in a range of social dimension goals through Higher Education, what if university rankings could foster the commitment of universities to better their outcomes as regards social dimension?

## **The Commitment of the University with the Social Dimension Through the Quality of Higher Education: A Proposal to Include University Rankings**

Five of the most currently followed international rankings were examined in order to verify whether, among the substantial objectives of higher education they contemplate, they include, to any extent, in their idea of “quality” any aspects related to social development through Higher Education (see Table 1).

**Table 1** Social development aspects in international rankings

University ranking	Social development aspects
QS World University Rankings®	Labour market issues
Academic Ranking of World Universities—ARWU	Labour market issues; relationship to industry
Ranking Web of Universities (Webometrics)	
Times Higher Education World University Rankings (The World University Rankings)	Relationship to industry
U-Multirank	Labour market issues; relationship to industry; gender equity; community service learning; regional engagement

The main conclusion drawn from this analysis is that four of these rankings do not contemplate indicators directly related to diverse aspects of social development, with the sole exception of economic indicators connected to labour market issues and to the relationship between universities and industry. Only U-Multirank has added a set of indicators relating to the social dimension, including issues such as *regional engagement* (e.g. BA theses with regional organisations<sup>2</sup>; MA theses with regional organisations<sup>3</sup>; Regional joint publications<sup>4</sup>; etc.), and more recently, *gender equity* (e.g. Percentage of female students<sup>5</sup>; Female students bachelor<sup>6</sup>; Female students master<sup>7</sup>; Female academic staff<sup>8</sup>; Female professors<sup>9</sup>) and *community service learning*.<sup>10</sup>

Nonetheless, incipient initiatives are already working toward the inclusion in university rankings of indicators tied to a bigger number of aspects through which higher education can influence social development; notably, among others:

- the “Call to Action” Communiqué (Talloires Network 2014): in which leaders from 134 universities and higher education partner institutions from 40 countries across the globe encourage the global university ranking systems “to take civic

<sup>2</sup>Degree theses of bachelor graduates done in cooperation with organisations (industry, public, non-profit organisations) in the region.

<sup>3</sup>Degree theses of master graduates done in cooperation with organisations (industry, public, non-profit organisations) in the region.

<sup>4</sup>The percentage of department's research publications that list at least one co-author with an affiliate address in the same spatial region (within a distance of 50 km from the university).

<sup>5</sup>Percentage of female students enrolled at the department.

<sup>6</sup>The number of female students enrolled in bachelor programmes as a percentage of the total enrolments in bachelor programmes.

<sup>7</sup>The number of female students enrolled in master programmes as a percentage of the total enrolments in master programmes.

<sup>8</sup>The number of female academic staff as a percentage of the total number of academic staff.

<sup>9</sup>The number of female professors as a percentage of the total number of professors.

<sup>10</sup>The percentage of credits given in service-learning activities, in relation to the total number of credits.

engagement seriously and to reduce the negative effects of the ranking systems on the public service responsibilities of higher education”;

- QS Stars ratings (QS Quacquarelli Symonds Limited 2014): a rating system that takes into account a number of factors that are often overlooked in university rankings, including in the “Social Responsibility” and “Inclusiveness” a set of criteria, such as “Community investment and development”, “Charity work and disaster relief”, “Regional human capital development”, “Environmental impact”, “Scholarships and bursaries”, “Disabled access”, “Gender balance” and “Low-income outreach”.
- “UI Green Metric” (Universitas Indonesia) and “Business Education for Sustainable Development—BESD” (Spitzeck and Siegenthaler 2007: 52–54): both *value-driven* rankings that aim at addressing sustainable development through league tables and a set of indicators focused on a picture on how the university is responding to or dealing with the issues of *sustainability*, such as transport, water usage, waste management, infrastructures, energy and the role of education by creating the new generation concern with sustainability issues.

This work, that is part of a wider investigation, aims to: (1) encourage universities to work to improve their situation over a range of aspects of the social dimension; (2) publicly value the work of universities on this matter; and (3) provide students and society with more complete, accurate and balanced information on university outcomes according to the Higher Education objectives outlined by EHEA and UNESCO.

Presented here as a complement to the above-mentioned valuable initiatives is a proposal to enrich university rankings, so that these, in turn, would incentivize a higher education more committed to social development in its various facets. Therefore, the proposal aims at reconciling social dimension objectives for higher education—set out by EHEA and UNESCO—with the *persuasive power* of rankings.

As a result of going through two main sources of information, a number of key aspects related to the social dimension and the Higher Education missions have been identified. This work has analysed, on the one hand, the institutional communiqués and official statements about Higher Education challenges published by EHEA, UNESCO, United Nations, Council of Europe and European Union from 1998 to 2015 and, on the other hand, the content of the Delphi study responses given by 214 experts (higher education specialists, rectors and other university employees, public policy makers and members of civil society involved in various different areas of development) from 80 countries, who were invited to participate in this study set up by Global University Network for Innovation (Lobera and Secretariado GUNI 2008) that aimed to gather the diverse participant’s approaches to the role of Higher Education for social and human development.

Far from a restricted idea of social dimension, the proposal that is presented is based on a more comprehensive idea of this social dimension according to the objectives of Higher Education stated by the above-mentioned institutions.

The proposal is divided into two parts:

- The first part of the proposal offers a series of indicators complementary to those already existing in international university rankings, so that these rankings incentivize attention to certain objectives tied to particular aspects of social development and, at the same time, serve as a guide for channelling the efforts of agents involved in the pursuit of these objectives.
- The second part of the proposal, subsequent to this, draws the main lines of future strategy for the strengthening, improvement, and recognition of the quality of university rankings more clearly conscious of these objectives and of their potential repercussions.

University rankings are not, a priori, forced to value a set of circumscribed dimensions of higher education—such as “scientific production” in certain journals—but their idea of “quality” may be shaped, at least in part, by the recognition of certain aspects of common interest related to social development.

Due to the great limitations in available data, this pilot proposal of indicators is meant to be a modest but realistic beginning, with every indicator open to discussion and to adaptation for incorporation in any nationally or internationally recognised university ranking (see Table 2<sup>11</sup>).

Centring our attention on the final five indicators in this proposal, which measure the presence in curricula of substantive learning outcomes directly tied to diverse facets of social development, as stated by Salmi (2009: 72–73), it is important to point out the debate on measuring learning outcomes at the tertiary education level as a recognition that “excellence is not only about achieving outstanding results with outstanding students but ought perhaps to be also measured in terms of how much added value is given by institutions in addressing the specific learning needs of an increasingly diverse student population”.

Actually, certain higher education objectives can only be reached if the substantive content joined to them is nurtured and empowered in a similar way as occurs now with other content more closely tied to professional development.

Beyond the mere proposal of new indicators open to being included in current university rankings, the next steps would be:

- First, carry out a pilot study contemplating the calculation of indicator results as far as available data sources allow.
- Likewise, confronting the lack of or inconsistency in data, document each case and call it to the attention of the entities responsible (or potentially responsible) for the sources of data.
- Second, submit this set of indicators and results to discussion by different stakeholders involved so that, on the one hand, the proposal is improved in specific aspects and, on the other hand, these stakeholders are encouraged to reflect on the importance of the relationship between Higher Education and social development.

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<sup>11</sup>More detailed information on the indicators and their data sources is available on request.

**Table 2** Set of indicators

Equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Annual contribution of the number of university graduates from recognized institutions to society</i></li> </ul> <p>Number of graduates from a recognized institution<sup>a</sup> per academic year  Note: Level of studies according to International Standard Classification of Education—ISCED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Upward intergenerational mobility in education (by parents' educational attainment)</i></li> </ul> <p>Number of graduates from a recognized institution whose parents both have below tertiary education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Gender equity in completion of higher education</i></li> </ul> <p>Ratio between the numbers of graduate women and men  Note: from a recognized institution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Gender equity in composition of highest level academic staff</i></li> </ul> <p>Ratio between the numbers of female and male full professors</p>
Institutional engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Consideration of work on social engagement</i></li> </ul> <p>Number (and level) of prizes awarded by institutions or institutional networks that are recognized in the field of Social Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Leadership in actions focused on sustainable development and social engagement</i></li> </ul> <p>Full member of a recognized university network focused on sustainable development or social engagement and also working at that moment on a project focused on that issue (published by the network)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Leadership in social development projects</i></li> </ul> <p>Annual amount received in order to coordinate competitive projects in the framework of institutional programmes focused on social development and cooperation</p>
Substantive learning outcomes in accredited university degrees <sup>b</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Learning outcomes in "Equity"</i></li> </ul> <p>Percentage of degrees that include learning outcomes focused on "Equity" out of the total number of degrees of the university (number of degrees in which their syllabuses include one or more learning outcomes or competences relating to "Equity" out of the total number of degrees offered by the university)<sup>c</sup></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Learning outcomes in "Sustainability"</i></li> </ul> <p>Percentage of degrees that include learning outcomes focused on "Sustainability" out of the total number of degrees of the university</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Learning outcomes in "Democratic Citizenship"</i></li> </ul> <p>Percentage of degrees that include learning outcomes focused on "Democratic Citizenship" out of the total number of degrees of the university</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Learning outcomes in "Human Rights"</i></li> </ul> <p>Percentage of degrees that include learning outcomes focused on "Human Rights" out of the total number of degrees of the university</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Learning outcomes in "Cooperation and Social Engagement"</i></li> </ul> <p>Percentage of degrees that include learning outcomes focused on "Cooperation and Social Engagement" out of the total number of degrees of the university</p>

<sup>a</sup>Available at

– UNESCO Portal to Recognized Higher Education Institutions—HEIs (<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/resources/unesco-portal-to-recognized-higher-education-institutions/>)

– ENIC-NARIC. Recognized HEIs (<http://www.enic-naric.net/recognised-heis.aspx>; <http://www.enic-naric.net/higher-education-institution.aspx>) and Quality assurance: accredited programmes (<http://www.enic-naric.net/quality-assurance-accredited-programmes.aspx>)

– Quality Agencies (INQAAHE <http://www.inqaahe.org/>; EQAR <https://www.eqar.eu/>)

<sup>b</sup>Official university degrees accredited by a Quality Agency (for example, in the EHEA, the quality agencies of the European Quality Agency Register—EQAR)

<sup>c</sup>e.g. Public information about competencies and learning outcomes included in each official degree syllabus in the Spanish University System, is available at the 'Register of Universities, Centers and Degrees—RUCT' website



- Third, integrate accepted indicators into the university rankings.
- And fourth, take progressive steps to inaugurate certification processes for university rankings.

On this last point, we are not starting from zero. For example, the objective of the IREG Ranking Audit initiative (IREG Observatory 2011) is to verify and certify that the ranking under study is professionally developed, with transparent methodology, observes best practices in its area, and responds to a need for information on the part of various agents (in particular students, higher education institutions, employers and institutional managers).

However, despite its similarities with the IREG Ranking Audit initiative (IREG Observatory, n.d.), which might suggest a complementary relationship, the project proposed here emphasizes in particular the need of bringing the bases for certifying the pertinence and quality of rankings in line with the Higher Education objectives reflected in texts endorsed by UNESCO or others of similar character in the respective fields involved in the construction of the European Area concerning us today. For this reason, substantive aspects tasked to these universities, starting with the teaching/learning process, would need to be addressed.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, there is a noticeable lack of attention to the social dimension in the rankings, although the inclusion of indicators focused on this dimension is not only important but also feasible and affordable.

The main purpose of the present work is to contribute to the fostering of a range of social dimension aspects in the EHEA through a newly proposed instrument focused on the impact of current university rankings. Therefore, taking into account the important role of higher education in addressing current and future challenges, further development is needed in order to make “quality measure” tools, including university rankings, more relevant for society.

Far from ignoring the magnetism of some social dynamics linked to university rankings, such as the previously noted “simplification” or “pursuit of recognition,” the immediate challenge may lie not so much in an impetuous battle against rankings as in taking advantage of their potential, making an effort to endow them with a *substantiveness* that favours social development in its diverse facets, encouraging its inclusion in the so-called *capabilities approach* (Sen 2000; Nussbaum 2007, 2012).

In short, given that university rankings are already a far-reaching reality, and bearing in mind the previous analysis of their advantages and disadvantages, it is fitting to try to ensure that their effects are, as far as possible, in the service of social objectives arising from democratic debate among a citizenry that is committed to the attainment of fundamental rights and freedoms.

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# A Typology of Admission Systems Across Europe and Their Impact on the Equity of Access, Progression and Completion in Higher Education



Cezar Mihai Haj, Irina Mihaela Geanta and Dominic Orr

## Introduction

In a world confronted with more numerous and diverse challenges than ever, having educated people becomes vital for economic and social development. The EU target stating that by 2020 the average share of 30–34 year-olds in EU member states with tertiary educational attainment should be at least 40% is on track, already reaching 39% in 2016 (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2014). A large part of this has been achieved through expanding the share of upper secondary graduates qualifying to enter higher education. This share increased by 4% between 2008 and 2015.

At the same time, on European level, the demographic decline can no longer be ignored, with some countries being more affected than others. For children and young people aged 0–29, the percentage in the overall EU-28 population has decreased from 41% in 1994 to 36% in 2004, to reach 33% in 2014 (Coyette et al. 2015). This translates into a smaller pool of potential students from which HEIs can select. And this demographic decline is starting to impact on European countries' higher education systems, with the absolute numbers of higher education entrants decreasing by 19% in the same timeframe (Orr et al. 2017a).

However, even within this framework, some higher education institutions (HEIs) continue to see growth in their entrants' numbers. When surveyed on this by the

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European University Association's Trend Study, HEIs attributed this overall phenomenon to widening participation, international recruitment and changes in the admission policy (Sursock 2015). So, it could be stated that the time is actually right for more inclusive policies since the pool of "traditional" students is declining in many European countries, and policy-makers and HEIs have to look to more inclusive policies (Orr and Hovdhaugen 2014). At the same time, higher education institutions (HEIs) have been keen to exercise their autonomy in recruitment and selection decisions. As such, higher education has entered a new phase of consolidation and realignment, which requires HEIs to implement new strategies for recruiting students—from focusing on candidates from lower socio-economic backgrounds, who have not been a major focus group in the past, to designing customised selection procedures.

Given this wider educational context, the role of admission systems to higher education becomes more important than ever. The admission system is a process of matching, guidance and selection that enables students to graduate with the new skills required for the networked knowledge society. In this, admission should be seen as a lengthy progression starting sometimes as early as primary education and continuing into the first year of higher education studies.

Moreover, admission systems into higher education are complex and vary across countries. They are the product of different social, historical, political and economic backgrounds, based on contrasting philosophies of education and what education can and should aim to achieve for individuals and society as a whole (Turner 1960). However, despite the great complexity of elements, there are similar features that allow a clustering of the admission systems across the EU Member States, EEA/EFTA countries and candidate countries into a small number of well-defined types.

This article will draw from the data and findings of the "Study on the impact of admission systems on higher education outcomes—EAC-2015-0470" (Orr et al. 2017a), which was commissioned by the European Commission and was published in August 2017. The authors were part of the consortium that was tasked to deliver the study.

It should be noted that this paper takes a "mainstream" view of the respective national admission systems, i.e. it tries to understand the baseline impact of the general system. Almost all higher education systems are confronted with further challenges regarding equity and inclusiveness (see chapters in this section on refugees and working students are just two target groups), and their possibilities for reacting to these are shaped largely by how the baseline system is configured. Furthermore, this approach does not take into account the large differences within higher education systems due to starkly different profiles. For instance, it describes the basic structure for France, but not the difference between general universities and the *grandes écoles*. For more details on how national admission systems are organised and work for the case study countries (including France), see volume II of the final report which includes detailed national studies (Orr et al. 2017b). In terms of their effects on equity, however, it is clear that greater stratification of higher education will further increase the challenge of achieving participative equity of underrepresented social groups and require even better directly policy initiatives.

## Methodology

The study used an innovative qualitative and quantitative mixed method, which aimed to look beyond the usual practices when analysing admission systems. While previous research relied mostly on comparative mapping among individual countries (McGrath et al. 2014), the methodology in this particular case focused on a broader perspective, looking at 36 European countries—the 28 EU countries, the five EU candidate members, as well as the three EEA/EFTA countries, and included focus groups and interviews to understand how the system really works.<sup>1</sup>

An initial extensive mapping was undertaken analysing the 36 countries across 24 indicators that followed students from primary education to the labour market, measuring both quantitative and qualitative aspects. This in itself was a challenging exercise, with identifying relevant data sources that were comparable. The information collected was then validated by national experts in all countries to ensure its accuracy, and a number of characteristics deemed most relevant were selected for further comparative analyses.

In order to reflect the diversity of countries in Europe in terms of higher education participation, to have a balanced geographical coverage as well as a focus on countries developing new initiatives in this area, eight countries<sup>2</sup> were then selected to perform an in-depth analysis which included both interviews with the policy-makers and key informants (representatives from ministries dealing with upper secondary and higher education and from other bodies responsible for the admission process, registrars from a number of public and private universities), and focus groups with students in the last year of upper secondary and first year of higher education. This provided a comprehensive view of the admission system from all stakeholder perspectives.

The results were refined and translated into a new typology of admission systems, under the form of a two-dimensional matrix built on what were deemed the most important dimensions of admission—streaming in upper secondary education and further selection by HEIs.

For the streaming in upper secondary education, the authors took into account the existence of significant learning pathways through upper secondary schooling that do not lead to higher education to split the countries in two groups:

- at least one pathway through the school system does not lead to a qualification enabling higher education entry (to some part of the system)<sup>3</sup>
- in general, all pathways may lead to higher education entry (in some part of the system).

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<sup>1</sup>For consistency purposes, Liechtenstein was excluded from the further statistical analysis.

<sup>2</sup>France, Germany, Ireland, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Spain.

<sup>3</sup>Streams that led to ISCED 4–5 programmes were not taken into account.



**Table 1** Types of admission systems in European countries

Selection  Streaming	(Nearly all) HEIs can select with additional criteria	HEIs cannot select with additional criteria (in normal circumstances)
At least one pathway through the school system does not lead to a qualification enabling higher education entry (to some part of the system)	<b>Type 4: Double selection</b>  <i>Croatia, Czech Republic, Iceland, Montenegro, Norway, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain, United Kingdom</i>	<b>Type 1: Selection by schools</b>  <i>Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia</i>
In general, all pathways may lead to higher education entry (in some part of the system)	<b>Type 2: Selection by HEIs</b>  <i>Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Portugal, Lithuania, Latvia</i>	<b>Type 3: Least selection</b>  <i>Albania, France, Greece, Ireland, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Malta, Sweden, Turkey</i>

Source Orr et al. (2017a)

Regarding the extent of higher education autonomy in further selection of students, countries were also split into two groups<sup>4</sup>:

- (Nearly all) HEIs can select with additional criteria, which included countries where most of the HEIs can also base their decision on secondary school exit results: results in the “secondary school exit exam”;
- HEIs cannot select with additional criteria (in normal circumstances), which included countries where most of the HEIs cannot organise any further assessment of students and the decision regarding students is taken based on:
  - national regulations with regard to the related discipline which pupils have achieved when graduating from high school and a random allocation mechanism;
  - national regulations regarding school exit results: results in the “school exit exam” or the grades for some disciplines in high schools;
  - a national entrance exam that provides further assessment.

The two-dimensional matrix has led to identifying four types of admission systems: Type 1—Selection by schools, Type 2—Selection by HEIs, Type 3—Least selection and Type 4—Double selection. These types were then reviewed for their impacts on equity, efficiency and effectiveness of higher education admission. This paper focuses mainly on the equity dimension in the analysis of admission systems (Table 1).

<sup>4</sup>Exceptions may exist for medicine, military, arts and EU-regulated programmes.

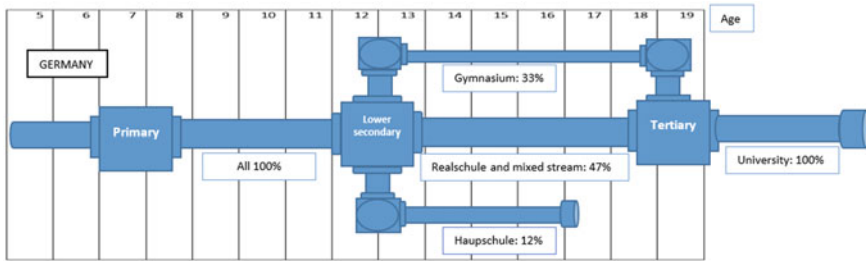
## Conceptual Background

There are three main mechanisms for selection that take place within the education system: limiting the share of pupils achieving the qualification necessary to enter higher education, selecting after secondary schooling at the point of transition, and selecting during the study process. Whilst the first process is part of how the school system is organised, the following two are about how prior academic qualification, student choice and HEI recruitment interact with one another.

### *The Pipeline Through a School System*

In all school systems over the course of a pupil's learning career, the secondary school system assigns grades to students, which can be used to examine their relative academic capabilities in various fields. The pathway into which a pupil is placed during their time in a secondary system can determine to a greater or lesser extent their future options. In some countries, a major "sifting" occurs at the end of primary or lower secondary when students are streamed into different pathways based mostly on perceived academic ability. The difference between countries concerning streaming is in the timing and the consequences of selection procedures. In some school systems, the pathway into which a pupil is placed during lower secondary schooling can determine whether he/she is likely to obtain the qualification necessary to enter higher education, whilst in others all routes lead to the likely attainment of the entry qualification but the part of the higher education system they are likely to enter is different. The final school exit examination, present in a multitude of educational systems, will also play a key role in the students' future educational path.

Figure 1 provides an overview of this pipeline for Germany: pupils are streamed into one of three main tracks in upper secondary schooling, and only two of these provide direct access to higher education – the Gymnasium is the academic route, and around one third of all pupils take this route; the Realschule used to be the higher vocational route, but this is being expanded to other streams and can be a direct route into higher education too, this accounts for 22% in the Realschule and a further 25% in a mixed stream system; those in the so-called Hauptschule, around 12%, do not usually progress into upper secondary schooling. A particular development in Germany has been the increasing share of pupils in mixed stream schools and decline of the Hauptschule, generally giving more pupils the chance to enter higher education.



**Fig. 1** Overview of the pipeline to higher education in Germany. *Source* Orr et al. (2017a). *Note* The missing 8% of pupils are those in other school forms, especially those supporting pupils with learning difficulties

### *The Role of HEIs*

With the increasing autonomy and institutional diversity of higher education in Europe, a large number of higher education systems have given their HEIs more freedom to decide which type of applicants they enrol and how many (Eastermann et al. 2011; Fumasoli and Huisman 2013). HEIs contribute to student selection based on the level of existing autonomy, which sometimes allows them to apply additional criteria in order to select and enrol those deemed more academically fit for the study programmes provided. Institutional mission, legal constraints, financial incentives awarded, innovative selection procedures or specific policies targeting different groups of students are all drivers that impact HEIs' selection.

### *Students as Agents in the Admission System*

Students are actors in the HE admission process. HE admission is not something that just happens to students, they shape it themselves with their choices—albeit choices that are constrained by the behaviour of the other actors in the system. The process through which students select a particular HEI or study programme is possibly the most complex one amongst the three. Apart from the information and guidance received throughout various educational stages and the academic results obtained, students rely heavily on the proximity network (friends and family) when making a study choice. The focus group work showed that the pressure stemming from the multitude of choices and the “cost” of wrongful selection weighs greatly on students when making a final decision on their study programme.

## Types of Admission Systems Across Europe and Their Link to Equity

For the purpose of the rest of this article, the authors have concentrated on the equity side of the analysis where an equitable admission system is considered to be one focusing largely on students' potential to succeed irrespective of their social background.

One of the most important policy challenges in European higher education over the past decades has been the expansion of opportunities in higher education. While **equity** features high on the European and international educational agenda (European Commission 2010; United Nations 2016), significant efforts are still required to narrow the gaps and allow for better access to (higher) education for under-represented groups. An OECD review of equity in tertiary education famously stated that “merit is never pure” (OECD 2008). Initiatives designed to make all forms of higher education more accessible to diverse populations should evaluate prospective students' *potential* rather than simply their past scholastic achievements in the school system, but this is rare.

The article now takes a closer look at each type of admission system and attempts to describe how it works in terms of equity. Proxy quantitative indicators for success used in the following quantitative analysis were participation by social background (attainment by parental social background), participation by gender and participation by age (for mature students). It should be noted that the typology based on the two dimensions in Table 1 represents only a snapshot of current policies and practices. Taking into account the limitations of the simple statistical analysis on the typology, the authors have tried to partly overcome this through the in-depth analysis of the case studies. Despite this limitation, this basic model can be used by policy-makers in European countries to evaluate different policies, thus enabling any country to consider some of the consequences of shifting from one category to another.

### *Type 1—Selection by Schools*

The countries in this category have educational systems where students are being placed in various streams, sometimes as early as primary education, and at least one of these streams awards qualifications that do not allow access into higher education. Moreover, most HEIs do not have the autonomy to select students using additional criteria.

These systems also have the lowest relative participation rates by students from low social backgrounds.<sup>5</sup> One might therefore say that, while they are effective

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<sup>5</sup>The study used attainment by educational parental background as a proxy measure of socio-economic background while recognising the limitations of this approach.

systems, as countries with this type of system have low rates of unemployment among recent graduates, they are *only effective for those who have social advantages*, to begin with.

The statistical data on the odds ratio of young adults (25–34) with highly educated parents (i.e. tertiary educational attainment) completing tertiary education over young adults (25–34) with medium educated parents (i.e. upper-secondary—ISCED 3 or post-secondary non-tertiary education—ISCED 4) show that countries with Type 1 admission systems perform the poorest in terms of equity, as children of medium-educated parents have much lower chances of attaining higher education than children of highly-educated parents (Fig. 2).

Between the two factors of influence, streaming has a slightly larger impact on selection than HEIs autonomy, which means that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds have more chances of being put in streams that do not lead to higher education. Furthermore, when looking at the existence of career guidance services, data collected from the 2015 Bologna Process Implementation Report questionnaire (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2015) show that in countries with no career guidance services targeting underrepresented groups, children of medium educated parents have much lower chances to attain tertiary education than children of highly educated parents.

Looking at the qualitative data from the case studies where these trends can be analysed in depth, one can see that *at the school level, streaming determines greater social inequalities*, meaning that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds tend to have less chances of entering higher education. There are

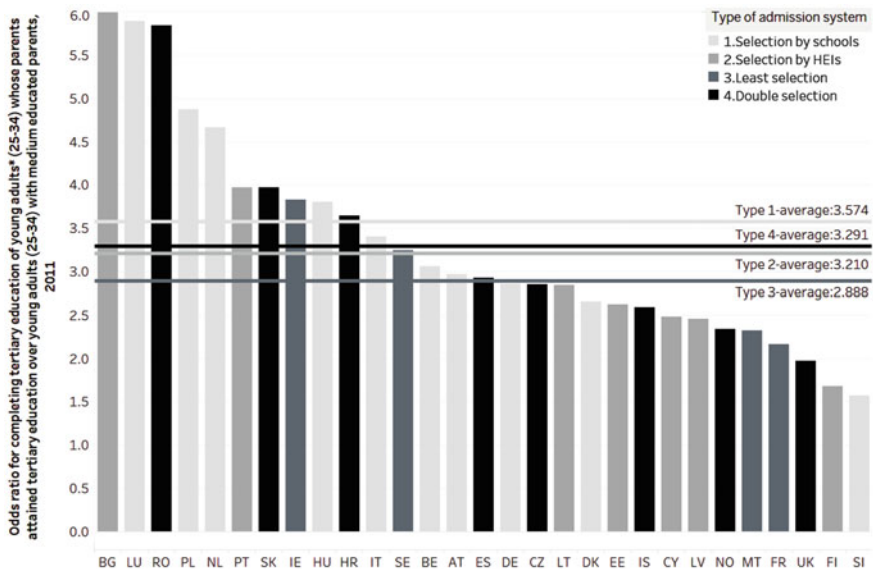


Fig. 2 Attainment by educational parental background, 2011. Source Orr et al. (2017a)

different stages in the educational process when school pupils are placed on paths with a higher or lower likelihood of leading to higher education entry. In some countries, a division is made between those expected to go on to higher education and those expected to go into vocational training or the labour market (sometimes as early as the age of ten, in the case of Germany), while in others students are not divided until the exit or transition phase in upper secondary schooling. Whether the streaming is based on academic merit or teachers' recommendations, there is also a direct correlation with parents' socio-economic background. Students put into vocational streams have lower chances of re-entering the path to higher education, although in theory transition between academic and vocational tracks is possible (as is the case for the Netherlands). However, if this transition occurs, it usually takes place from academic to vocational, not the other way around.

**Merit is often solely defined as students' ability to perform in secondary school examinations.** Evaluations throughout secondary education focus exclusively on academic performance, without taking into account students' additional skills or interests or even their socio-economic background. While this may be perceived as an objective, system level method of assessment by schools, students often consider that too much emphasis on standard examination does not allow for their full potential to be discovered.

In many educational systems, especially where HEIs do not benefit from autonomy at admission level, the main criteria used for selecting students is the secondary school exit examination. Thus, **the exit examination may not be fit for purpose**, as it serves two sometimes contradictory roles: measuring the secondary education students' performance level and placing students into specialised higher education study programmes. As highlighted by policy-makers, HEIs representatives and students themselves through interviews and focus groups, the principal role of the exit examination should be to assess the students' performance at the end of secondary education. Given the importance awarded to this exam, teachers are often shifting focus from providing students with a meaningful learning experience to a better preparation for successfully passing the final test. Furthermore, as many times the examination method is not indicative of future academic success or is not in line with HEIs study programmes.

## *Type 2—Selection by HEIs*

The countries that fall under Type 2 are characterised by the lack of secondary school streams that hinder the students' right to access higher education. The selection can be, nevertheless, influenced by HEIs ability to organise a further selection of students.

In terms of equity, these higher education systems are not as restrictive as Type 1 systems. However, since HEIs are allowed to apply additional criteria when enrolling students, they will seek efficient ways to do so, which means they will

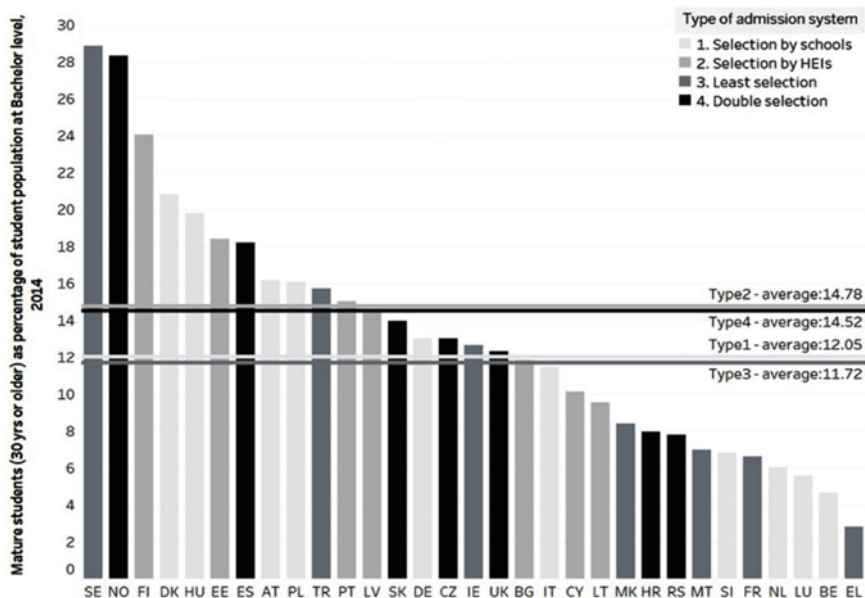


Fig. 3 Mature students (30 years or older) as percentage of student population at Bachelor level by admission type, 2014. Source Orr et al. (2017a)

most likely focus on scholastic achievement as the main criterion, thus indirectly limiting the chances for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

But even in this case, as the secondary school exit examination does not solely perform the role of entry criteria, higher education institutions are able to admit more mature students.<sup>6</sup> The figure below shows the degree to which older students are welcome within the system. This is done by measuring the percentage of total Bachelors enrolled by country and cross-tabulating with the level of autonomy the HEIs possess in organising admissions. A high value indicates a higher percentage of mature students in the student body. As the difference between type 4 (double selection)/type 2 (selection by HEIs) and type 1 (selection by schools)/type 3 (least selection) is the level of autonomy HEIs have in selecting with additional criteria, it appears that this is an important factor in terms of access of older students (Fig. 3).

Looking at the qualitative data regarding the impact of HEIs autonomy on equity, the case studies showed that **social inclusion does not score high amongst institutions' priorities**. With the typology developed, where HEIs autonomy plays a significant role in the admission process, this translates into perpetuating inequality. Where HEIs can further select their students, they will aim for a

<sup>6</sup>This increased participation of mature students does not necessarily translate also into high completion rates for mature students.

meritocratic approach, looking mostly at scholastic results rather than looking beyond, and selecting more students from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Irrespective of existing autonomy at admission level, **HEIs benefit from instruments that allow them to manage student pathways**—before, during and after admission. Before admission, HEIs can actively promote their study programmes in schools as part of information and counselling. They can additionally target specific groups of students—by promoting positive discrimination for underrepresented students (i.e. specific study places for Roma students in Romania or places specifically for students attending high schools in economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods for one HEI in France). At entry level, individual initiatives are implemented, but the Netherlands has introduced the “Study Choice Check”, an innovative approach through which students can test if they are a good fit with the desired study programme either by direct interviews, online testing or spending a day at the institution and performing academic student activities. This results in a recommendation from the HEI on the prospective match between the student and the study programme; while not mandatory, this can provide better insights for prospective students. After admission, some HEIs implement tools to make the transition phase easier for students—such as mentoring and buddy systems or preparatory courses.

HEIs are expected to produce graduates who are well prepared for the labour market, however, evidence from the existing data and case studies show that there is a **loose link between the distribution of study places and labour market**. While HEIs could adjust their allocation of study places either by analyses of trends across the labour market or changing student demands, few institutions tend to do so. This is the result of a variety of factors: in some countries, reallocation of study places is negotiated at both national and regional level (e.g. Spain), thus taking a long time; in other countries, there are no financial incentives for institutions to do so (e.g. Romania, France, Germany), while in specific instances, this is not the perceived role for higher education (e.g. Germany). However, private HEIs are at an advantage here, their flexibility in the decision-making process enabling them to react faster to labour market changes and design study programmes accordingly.

**While HEIs advocate for more autonomy, this also comes with additional challenges.** Across Europe, HEIs autonomy varies between countries—in Spain (for public institutions), Germany or Norway this is limited, and HEIs act under a clear framework set at national level. On the other hand, HEIs in Romania, Lithuania or Ireland benefit from extensive autonomy which allows them to make choices in the interest of institutional benefit. In terms of selection of students, representatives of various HEIs have expressed in favour of more autonomy, equally aware of the financial and human increased costs for such an approach or the overall admission timeline which sets additional constraints.



### Type 3—Least Selection

The countries in this cluster are characterized by the absence of streaming at secondary school level (with all pathways providing access into various parts of the higher education system), and no further selection at the level of HEIs. In such systems, if neither the school systems limit nor the HEIs select students, then students have the widest choice in terms of academic pathways.

As it might be expected, since Type 3 systems put up the fewest academic barriers to access, they are also the one with the most equitable outcome as shown in Fig. 2—Attainment by educational parental background where the authors look at the odds ratio of young adults (25–34) with highly educated parents completing tertiary education over young adults (25–34) with medium educated parents. This is also the system where information, advice and guidance play the most important role in supporting students to make the best-informed choices in selecting their desired study programme.

However, a more inclusive system is not also a more efficient system, as the data analysis shows. While a more diverse student body gains access to higher education, HEIs inability to further select means that they will not be able to get students that best fit with the study programmes provided. This is reflected in the completion rates (ISCED 5A) indicator, which is the lowest for Type 3 systems (Fig. 4).

From *young peoples' perspective*, the in-depth case study analysis showed that **students tend to make study-related decisions under pressure**. There are two

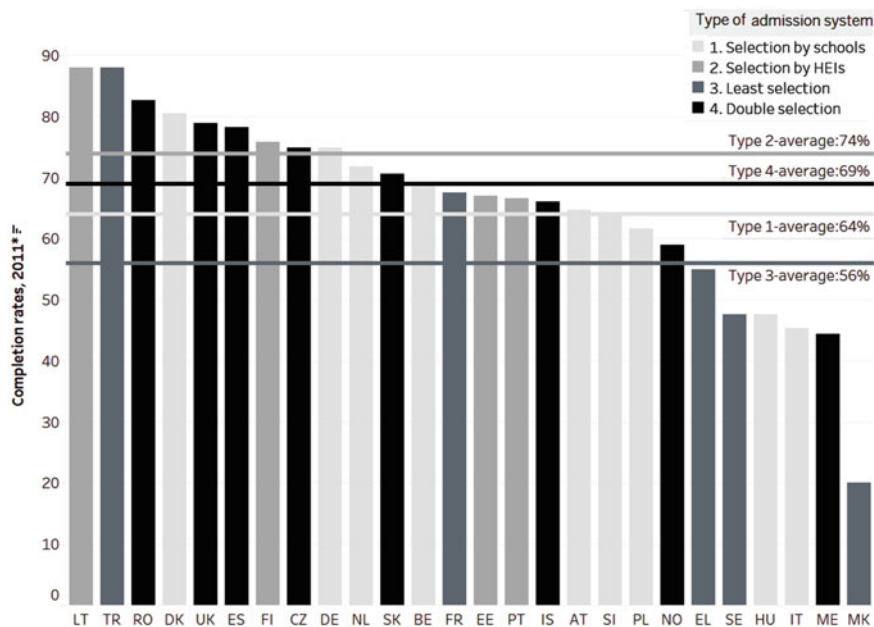


Fig. 4 Completion rates by type of admission system, 2011\*. Source Orr et al. (2017a)

major events in terms of academic life that occur almost simultaneously at the end of upper secondary education: selecting the study programme in which to enrol and preparing for the final examination. While, in terms of selection, the trend in Europe is to select a study programme first and then look at HEIs that provide it, prospective students have a multitude of options available. Inadequate choices can additionally be costly since any mistake in the selection of courses will translate into a delayed entrance on the labour market. This makes the information, advice and guidance instruments extremely important because if these are not sufficient or properly provided, it puts an enormous pressure on the young people. As focus groups revealed, stress is also emphasised by teachers who tend to further highlight the importance of their choices. At the same moment, students also prepare for the final examination at the end of secondary education, which in many systems is the main criterion for higher education access. As such, many feel the burden of major life decisions in a very short period of time.

With students relying heavily on their proximity network in making decisions, providing adequate information and guidance becomes of utmost importance for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, especially in countries with Type 3 admission systems, where extra weight is put on students.

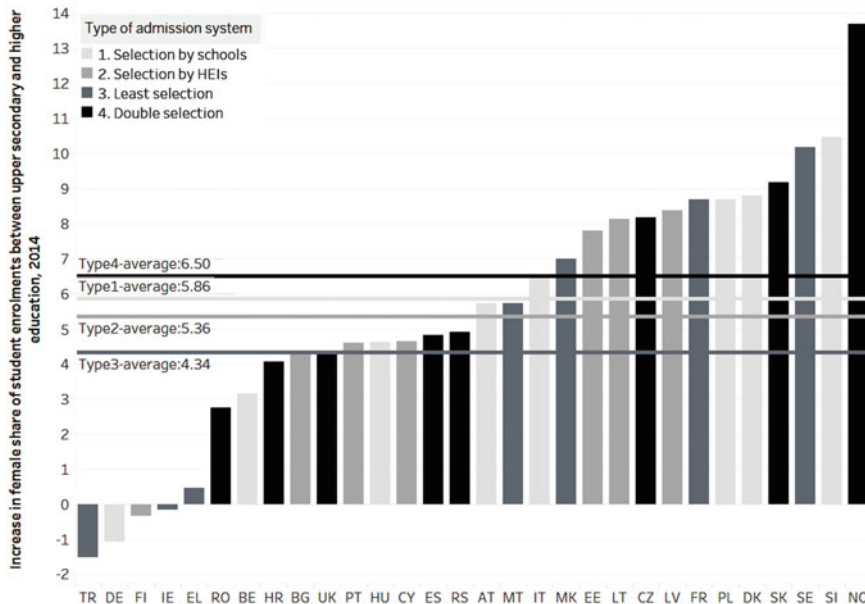
### ***Type 4—Double Selection***

Countries with Type 4 admission system are characterised by both streaming into secondary education and HEIs ability to further select students using additional criteria.

One would expect these systems to perform poorly when it comes to equity. Surprisingly, when looking at Eurostat data on attainment by educational attainment data—Fig. 2, Type 4 systems come second, after Type 3 systems. Differences emerge when taking a closer look at the participation of mature and female students. HEIs autonomy in further selection is reflected, as for Type 2, in the enrolment rates of mature students, which are relatively high. Nevertheless, this high enrolment rate for mature students does not necessarily translate into high completion rates for them.

A distinct feature is the higher participation of female students, resulting from this double selection. Looking at the data, in countries with type 4 admission system, more female students tend to go into higher education. Female students also perform slightly better in terms of completion rates. As female students receive better academic results in secondary schools, this result is intuitive: they have better academic results and so are more likely to be selected in a competitive system. On the other hand, male students are more likely to enter in vocational routes, where these are available.

This conclusion is highlighted in Fig. 5, which looks at the degree to which female students are welcome within the system. This is done by measuring the difference between the percentage of females in upper-secondary schools and



**Fig. 5** Increase in the female share of student enrolments between upper-secondary level and higher education by admission type, 2014. *Source* Orr et al. (2017a)

the percentage of females in higher education (ISCED 6). A higher value means that the proportion of women in higher education has increased compared with secondary education.

Further related to the issue of equity, the analysis shows that **second chance routes, which could be implemented by HEIs to attract students not choosing the “traditional route”, are not well-developed as the availability of these routes and the number of students using these routes are still limited.**

As a consequence, for the few countries that clearly provide such opportunities (e.g. Spain, Norway), the student population targeted is marginal. Additional efforts have been made, either by allowing access from vocational routes into higher education (e.g. Germany, Norway) or allocating places for students from disadvantaged backgrounds (e.g. places for Roma students in Romania). Thus, numerous potential students are not being considered for higher education.

## From Conclusions to Recommendations

With relevant and comparative information, policy-makers can re-evaluate and perhaps realign their admission system in line with national or European equity strategies. This paper had the objective of using the typologies developed during the SASH study to draw comparative findings, notwithstanding the fact that Europe has

a very diverse higher education landscape. Therefore, any policy recommendation needs to be contextualised.

Based on the results of the analysis and case study insights, eight general recommendations can be made:

- Systems where streaming occurs at an early age (especially in Type 1—selection by schools) appear to embed social inequality into higher education entry and, as students get older, make further policy interventions related to equity harder to deliver. So, with a focus on the policy framework, **policy-makers could reshape the selection processes at secondary education level** by reducing the consequences of allocating pupils to different upper secondary streams and/or re-designing the exit examinations in such a way that more students gain the necessary qualification to access higher education study programmes or specific HEIs.
- To better match students with the educational offer, **HEIs should be allowed to experiment with ways of identifying student potential** (especially in systems where HEIs want more autonomy—Type 1 and Type 3 admission systems). While accepting the need for balance, HEIs should be given greater autonomy to select their students, regulated by a legal framework that enhances rather than constrains equitable admissions. There are various ways to achieve more inclusive entry, either by expanding the existing access routes to higher education or by creating new ones in accordance with specific strategies for inclusion.
- Evidence suggests that HEIs already have institutional tools to deploy resources more proactively in order to help such students enter and succeed; yet in most instances, HEIs are not stepping up because they do not see this as their responsibility. As the paper from Vlk & Stiburek in this publication states: many HEIs are following the strategy: “striving for excellence, acknowledging the social dimension”. **Incentives should be provided for HEIs to become more inclusive** (especially in Type 2—selection by HEIs), in order to select, support and help graduate more students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, thus no longer perpetuating inequality. An example could be the English case with the universal system of equity performance agreements which, despite the very high cost of student tuition, has increased higher education participation amongst students from lower socio-economic groups.
- In order to relieve the pressure experienced by students when making study choices, **HEIs could use Bologna tools to facilitate transition throughout higher education** by extensive use of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) to facilitate movement between different study programmes and institutions. Reducing the consequences of “mistakes” would take much of the pressure off the experience for students. Making credits easier to transfer from one programme to another could achieve this.
- **HEIs should improve their communication of the choices provided to students** (especially in Type 3—least selection), which would give prospective students more accessible and relevant information about their future academic

paths. Providing students with study programmes that better fit their skills and interests is desirable, however, there should be a balance between better study opportunities and an overwhelming number of choices.

- **Schools and HEIs should improve the information, advice and guidance** available. While counselling exists across Europe in various forms, the tendency is to focus on providing timely and accurate information. Indeed, better guiding services would enable students to select the best study programmes for them, alleviating misinformed competition in some cases (i.e. because a share of students is applying for study programmes based on misinformation). This, however, implies deep knowledge of both the higher education system and the individual students. The situation is further complicated by the human resources available and the way counselling is provided, which varies significantly (i.e. one counsellor per 800 students in Romania to an extensive counselling system in France). With students relying heavily on their proximity network in making decisions, providing adequate information and guidance becomes of utmost importance for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, especially in countries with Type 3 admission systems where the focus is particularly on student choice.
- **Schools can reduce pressure on students during their final year of secondary school** (especially in Type 3—least selection) by supporting them to make choices about higher education earlier, together with providing adequate information, advice and guidance. The tension between the needs of the schooling system and those of higher education is a difficult challenge to resolve in the final year of secondary school. That is why it is important to ensure that students think about higher education choice much earlier than in the final year of secondary schooling, which should be the final stage of a much lengthier process. This is also very important for Type 4—double selection, as the streaming in secondary school and the HEIs additional selection process can severely limit the options a student has.
- This all leads to **one** final recommendation, which is perhaps the most important one: for **an increased collaboration between schooling and higher education** as a way of overcoming the tensions between the needs and purpose of the schooling system and those of higher education. Working together, they would help construct better, fairer and more inclusive education systems.

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# Study Success at the Clash Point of Excellence and Social Dimension?



Aleš Vlk and Šimon Stiburek

## Introduction

Traditional higher education (HE) systems and higher education institutions (HEIs) in Europe are under pressure due to increasing demand of various stakeholders and the society as a whole, global developments, political and economic doctrines as well as many initiatives at the EU level (see for example Clark 1997; Enders et al. 2011; Mazzarol and Soutar 2001; Neave 1994; van der Wende 2003; van Vught 2011).

First, we can see a major concern for efficiency of public expenditures and efficient institutional behavior. Second, institutions, as well as individual academics, are stimulated to achieve higher quality or excellence. Third, higher education institutions are expected to accommodate a more diversified student body, combat dropout and offer more relevant study programs as a part of their social mission.

In our contribution, we look at study success as a special element of the social dimension of higher education. We argue that the issue of study success, completion and dropout can serve as an interesting example of how various internal and external pressures—including national and institutional policies—can affect the openness of the HE system. We are particularly interested in how the emphasis on excellence in teaching and research influences the actions taken towards study success on both the national and the institutional level. The most important question is whether study success and excellence can be stimulated effectively at the same

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time and how. Could universities that are devoted to excellence be also inclusive? Finally—can we find measures, which can contribute to achieving both goals at the same time?

The first part of this paper discusses various demands on higher education as described in selected theoretical literature. Then, special attention is paid to the social function of higher education followed by an analysis of the topic of excellence. Afterwards, we shortly summarize the state-of-play of the dropout/study success agenda in the European context. The article describes the four Visegrad countries (V4)—Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia—and their approach towards dropout in order to provide for international comparison in the central European context. An in-depth case study is devoted to the Czech higher education system. In the concluding part, we provide preliminary answers to our initial questions.

## **New Demands on Higher Education**

Higher education institutions are organisations with a longstanding tradition of searching for truth and maintaining knowledge (Maassen 1997). Contemporary society expects the HEIs to fulfil their core mission in teaching, research and a “third mission”. Many authors argue that in the last few decades, traditional higher education systems, as well as individual higher education institutions, have been facing increasing demands from society in general. Two decades ago, Clark (1997) identified three major demands on higher education which seem to be still valid today:

1. a demand for greater access to higher education;
2. more qualifications and positions on the labour market require a university degree;
3. governments, as well as other stakeholders, expect a more efficient behaviour of traditional higher education providers.

In the European context, we should note that the European Commission (EC) has been paying increasing attention to higher education as a tool to facilitate European integration (Neave 1995). The Bologna declaration signed in 1999 launching a complex Bologna process, followed by the Lisbon Strategy (2000) drafted by the European Union can be seen as major milestones in the European higher education landscape.

Due to various demands, global trends, national, EU or international policies and other external as well as internal factors, a modern European higher education institution is facing at least the following challenges:

- to absorb an increasing number of students while the student body becomes more and more heterogeneous in terms of background, abilities and expectations;
- to maintain the social function of HE in society;



- to keep the quality of teaching;
  - to attract more fee-paying international students in order to compensate for the decline of domestic student body;
  - to meet the rapidly changing requirements of employees;
  - to achieve excellence in research;
  - to increase knowledge transfer and commercialisation of research outputs;
  - to demonstrate efficiency.
- (Švec et al. 2015)

## Social Function of Higher Education

International organisations, scholars and policy-makers have underlined the role of higher education in economic as well as social development (for example World Bank 2002; European Commission 2003; Cremonini et al. 2014). Bryson et al. (2014) note that citizens would like to have a highly performing HE system, which is effective in achieving the desired outcomes, operating justly and fairly and generating societal benefits.

In the European context, a social dimension has been formulated and discussed mainly by the European Commission through communications and analytic materials and through the Bologna process. A very short chronological summary of selected policy documents and statements concerning social dimension of higher education is described in the following paragraphs.

Although a social dimension is not referred to in the 1999 Bologna declaration, it has become an integral part of the Bologna process since 2001. In the Prague Communiqué, the social dimension of higher education is explicitly mentioned as an area for further exploration. The 2007 London Communiqué finally defines the objective of the social dimension of higher education:

Higher education should play a strong role in fostering social cohesion, reducing inequalities and raising the level of knowledge, skills and competences in society. Policy should therefore aim to maximize the potential of individuals in terms of their personal development and their contribution to a sustainable and democratic knowledge-based society. (p. 5).

The document *Focus on Higher Education in Europe 2010: The Impact of the Bologna process* (Eurydice 2010) describes the impact of the Bologna process on various dimensions of HE systems. Social dimension is the most challenging aspect of the Bologna process as its understanding differs in various countries. Only very few countries set up specific targets to increase the participation of under-represented groups, and only a half of the countries systematically monitors the participation. The most common measures are a targeted financial support and alternative access routes/admission procedures.

The European Commission summarises the achievements concerning access and retention (dropout) in the 2014 document *Modernisation of Higher Education in*

*Europe*. Only nine countries define attainment targets for specified groups monitoring only a few important characteristics on their national level. Furthermore, quality assurance agencies rarely examine admission systems from the perspective of widening the access. The document underlines the societal responsibility of institutions and the system as a whole for minimizing the psychological, financial and emotional impact of individuals who do not finish their studies. Further steps should be taken in order to clarify basic definitions, collect proper data, introduce various measures on different levels (institutional as well as national) and monitor their impact.

The 2015 Yerevan Communiqué underlines the commitment to make higher education more socially inclusive by implementing the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) social dimension strategy.

A recent communication “*A renewed EU agenda for higher education*” of the European Commission (2017) discusses two additional aspects of the social dimension of higher education institutions: social contribution to the wider communities where they are located and providing civic values. The higher education systems should create better conditions for inclusion. Study success and higher completion rates are perceived as improved efficiency and returns on public investments.

To summarize this, we can see that, at least for the last fifteen years, the social dimension of higher education in the European context has gained considerable attention. Its meaning has been gradually demarcated through the Bologna process as well as by the EC policy papers.

However, while discussing the social function of higher education, the European Commission as well as other important societal actors have been at the same time emphasizing excellence in both teaching and science.

## How to Achieve Excellence

Global competition in both research and teaching has caused the pursuit of excellence in higher education and science (Marginson 2004; Rust and Kim 2012). In the European context, the political concept of excellence has been closely connected with the “Europe of Knowledge” discourse (Pinheiro 2015). In higher education, excellence is usually connected with reputation and rankings, both based in particular on research performance in global comparison. University league tables and international rankings have played an increasing role in the pan-European context (Hazelkorn 2011).

The concept of excellence is exclusive and competitive by its own nature translating into policy measures focusing on the concentration of scarce resources, i.e. people and funding (Antonowicz et al. 2017). Academic excellence is believed to be a scarce good present only in a limited number of institutions with specific features related to internationalisation and size (Maassen and Stensaker 2011).

THE World University Ranking, QS World University Ranking, the Academic Ranking of World Universities (Shanghai Ranking) or the CWTS Leiden Ranking are eagerly monitored by university leaders and managers, the students and the press. The main criteria of these rankings are the academic reputation, research performance, internationalisation, cooperation with business or regional involvement. As Nyssen mentions in his paper in this sub-section, U-Multirank is the only ranking taking into account indicators concerned with the social dimension such as gender equity and community service learning.

The European Commission (2010) note that European higher education institutions should attract more top global talent and perform better in the existing international rankings as only relatively few of them have reached the leading positions so far. Some European countries that felt unrepresented in international rankings have implemented reforms targeted at supporting top universities (France), world-class science (Germany) or world-class university (Finland) (Cremonini et al. 2014).

## Study Success

As mentioned earlier, study success is an integral part of the policies promoting the social dimension of higher education. Nevertheless, the topic of study success and dropout was discussed already in the 17th century and reached considerable attention in particular in the United States (see for example Berger and Loyd 2005). The most quoted modern theoretical conceptualisations have developed since the 1970s, and the one of Tinto (1993) has become probably the most influential one. Tinto builds his theory on the concepts of social and academic integration of students, stressing both the importance of individual as well as institutional characteristics for study success. Detailed reviews of theoretical as well as empirical work in the field have been done for example by Larsen et al. (2013), Kuh et al. (2006) or RANLHE project (2011).

Over the time, a broad variety of terms has been used in the scholarly literature to address study success (completion, graduation, retention, persistence, survival, attainment, re-enrolment or time-to-degree) and dropout (stop-out, discontinuation, attrition, wastage, turn-over, dismissal, withdrawal or student departure). In our contribution, we use the terms “success” and “dropout”, and in specific cases the terms “completion” or “graduation”.

As reviewed by the HEDOCE project<sup>1</sup> (Vossensteyn et al. 2015), policies addressing student success and dropout are currently being developed in most European countries. The topic is high on the agenda in almost half of the countries.

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<sup>1</sup>The main task of the research assignment on dropout and completion in higher education was to conduct a comparative overview of the main policies and measures in 36 countries, including eight in-depth case studies. The European Commission awarded this research to a consortium led by the Center for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS) at the University of Twente, the Netherlands and the Nordic Institute for Studies in Innovation (NIFU), Norway in 2014.

National governments take actions to improve chances for students to succeed, employing a broad range of measures. These cover financial measures (incentives for both institutions and students, ranging from funding formulas and project funding to scholarships and tuition fees), information and support (mentor, counselling, consultancy, rankings and other measures) and organisational changes (such as increased flexibility of study pathways, curriculum changes, revision of admission criteria or quality assurance procedures). In the following text, we take a quick look at how the issue of study success has been approached in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia.

## Visegrad Countries and Study Success

The main source for this comparative part of the paper is the HEDOCE study (see above) and country reports. The following country reports have been analysed by the authors:

- **Czech Republic**, written by Aleš Vlk (with the support of Václav Švec and Šimon Stiburek) and summarised by Martin Unger (Vossensteyn et al. 2015, Annex 2, 31–35),
- **Hungary**, written by Jozsef Temesi and summarised by Renze Kolster (ibid., Annex 2, 76–79),
- **Poland**, written by Marek Kwiek and summarised by Sabine Wollscheid and Elisabeth Hovdhaugen (ibid., Annex 2, 119–121),
- **Slovakia**, written by Alexandra Bitusikova and summarised by Sabine Wollscheid and Elisabeth Hovdhaugen (ibid., Annex 2, 129–130).

Unfortunately, no comparable data are available to compare the dropout rates across the Visegrad countries. The most recent comparison was provided by OECD in its 2013s Education at a Glance (Table A4.2), where indicators used by the national stakeholders were collected. According to the review, 75% of newly enrolled students who started their first study in a full-time ISCED 5A program in the Czech Republic in 2001 graduated in any study program in 2011 or before. At the same time, based on a cross-section comparison, 72% of Slovak students who enrolled between 2006 and 2009, depending on the standard duration of their study program, were estimated to graduate successfully. The same is true for 64% of the same cohort in Poland and 66% of those who enrolled in 2006/07 or 2009/10 in Hungary (OECD 2013). As we see, the Czech Republic figures are based on a true cohort analysis while the others are build on a cross-section comparison. As additional differences in national methodologies are likely to occur, the figures should be interpreted with extreme caution.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>For more on the differences between individual calculation approaches and other issues see e.g. OECD (2013) or Vossensteyn et al. (2015).

According to the HEDOCE study, a range of measures to fight student dropout and promote success have been implemented by the governments in the V4 countries. The most prevailing one is the introduction of financial incentives for students to complete their studies in time. All four countries have introduced this measure in a similar way—charging fees to students who exceed a set time limit for completion. Although the impact of these measures has not been rigorously evaluated, it can be expected to motivate students to proceed with their studies swiftly. However, it seems that fees charged in the final phase of studies do not prevent students from dropping out in earlier years, or in the moment they are required to pay the fee.

Poland and Hungary have taken actions to provide students with more relevant information, in particular in relation to career prospects and employability. These initiatives are expected to reduce student-program mismatch, stimulate student motivation and attract the attention of applicants to the fields most relevant for the economy and society. Graduate tracking and graduate surveys are conducted in order to collect necessary information in this respect. In line with that, both countries have introduced financial incentives for students directing them to priority fields, in particular, engineering and other STEM areas. The Czech Republic is currently in the process of preparation of a comprehensive information portal with a similar goal. In Slovakia, tuition fees have been introduced for part-time study programs in order to promote full-time study, where a higher quality of learning is expected.

In the Czech Republic, social scholarships for students with special needs were introduced to improve their chances of completing their studies. Although only a small number of students qualifies for the grant, and the overall amount of support is not large, those who receive financial support are more successful than average. In addition, special funds are available to higher education institutions for modernisation and innovation projects targeted at improving the quality of teaching and services. These funds are not specifically targeted on study success, however, various projects related to this agenda have been supported as well.

Hungary seems to be the most active country in the region in adopting measures to prevent dropout and shorten the time students take to graduate. Besides the measures mentioned above, other steps have also been taken in the Hungarian higher education to stimulate study success—in particular the introduction of university centres providing mentoring and counselling to students in need. In addition, a legal framework was adopted in order to improve recognition of prior learning to motivate students transferring from one higher education institution to another or bringing competence acquired outside the university. Moreover, success and dropout statistics are required in HEI self-evaluation reports and are reflected by the Accreditation Committee during external quality assurance process.

It is worth noticing that the V4 countries also share, to a great extent, the way they conceptualise the study success and dropout. In all four countries, the number of students entering the system increased rapidly after 1990—it resulted in an augmented heterogeneity of student body. Broadening the access to higher education, in general, is often seen as the main reason for the dropout increase by the

decision-makers in the V4 countries. Most of them view dropout as a positive phenomenon helping keep the “quality” of education high.

It seems that the most frequently articulated motivation for the V4 countries to tackle student dropout is the economic reasoning: low success rates are considered to be inefficient, consuming the scarce resources without leading to the final product—graduates needed on the labour market. This is in line with the adoption of measures to stimulate early completion (see above). The general ideas of social dimension and fair access to education do not appear to be the main drivers promoting this policy.

In none of the V4 countries, the issue of study success and dropout dominates the higher education policy agenda. It is quality and excellence, which are often quoted as the main priorities. The only exception might be Hungary, where substantial attention has been dedicated to stimulating completion, in particular in order to increase the number of graduates in priority areas such as engineering.

In the following part, we take a deeper look at the Czech case study in order to illustrate the development of study success policies in the context of the promotion of social dimension and excellence.

## Case Study of the Czech Republic

First of all, we look at how the issue of dropout in higher education is described in strategic documents of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS).

Attention was paid to this issue as early as in 2000 (MEYS 2000), yet only limited measures were suggested, stating vaguely that the flexibility of study pathways should increase. In the following years, the study success policy did not receive any considerable attention, rather the opposite. The 2005 Strategic Plan (MEYS 2005) highlighted the context of economic efficiency, and in the subsequent period,<sup>3</sup> the promotion of social dimension in HE remained underemphasised.

The topic of study success and dropout re-emerged in the policy documents in 2014 in the ministerial Framework for HE Development (MEYS 2014). The topic appeared on the agenda as a result of external pressure from the European Commission. The EC asked for a strategic framework covering a list of agendas, including dropout as part of the social agenda, to be defined before approval of operational programs funded by the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) for the period 2014–2020.

The Strategic Plan 2016–2020 (MEYS 2015), which is the major strategic HE document currently in effect, builds on the 2014 framework and adds more specific measures and goals. The policy of student success and dropout seems to be finally an established part of the HE policy agenda. However, only limited measures have

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<sup>3</sup>Central-right coalitions were in power in the Czech government bringing tuition fees and diversification of higher education high on the agenda (see e.g. MEYS 2009).

been introduced so far, and many policy actors (such as the management of HEIs) rather tend to maintain their elitist perspective, considering dropout a desired event “weeding out low quality students” (Vlk et al. 2017).

In the meantime, the dropout rates have grown gradually. Since 2005 less than one half of studies started at the undergraduate level<sup>4</sup> have actually led to graduation, although many of the students dropping out returned to the system again later. Dropouts are most prevalent in the fields of study such as agriculture, engineering and science, but all the other disciplines are also affected. The success rates are even worse at the postgraduate study level where only about one-third of enrolled students graduate. On the other hand, about three-quarters of students succeed at the master’s level.

At this point, it should be stressed out that the ability of the government to steer the HEIs is rather limited. Institutional autonomy and self-governance, inspired by the Humboldtian idea of a university, remain the dominant organisational principle of the HE system in the Czech Republic (File et al. 2006). Thus, the government directly influences neither the internal organisational processes and structures of universities, the content of the study programs, the modes of teaching, the HR decisions, nor institutional actions taken to promote quality and student success. Indirect measures are in place (accreditation criteria, performance-based funding formula and other financial incentives—see below), however, these are usually a result of rather complicated negotiations with HEI representative bodies.

Financial incentives are probably the most influential instrument applied by the Ministry of Education to affect the behaviour of the HEIs. Among them, the funding formula reflecting student numbers, internationalisation, graduate employment as well as research performance (with the specific criteria varying every year) is the most important one, accompanied by project funding for strategic projects and extensive investments from the European funds.

Mostly indirect measures are in place in case of study success and dropout policy. For the above-mentioned reasons, the policy documents highlight the importance of measures on an institutional level—they recommend HEIs to invest in teaching initiatives, social integration and analysis of the dropout causes and drivers. Such measures are supported by the so-called Institutional Programs allocated by the MEYS to individual institutions for strategic innovation projects and quality assurance. However, study success is only one of many priorities the program is targeting.

Besides financial incentives promoting institutional actions towards study success, measures to improve access to information about study programs and graduation rates have also been implemented. Since 2016 dropout rates have been

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<sup>4</sup>A study is not equivalent to a student. One individual student can be registered at several studies/study programs, even at the same faculty or university. As a result, the number of studies is always higher than the number of students within the system.

published in annual reports of higher education institutions. In its Strategic Plan, the Ministry also emphasises that more research into the topic should be undertaken (MEYS 2015).

At the same time, multiple steps have been initiated to promote and support excellence in Czech higher education. In particular, research performance of individual institutions has become crucial for public funding. The concept of excellence is connected mainly to publication output and qualification structure (number of associated professors and professors). It should be also mentioned that the existing system of funding research in the Czech Republic is purely quantitative. It is based on a sophisticated mathematic formula transforming the points assigned to various research outputs (journal articles, books, conference contributions, patents, prototypes etc.) into institutional funding of research organisations (see for example Good et al. 2015).

The support for achieving excellence is also present at the programs funded by the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF). There are special calls targeted at excellent teams as well as excellent research centres. Other granting agencies (supporting either basic or applied research) also support excellence. In the public discourse, one can find a strong argument that mainly excellent organisations, excellent teams and excellent outputs should be supported, while the mediocre ones should be gradually pushed outside the system.

To summarise, the concept of social dimension has been the driving force behind the development of the study success policy only since 2014. Furthermore, it was introduced to the agenda by an external force—the European Commission. On the other hand, the struggle for quality and excellence has been perhaps the main concept attracting the attention in the Czech higher education. The pursuit of excellence has often been quoted as the main reason why not to take actions to reduce student dropout.

## Concluding Remarks

In the concluding part, we come back to our key question—whether study success and excellence can be stimulated effectively at the same time and how.

It seems that the excellence concept, based mainly on the research performance and publication outcomes, has preoccupied the academia in the analysed area of Visegrad countries. To a great extent, it is due to the parameters that are fundamental to table leagues and international rankings. This trend is being further reinforced by the system of institutional funding. Therefore, at least in the Czech Republic, the teaching role has lost its priority. Individual academics, as well as institutions, do not have enough time and resources to devote to teaching as they have to publish, get grants, administer projects and cooperate with business. They must prioritize. Naturally, the social dimension, including the study success and drop out, is not seen as the top issue. On the contrary, it could be even perceived as an extra burden on the journey to excellence. For example, during our interviews



with HE stakeholders within the HEDOCE case study, only one person felt that the dropout rates could be lowered without downgrading the quality of teaching.

The best way to describe the stage of the Czech higher education system (based on the data, we suppose that the same is true also for many other Central and Eastern European countries including the V4) is the following: according to the share of age cohort entering the system, higher education has moved from mass into universal access model (Trow 2006). However, most of the institutions and mainly the academics still mentally stick to the idea of elite higher education, in which only a small number of top motivated and gifted students are educated. For many of them, the main motivation is research and academic career—not teaching and transfer of knowledge to the young generation.

For the above-mentioned reasons, we expect that most of HEIs devote their resources to the excellence “agenda”, unless the social issue is directly required and financially stimulated, or the dropout rates reach such a high level that they jeopardise the existence of a department, faculty or university. Therefore, we see higher education institutions using the label “research excellence” rather than “exemplary in social dimension”.

In our opinion it is rather difficult, especially in the V4 countries, to find the proper balance between the pursuit of excellence and the social function of higher education. Interestingly enough, the countries with the shared history of the former communist regime seem to be most persistent in keeping the most conservative and elitist approach towards higher education closely connected with the research mission. The social dimension has been adequately internalised neither by the academia nor by the public. This statement is also supported by Mihai Haj, Geanta and Orr as they argue that higher education institutions do not feel that pursuit of inclusion (as a part of the social dimension of HE) is their responsibility.

The seeming “clash” between the social dimension and excellence is only one example of the pressures HE management faces, resulting from a variety of expectations from the higher education system. In many cases, the management feels that the demands and expectations contradict each other. In order to meet the requirements of the social dimension (provide access to quality education to broader masses of students with respect to their diverse needs), HEIs should invest substantial efforts in reducing student dropout. In many cases, this means revisiting the traditional academic curriculum, supporting students from disadvantaged backgrounds and reflecting special needs of non-traditional learners and many other steps.

However, we believe that there are several measures on the institutional as well as national level that can support excellence and study success at the same time. We can think, for example, about curricular and teaching initiatives stimulating student engagement, peer-review of teaching methods, publication of QA evaluation results to increase the prestige of proactive, innovative and student-oriented programs, measures reflecting work-study-life balance, information systems supporting matching of interests between students and HE institutions, etc. However, any measure requires adequate resources.

Another question is the level of the HE system diversification. In diversified systems, a small number of institutions are devoted to excellence (mainly related to research), while others reflect mainly the social role as well as the rapidly changing needs of the labour market and the society. This could mean supporting a small number of exclusive “excellent” universities that would maintain the high dropout rates and selective practices (low social dimension) and, at the same time, applying different quality criteria to “the other” (second-tier/regional/applied) institutions preferring the social dimension to research performance and global reputation. Such a model has not been (fully) implemented in the observed countries at the moment, although it is widely discussed.

It is not easy at all to find a proper and general solution. Cremonini et al. (2014) ask whether concentrating public resources at the most excellent universities—rated high by external rating organisations—improves the overall quality of a higher education system as a whole. For example, targeting research performance alone might help a top-tier institution, yet at the expense of the others. The authors also argue that pursuing rankings should be complemented by other policies inducing system improvements.

To conclude—as it seems, it is becoming increasingly difficult to combine policies on the national level with specific measures on the institutional level. The described “clash” between the social dimension of higher education, on the one hand, and the excellence of research, on the other, is just one example. However, we believe that there are ways for the higher education policy to face these challenges through more intensive discussion within our societies what HE is and should be and with the help of exchanging best practices and intensive involvement of relevant stakeholders.

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# The Role of Student Counselling for Widening Participation of Underrepresented Groups in Higher Education



Janine Wulz, Marita Gasteiger and Johannes Ruland

## Social Dimension as a Crucial Element of the Bologna Process

Higher education was available only to a small proportion of the population for a long time. While in the 1960s higher education participation was around 10% in most European countries, today raising the proportion of graduates between 30 and 34 years to at least 40% is an European target (European Commission 2014) and the importance of higher education for economic revival and social cohesion is underlined in many European documents. Recently we can observe higher education following different, even contrary approaches. We notice an increasing commodification of higher education with a focus on competition of European graduates in worldwide economy rather than its social benefits. At the same time, higher education is more and more acknowledged as a means for fostering social mobility and cohesion, also because of high rates of youth unemployment and widening levels of inequality (Riddell and Weedon 2014).

The social dimension of higher education became an important topic in European higher education policies since the beginning of the 21st century: it was mentioned in different Communiqués following the European Ministerial Conferences, and it is often seen as part of the so-called third mission of universities, considering higher education having a role in society aside teaching and research.

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Social dimension was mentioned in the Prague Communiqué in 2001 for the first time; in 2007 the London Communiqué reaffirms “the importance of students being able to complete their studies without obstacles related to their social and economic background” (London Communiqué 2007). Later on, one of the goals the participants in the Ministerial Conference in 2015 in Yerevan agreed on was making the higher education system more inclusive and therefore widening participation in higher education: “We will enhance the social dimension of higher education, improve gender balance and widen opportunities for access and completion, including international mobility for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.” (Yerevan Communiqué 2015). This aim shows already the most common interpretation of social dimension, which is that “a state of participative equity should be attained in European higher education” (Hauschildt et al. 2015). Following the idea of widening access and developing a more inclusive higher education system, underrepresented groups have been in the focus of policies since.

The importance of the issue of social dimension in higher education was raised by the European Students Union for a long time (Vukasovic 2017). During the economic crisis followed by growing numbers of unemployed youth, other stakeholder organisations, such as the European University Association (EUA) and Education International (EI) promoted stronger advocacy for underrepresented groups in higher education and a more inclusive higher education system. Whereas there is a general consensus within all the mentioned Communiqués about social dimension, the stakeholder organizations’ approaches were very different in the beginning. While EUA focused mainly on the equity in mobility programmes, at least until 2003, ESU underlined the need to reduce financial obstacles already in its Goteborg Declaration in 2001 (Vukasovic 2017).

Although the social dimension of higher education has been a topic of discussion for more than 15 years now, student population is still not very diverse in most European countries and disadvantaged groups, such as disabled students, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds or those with care obligations are still underrepresented in higher education (EACEA 2015). According to the European Students Union report “Bologna with student eyes”, social dimension has only a “more or less high priority” in eight out of 36 countries. And even in countries with a high priority, no major progress has been made so far. The implementation of national access plans is one of the strategies recently developed in many countries, focusing on identifying target groups, developing measures at national and institutional level as well as monitoring the implementation process and its impact (ESU 2015). The measures developed in many countries differ, but can be summarised in the following two different approaches. There are measures developed aiming for widening participation in higher education by general approaches with benefits for the entire student population, and measures put in place to widen participation by the implementation of specific measures for underrepresented target groups. Nevertheless, the 2015 Bologna Process Implementation Report states there is a thin line between those two groups (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2015).

In this paper we focus on student counselling provided by students' unions as one of the most common measures student unions deliver to empower prospective students and underrepresented groups: What type of counselling offers do students' unions have? Which channels do they use, which challenges do they face? And how are they involved in the development of national strategies for social dimension? And after that: Which role do students' unions have in widening participation of underrepresented groups in higher education through their counselling activities? This paper provides an insight rather than a broad overview—because the challenges, opportunities, goals and disadvantages students' unions and counsellors meet in the various national contexts strongly differ.

### ***Underrepresented Groups in European Higher Education***

One of the main challenges for implementation of measures related to the inclusion of socially and culturally disadvantaged groups of higher education is that the understanding of underrepresented groups differs by country. Based on the definition used in the Eurostudent survey, we define them as a group which is not represented within the student population as it is in the general population (Hauschildt et al. 2015). Moreover, countries vary to a great extent in terms of monitoring participation of various student groups and the need for additional support. Most countries monitor participation and progress of students based on gender or disability, although disability is not defined the same way in many countries (e.g. if psychological disabilities are included or not). In some countries migrants and/or migrant children are considered important categories, while in other countries students with families are targeted (Weedon and Riddel 2012). From a student's perspective, the main groups underrepresented in higher education include students from low socio-economic background, students with physical disabilities and students with psychosocial disabilities/mental health issues. Other groups mentioned in many European countries include LGBTQ\* students, students with children/dependents, students from immigrant background, students from different ethnic groups, specific gender of students, students with chronic health issues and mature students (ESU 2015). Eurostudent provides an overview of the educational background of students in the different Eurostudent countries. It shows in detail for example, that “underrepresentation of students without higher education background is apparent in almost all EUROSTUDENT countries” (Grabher et.al 2014).

Recently, the inclusion of migrants and refugees in higher education was discussed as an important issue in many European countries due to increasing worldwide mobility bringing more and more international students to European universities. Related to the social dimension, they have to overcome additional barriers and are affected by mechanisms other students don't have to face. “International students face the same life events and stressors as other students, but also additional pressures without the support system from friends and family home. The transition from one academic system to another can be confusing. Adjusting to

a foreign culture can bring about a sense of loss in regard to native language, security and the self. Culture shock, loneliness, problems of language proficiency, financial dependency and expectations from the supporting families can increase the likelihood of developing mental health issues” (Rücker 2015).

The underrepresentation of specific groups does not only tackle higher education participation in general but also specific elements such as the internationalisation of higher education. For example, many disadvantaged student groups are underrepresented in mobility programmes as in the Erasmus+. To achieve higher participation from a more diverse student population in mobility, the Mobility and Internationalisation Working Group of the Bologna Follow-Up Group recommended in its report to develop a common understanding of underrepresented groups and each country should analyse the in-depth reasons for underrepresentation within the national context (EHEA 2015). However, groups underrepresented in mobility programmes do not necessarily match the underrepresented groups in national higher education systems (Grabher et al. 2014).

## **Measures to Include Underrepresented Groups in European Higher Education**

Measures to widen participation in higher education have been taken in many European countries, including a number of mainstream-measures aiming for increase of participation as a whole, expecting to also increase the participation of underrepresented groups, as well as measures targeting specific groups directly. A more mainstream approach is undertaken by countries aiming for most accessible higher education for the widest range of learners, as for example education free of charge, grant and loan systems and high number of university places. Counselling is considered as one of the measures to widen participation in higher education, together with the provision of student facilities (e.g. housing, medical support, childcare). At the same time, many countries implement measures targeting underrepresented groups specifically, as for example students with disabilities, students from ethnic minorities or from socially and/or economically disadvantaged backgrounds (EACEA 2015).

Students’ disadvantaged background is one of the main reasons for young people not to attend higher education. One reason for that can be explained by social capital theory (Bourdieu 1983), based on the idea that contacts or connections within and between social networks have an impact on individuals. For example, families with first-generation students can often provide less educational resources and support than academic families: they cannot help when deciding for a study programme, nor in case of difficulties with a professor or the question where to apply for grants. Counsellors can play an important role for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, as they can somehow compensate the lack of support other students might have from their family and friends (Pham and Keenan 2011).



Other measures identified recently that enable students with low socio-economic background to participate in higher education is the introduction of alternative access routes, also mentioned in the 2012 Bucharest Communiqué. In many countries, the regular entry routes are defined by formal qualifications such as a higher education entrance degree or have access regulations such as exams or scoring based on school grades. While these regulations are considered a barrier for disadvantaged groups, many countries aim for providing alternative entrance routes, in order to compensate the imbalance between over- and under-represented groups. Also recognition of prior learning is considered an important tool to widen participation in higher education.

Dropout from higher education has a number of reasons, which might include psychological reasons, wrong choices of study programme, lack of financial resources. However, students from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to dropout. For example, in case of socio-economic disadvantaged backgrounds, students risk to drop out might be higher because of a lack of support from their families.

Counselling is one of the measures to reduce dropout in many countries. Other measures include additional financing or social support groups as well as student-centred teaching and learning approaches (ESU 2015). Reducing dropout and increasing completion rates in higher education is mentioned in one of the key strategies within the EHEA. Guidance of students, also when deciding their study programme is considered an effective tool to reduce dropouts. Students' expectations, commitment to the content of the programme as well as study programme expectations often differ from reality and lead to little satisfaction and often dropouts. Having the right image and realistic expectations is crucial to the probability of completing higher education successfully (Warps 2012). Counselling and guidance activities as career choice activities, visiting of future study programmes or matching activities support these choices (Mittendorff et al. 2017). Thus, better-informed students have more realistic expectations for their studies and are more satisfied with their choice because their expectations correspond to their experiences (Blüthmann 2012). This is why counselling plays such an important role in the decision-making process—not only for underrepresented groups but for them even more. Higher satisfaction means a higher chance to conclude the studies and therefore a lower rate of dropping out (Blüthmann 2012).

### ***Student Counselling as a Key Measure to Widen Access to Higher Education***

Counselling and guidance activities for students and prospective students are provided by diverse actors in Europe. There are many areas of counselling identified, such as educational guidance, career guidance, disability/equal opportunity guidance. While educational and career guidance is widely accepted and used by many

students, services such as psychological counselling differ by country and also age of students. In countries where students enter higher education at a younger age (e.g. USA, UK, Ireland), psychological counselling is considered common for young people. In countries where students traditionally enter higher education at an older age, they are regarded as adults and expected to take care of themselves, (Rücker 2015) thus psychological counselling is often not provided for all students although there is a high number of students with psychological disabilities.

The way counselling is organised, the level of competence and qualifications of counsellor differ greatly from sector to sector, from institution to institution and from country to country (Rücker 2015). While in some countries, universities have an obligation to provide counselling, in other countries many private associations or NGOs provide counselling to students, especially in countries with high demands to access higher education. In other cases organisations aiming for support of specific student groups and/or disadvantaged or underrepresented groups provide specific counselling. This often does not include only provision of information but also support in difficult situations (e.g. where students are affected by harassment) as well as provision of a peer-network. For example, these activities are provided for female students in STEM programmes, older students, LGBTQ students or students with children.

In many countries counselling and guidance is provided by students' unions. However, the approaches of students' unions differ as well as the specific measures undertaken. In most cases counselling activities by students' unions are based on the concept of peer counselling. Students providing guidance for other students or prospective students has many advantages, often meaning that counselling is provided on a level playing field. All those involved live in a similar environment, often taking part in the same study programme. They experience similar difficulties and challenges and counselling often includes an exchange of good practices on how to overcome these. At the same time, peer counselling comes with difficulties: many of the counsellors are volunteers and provide their services in their free time. Thus, the quality of counselling is diverse and based on the individual's engagement in learning e.g. about legal backgrounds and other counselling opportunities. In many cases, the students' union provides trainings and/or documents and information materials to overcome this issue. Another challenge is the lack of professional counsellors and/or supervisors. Not all questions can be answered within peer counselling alone. A network of professionals who can support students is important, but often not possible because counselling activities may lack funding. In some cases students' unions are able to provide funding for legal or psychology professionals who can support student counsellors or students if required.

Another challenge for students' unions is that they do not only aim to solve individual student issue but identify a political solution to problems encountered by the overall student population. Thus, provision of counselling is often considered an conflicting area, as the problems identified during counselling are also used to make political claims. with making political use out of the problems identified during counselling activities (Wilhelm 2013).

The diverse types of counselling provided by students' unions make it difficult to compare them in terms of effectiveness also because little data is available. But results from Germany and Austria tend to show that counselling activities provided by student unions are helpful to students. In a representative study in Germany, 74 percent of the students who took advantage of student union counselling activities perceived it as useful (Ortenburger 2013). In the nation-wide Social Survey 2015 in Austria, two out of the top three rated counselling activities are provided by the Austrian Students' Union. Besides counselling activities, mentoring and tutoring by peers is also a common activity by students' union. As there is no data on the specific mentoring programmes, they are seen as a successful measure to prevent dropouts. As Cullen wrote "[...] a number of studies suggest that institutions that adopt peer and mentoring support programmes have lower rates of dropout" (Cullen 2013).

## **What Kind of Counselling Is Provided by Students' Unions in Europe?**

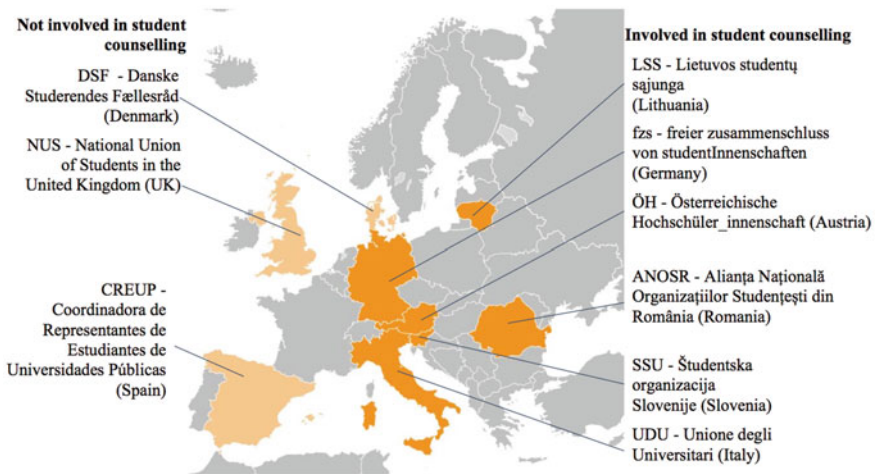
To learn about different approaches to student counselling provision in Europe, nine countries were selected for an in-depth analysis to identify current practices in student counselling by students' unions, based on geographical diversity. The data was gathered by an online survey sent to the national students' unions of the respective countries, desk research and follow-up telephone interviews with student representatives in the nine countries analysed.

Students' unions follow diverse approaches regarding counselling activities. While some unions consider the provision of counselling as one of their major tasks, others are not involved in counselling activities at all. The approach followed by the students' unions is influenced by the traditional self-understanding of their role. Some unions consider themselves more as a political actor in the academic and/or public sphere, others consider the provision of services to students as their core activity. Counselling activities are also a question of resources. Many students' unions do not have financial resources to provide counselling to students for example by hiring professionals. Other students' unions dedicate their staff resources to other issues, as they are considered more urgent. For example, in the UK counselling is provided mostly by universities, while the students' unions focus more on academic representation and raising awareness on issues such as student welfare and support for student groups experiencing discrimination: women, black and minority ethnic students, disabled students and LGBTQ students. Another reason for students' unions not to engage in student counselling is the political environment. For example, with the ongoing crisis in Spain, the students' unions focus on the struggle against raising tuition fees and financial cuts to scholarships, although counselling activities are considered important in the future.

But also, unions which provide counselling activities struggle with the available resources. For example, in Italy, counselling is mainly provided by student volunteers while there is a lack of resources for the organisation of counselling, as paid staff or counselling offices. In Germany and Austria, the expansion of psychological student counselling was identified as not satisfactory at the moment. In total three of the students' unions in the nine countries analysed do not provide student counselling due to the reasons described. Six unions provide counselling activities.

Counselling activities provided by the students' unions vary. The Lithuanian students' union provides general counselling for individual students, which might range from student loans and scholarships to the quality of student housing. The German students' union only counsels few individual cases at national level, which are specifically brought to their attention, while the main counselling activities are provided by the unions at institutional level. The fzs (Germany) provides specific counselling to students who have problems in finding a study place matching their preferences because of restricted access. A specific website was developed to enable the exchange of study places among students (Fig. 1).

In Italy, Slovenia and Austria counselling provided by the students' unions is diverse and covers a number of activities. This includes counselling of prospective students on entering higher education and choosing a specific study programme. The Austrian Students' Union provides counselling for prospective students also in schools and organises a peer-counselling programme, where prospective students join a student to attend lectures and can ask questions afterwards. The Italian students' union organises guided tours by their local unions, providing background information about the university to new students with a focus on local specifics, services offered and unions as well as student rights. The Slovenian students' union (SSU) attends higher education fairs, providing specific information via website and

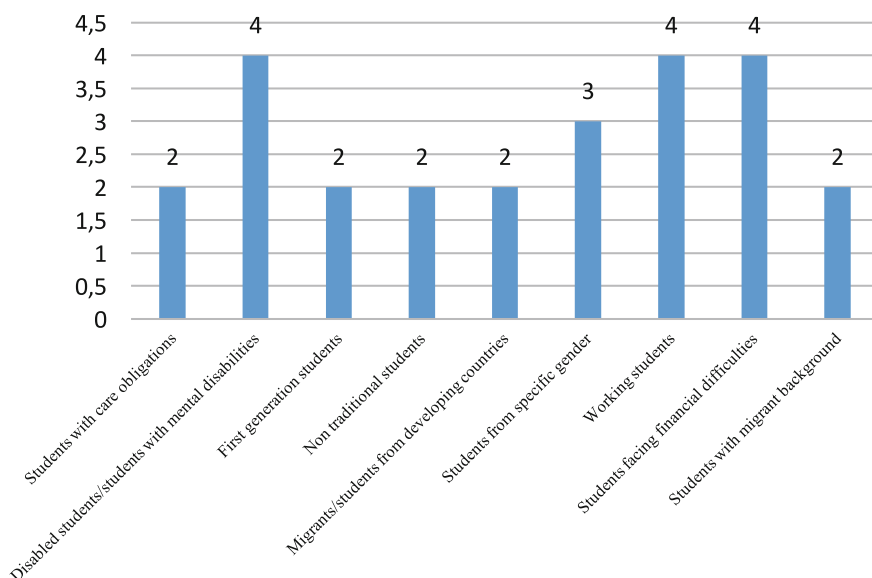


**Fig. 1** Students union involvement in student counselling. *Source* Online survey; n = 9

email. The Italian and the Austrian unions both offer regular counselling at national and local level on diverse issues. The Austrian union also provides online counselling through a chat programme as well as counselling for specific topics such as accessibility and barrier-free education, social affairs, foreign students and higher education regulations. In Romania the students' union (ANOSR) was actively involved in the development of the methodology provided by Counselling and Career Orientation Centres, which was adopted in October 2014 by Order of the Ministry of Education. These measures were, nonetheless, not put in practice—according to the union, due to inadequate funding.

Students' unions do not only provide general counselling but also counselling for specific target groups, underrepresented in higher education. The target groups approached differ by country. While most target disabled students and students with mental disabilities, working students and students facing financial difficulties, care obligations and gender issues are not tackled by all unions specifically. Target groups such as first-generation students, non-traditional students, migrants and students from developing countries, or students with migrant background are provided with specific counselling by only half of the unions analysed.

Three students' unions (in Lithuania, Denmark and Austria) also reported providing mentoring and tutoring to (prospective) students. This is organised and implemented by local students' unions which organise the mentoring programmes and match the mentors with prospective and/or first-year students (Fig. 2).



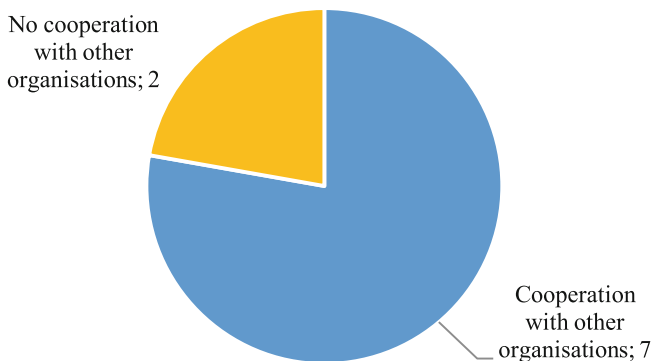
**Fig. 2** Counselling activities for specific target groups. *Source* Online survey; n = 9

Many students' union cooperate with other organisations in order to provide counselling to students, especially when it comes to specific issues such as housing, law or working students.

The Lithuanian students' union often cooperates with youth organisations. The German students' union cooperates with tenants' unions in housing issues, with higher education groups of the federal trade union (DGB) or local lawyers associations. The UK students' union works with the Child Poverty Action group to produce a yearly advice book on student finance and cooperates with other organisations providing advice and guidance to students, in order to exchange good practices and the impact of legislation on students. The Italian students' union collaborates with the high school students' union (Rete degli Studenti Medi) to provide counselling to students in their last year of upper secondary education. They also work with the trade union (CGIL) to support working students, as well as with LGBT organisations (e.g. Arcigay).

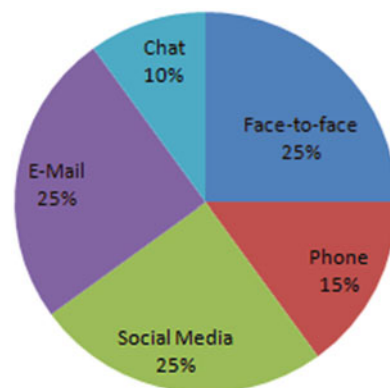
The Austrian students' union cooperates with the Ministry of Science, which funds counselling activities for prospective students. Other cooperation takes place by exchange of experiences and best practices with the federal Psychological Counselling Service, the department for study grants and higher education institutions. Two unions (SSU in Slovenia and ANOSR in Romania) cooperate with representative bodies: SSU reported cooperation depending on the target groups, whereas ANOSR cooperates and meets regularly with the Romanian Youth Council and the National Council of Students. ANOSR and ÖH (Austria) reported cooperation with the responsible ministry and other institutions which provide student counselling (Fig. 3).

Students' unions describe that most counselling activities take place regularly face-to-face, via phone and by e-mail. Face-to-face counselling is considered the most useful way, as students often feel more comfortable by meeting a peer-counsellor and issues can be discussed in more detail. E-mail and social media conversation are also often used to arrange a face-to-face meeting or to direct students to the most appropriate counsellor in case of specific questions (Fig. 4).



**Fig. 3** Cooperation with other organisations. *Source* Online survey;  $n = 9$

**Fig. 4** Communication channels used for counselling activities. *Source* Online survey; n = 9



The use of social media in student counselling was mentioned by all unions. Social media is considered an additional way of counselling, for example using the Facebook chat. One union reports the growing use of virtual communication (e-mail or social media). Also, other chat programmes, such as WhatsApp or Telegram, were mentioned amongst used communication tools. They are considered helpful as they provide quick, informal counselling for some questions or help schedule face-to-face meetings.

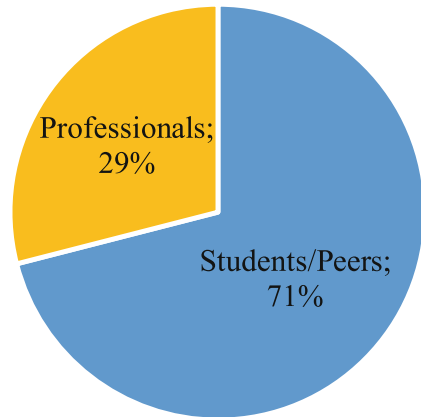
Individuals providing counselling to students have diverse backgrounds, however in most cases, counselling is provided by student peers. This is considered helpful by many students' unions, as peer counselling lowers the barrier to ask "silly" questions and counsellors know the living and studying situation from their own experience. However, some students' unions also employ professional counsellors. When it comes to legal issues, professionals with a background in law, often specialised in higher education law, are employed. In some cases, professional counsellors, as educational counsellors with a background in social sciences or psychologists are employed, for example to support prospective students in the selection process of their desired study programme or to support students in psychological crisis.

Counselling is provided mostly on a regular basis. There are daily or specified opening hours (e.g. 2–3 times a week). In two of the analysed cases, counselling is available on a non-regular basis, upon demand of students (Fig. 5).

## **Students' Involvement in the Development of National Strategies for Social Dimension**

The social dimension of higher education is considered of different importance in the European countries. Within the "Bologna with student eyes" survey, students' unions considered the social dimension as a high priority in only eight countries

**Fig. 5** Background of counsellors. *Source* Online survey; n = 9



(out of 36 Bologna countries) and many reported they perceived students as the only stakeholders interested in taking action in the field of social dimension.

Since the Bucharest Communiqué (2012), countries are encouraged to develop national access plans to widen participation in higher education. In 2015, access plans were successfully implemented in two countries, six were struggling with proper implementation of action plans, ten countries were debating implementation of an action plan and 13 countries did not debate it until that moment (ESU 2015). However, it seems that several countries started to work on the implementation of a strategy to widen participation in higher education since then.

Nearly all students' unions interviewed for this analysis, with one exception, are involved in the development of a national strategy for social dimension in their country. The development of national strategies for widening access to higher education differs by country. While some countries have strategies already implemented, others are in the early stages of this process.

The involvement of students in the process of developing a strategy for widening access differs by country. However, in most countries, students' unions are critical about the outcomes and not satisfied with the measures described in the strategy.

In Lithuania, no strategy on social dimension is in place yet, but there are ongoing working groups involving the students' union. The Spanish students' union takes part in the consultation process, but has a critical perspective on the process and is not satisfied with the results yet. In Germany, the students' union is involved in related working groups and the legislative procedures. However, due to the German structure of regional responsibility for education, no national strategy is in place. Also in the UK, there are regional differences, however, all four administrations have been focussed on policies relating to the student dimension and as a national representative organisation, the students' union is consulted and has an input into proposed legislation on widening access. The students' union is involved in commissions and implementation groups of access plans and is very active in identifying barriers to different student groups and raising awareness about the



social dimension. In Italy the students' union is involved in the process to develop the national strategy on the social dimension as a consultant body. However, the students' union is not satisfied with their involvement in the process so far. The Austrian students' union is not satisfied with the outcomes of the process to develop a strategy for widening access to higher education. They were involved in the consultation process within several workshops, but do not consider their recommendations adequately represented in the final outcome. The Slovenian students' union is fairly satisfied with the outcome of its involvement—the union reports being part of all task forces and participating in negotiations reminding the others about the importance of the social dimension. In Romania, the students' union started to campaign for social dimension issues in 2016, demanding public funding and other goals for higher education development for the election cycle 2016–2020. As a result of ANOSR's commitment, the student scholarship fund increased by 142% between January and March 2017 and the students benefit from free train transportation throughout the year, with all types of trains. ANOSR has requested specific increases for different budget chapters such as basic funding for scholarships, investment funds in higher education, subsidy for transport or canteens, etc. The only students' union which is not actively involved in the development of national strategies regarding the social dimension is the Danish one.

## Conclusions

The analysis of student' union involvement in student counselling and guidance activities identifies a number of good practices supporting underrepresented groups in higher education. Counselling and guidance are considered highly important when it comes to widening access to higher education and support for disadvantaged students.

Students' unions are well aware of the social dimension of higher education and aim to provide services and engage in policy-making to achieve a more diverse student population, which includes negotiations with responsible stakeholders and policymakers while also campaigning and lobbying. However, the approaches used differ by students' union. While some unions consider the provision of counselling and guidance as one of the main pillars to support disadvantaged students on their way to higher education and successful completion of their studies, other unions are more active in policy-making and consider counselling mainly a responsibility of universities and other organisations.

For those students' unions involved in counselling and guidance activities, the peer learning approach has proven specific relevance. The contact on a level playing field as well as the communication tools used (e.g. social media, chat, e-mail) reduce barriers for (prospective) students. Especially in cases where counsellors are also role models from underrepresented groups, the peer counselling is effective, as counsellors and students share similar experiences.

However, students' unions also identify challenges when it comes to peer counselling activities. For example many of them lack the necessary resources and funding to provide adequate counselling involving professional supervisors or professional counsellors. Moreover, sometimes they lack infrastructure and professional training. Another point mentioned by both students' unions and relevant literature is the lack of data on underrepresented groups in higher education. At the same time some students' unions face restrictions and higher education reforms such as stricter study plans with less individual choices and flexibility, reforms which link grants to a certain study progress and similar issues.

Counselling activities offered by students' unions fill a gap: on one hand, most of them cooperate with other organisations and, on the other hand, students or prospective students are less hesitant in asking for help. So, students' unions often interact with those who might not get in contact with specialised organisations. From this perspective, students' unions have to be all-round talents in their counselling offers: different target groups, different issues, different channels. However, in a certain way, they are also the connecting "glue" between specialised counselling offers due to their cooperation with responsible organisations or stakeholders.

The role of counselling activities for widening access and creating an inclusive higher education system, as well as for reducing dropouts from higher education was mentioned by several documents and authors. Following the Ministerial Communiqués of recent Ministerial Conferences, many countries aim for the implementation of a social dimension strategy or national access plans. While students unions are involved in the development of these strategies, many of them are not satisfied with the process and/or its outcomes yet, although it will be a crucial point for the successful further implementation of the Bologna Process that aims for a more diverse student population.

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# A New Aspect of Internationalisation? Specific Challenges and Support Structures for Refugees on Their Way to German Higher Education



Jana Berg

## Introduction

In 2015 and 2016, the number of asylum applications spiked in some European countries, including Germany. Many refugees and asylum seekers have high educational aspirations (Brücker et al. 2016), and their level of education determines their chances of integration and success in the host country (Fortin et al. 2016). Therefore, the question of how to integrate refugees and asylum seekers into higher education institutions (HEIs) became increasingly relevant. Supported by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), universities, universities of applied sciences and preparatory colleges started the “Integra”-programs to assist refugees on their way to and through higher education (Fourier et al. 2017).

Based on a system theoretical intersectional perspective, this article works out what first contacts for refugees, members of the international offices and a vice-president at 5 German HEIs of internationalisation identify as specific challenges for refugees and asylum seekers<sup>1</sup> on their way to German higher education, and then focuses on how German HEIs support them. Concluding, it recommends backing HEIs up financially in order to encourage and help the process of institutionalising supporting structures; and also to target more networking and

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<sup>1</sup>While it will generally be referred to refugees in this text, technically, some of the prospective students are also asylum seekers, which means they do not have received a refugee status yet (see Columbia n.y.).

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exchange of information between the HEIs. The article argues for an understanding of refugee students as internationals, as an addition to the HEIs and societies' diversity and as potentially highly skilled students.

## **Access to Higher Education for International Students, Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Germany**

Regardless of their residential status, refugees can apply to any German higher education institution; as long as they fulfil the general criteria for international applicants, they will be treated as international students (Study In n.y.a). Mostly, that means to hold a university entrance qualification and speak the required language, which in the vast majority of German Bachelor programs is German, on a C1 level.

Study preparation and access to higher education in Germany are central issues for international students: 32% of international students come to Germany with a high school diploma, while 21% had previously studied abroad, but had not completed their studies (Apolinarski and Poskowsky 2013, p. 4). International diplomas need to go through a process of recognition before being acknowledged as university entrance qualifications in Germany. The German Act of Recognition, however, is not applicable to school certificates obtained in non-EU countries (Anerkennung in Deutschland n.y.). Therefore, the matriculation offices or international offices of higher education institutions take the decision on their eligibility.

Preparatory courses can be a crucial aspect of access to higher education. Prospective international and refugee students with secondary diplomas that are not recognised as university entrance qualification in Germany have to take an assessment test ("*Feststellungsprüfung*"). They can enrol in either private or public<sup>2</sup> preparatory colleges ("*Studienkollegs*") to study for this test (Studienkollegs.de n.y.). The two-semester courses cover terminology and basic knowledge in the desired academic field. In 2012, 18% of all international students had to visit a preparatory college (Apolinarski and Poskowsky 2013, p. 5).

While technically, refugees are treated like all international (prospective) students during their application and enrolment, during the phase of study preparations they receive special support in order to deal with their specific situation. For example, the entrance criteria for the preparatory colleges already include advanced knowledge of the German language. Therefore, special classes prepare refugees for the entrance test in order to enrol in the preparatory courses that lead to the assessment test (Studienkolleg Hannover n.y.). Additionally, HEIs started offering courses, for example language and math classes, to support prospective refugee

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<sup>2</sup>Cost and availability of preparatory colleges depend on the German state and the individual college.

students on their way to higher education (Beigang and von Blumenthal 2016). In 2016, 6806 refugees and asylum seekers took part in courses offered by 135 HEIs and 37 preparatory colleges within the “Integra”-program (Fourier et al. 2017: 12). Due to the time needed to reach the necessary language skills for study preparations, it can be assumed that the number of refugees in preparatory courses is still going to increase. Generally, preparatory colleges and preparatory courses can be seen as important institutions for the internationalisation of German higher education and the support of prospective refugee students.

## **Challenges and Support for Refugees and Asylum Seekers at German HEIs**

In order to work out specific challenges for refugees on their way to higher education and to compare the support and integration programs at different HEIs, I conducted eight expert interviews (Kruse 2015, p. 166 et seq.; Bogner et al. 2002) at five HEIs in four German states (“*Bundesländer*”). My interview-partners were first contacts for refugees, members of international offices, one head of an international office and one vice-president for internationalisation. The sample consists of members of five HEIs, two universities of applied sciences and three universities, in four different German states and regions. The HEIs have been sampled based on a regional cluster to cover different areas in Germany and on their support for refugees (existing support and special programs). An additional criterion was to include a university of excellence.<sup>3</sup> I analysed the interviews and the mission statements for internationalisation as well as the information for refugees offered by the universities’ website with content analysis. In the following, an overview of the specific challenges for refugees the interview-partners described will be given, followed by short descriptions of the sampled HEIs and their support for refugees.

### ***Specific Challenges on the Way to Higher Education for Refugees and Asylum Seekers: An Intersectional Approach***

Prospective international students face a variety of challenges in Germany. It can be assumed that, to some extent, refugees face similar difficulties as all international students, amplified by and in addition to hindrances arising from their specific

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<sup>3</sup>The excellence initiative is a program by German’s federal and state’s governments to fund and support outstanding programs and institutions at selected universities. In intervals of 7 years, universities have to apply with proposed excellence clusters. Each time, 11 universities will be selected to be of excellence and receive the funding (see BMBF n.y.).

situation. In addition to entrance qualification (Brücker et al. 2016, p. 5) and language, literature on the situation of international students in Germany identifies several issues, for example study culture, finances (Schammann and Younso 2016, pp. 12–13), social isolation, information and support (Ebert and Heublein 2017; Levantino 2016, p. 90), gaps in the educational biography (Ebert and Heublein 2017, p. 32) and residential status as possible central challenges for access to and success in higher education in Germany (Apolinarski and Poskowsky 2013; Morris-Lange 2017). Trauma (Joyce et al. 2010) and residence obligations for asylum seekers are examples of additional hindrances for (prospective) students with the experience of forced migration.

The situation of refugees can be understood as an intersection of various factors of marginalisation. This means that those factors don't simply coexist or add up but interdepend and influence each other. They cannot be understood independently but have to be considered within their interdependence (see Müller 2011, p. 305). Instead of focussing on set factors like race, class and gender, as it is often done in intersectional approaches (see Müller 2011, p. 302ff.; Weinbach 2008), this article focuses on the factors influencing refugees' integration into HEIs that members of HEIs describe from their perspective,<sup>4</sup> following Weinbach's (2008) system theoretical approach to Intersectionality. The factors highlighted here are those influencing the inclusion into the HEI as an organisation and cannot be understood as a holistic representation of challenges refugees face within the host society. Some of those factors also apply to national or international students with no experience of forced migration; their specific combination is due to the individual situation—in this case, the specific situation of refugees. It can be assumed that some issues are amplified and others added by the specific situation of refugees. Also, their impact differs. While language and entrance qualification influence the access to higher education directly, others can be crucial hindrances for learning conditions and the general possibility of remaining in higher education. In the following, I will give an overview of several closely connected and interdependent challenges for prospective refugee and asylum-seeking students that were described by HEIs members throughout the interviews.

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<sup>4</sup>This paper is based on the perspective of members of German HEIs. For an advanced understanding of the situation and needs of refugees, their perspective must be considered. Studies as the WeGe-project ([www.wege.dzhw.eu](http://www.wege.dzhw.eu)) are working on this task. It can be assumed and some studies show that refugees will have different perspectives on some of those aspects, or even add completely others (see Stevenson and Willott 2007: 675). Harris and Marlowe indicate that staff members do not always “recognise important factors contributing to” (ibid., 2011: 190) refugee students' performance. Examples are aspects of age (Schammann and Younso 2016, p. 28) and gender (Hobsig 2004), which have only been briefly mentioned in the interviews this paper is based on.



## Language

It stands and falls with German language training and finances

(Interview international office member, University E, translated by JB)

Speaking German is a crucial skill and a requirement for applying for German higher education as well as for preparatory colleges. Preparatory colleges usually require German on at least a B1 level; HEIs often require a C1 level for inscription and also B1 for preparatory classes. More than one third of all international students describe their German as bad (Morris-Lange 2017, p. 21; Apolinarski and Poskowsky 2013, p. 48). While a total of 54% of international students' state to have acquired first language skills before coming to Germany. Refugees seem to start with less previous experience. In a study of the Institute for Employment Research (IAB) with 4500 refugees in Germany, 90% stated to not have had any knowledge of German when entering the country (Brücker et al. 2016, p. 7); there is no statistical information on the selective group of those who plan on studying, but according to the interviews, the level of refugees' German language skills is regularly very low in the beginning. The missing language skills of prospective refugee students in comparison with other foreign students are explained by some interview-partners with the unpredicted nature of their stay in Germany. Since they mostly did not plan to study in Germany, they did not prepare it with language classes.

Another issue is the diverse quality of language classes offered for refugees. Not all of them are accepted by the universities so it has to be certain classes which, on the other hand, are not always accepted by the job centres or the immigration office. This points out another issue: Refugees have to generally consider the rules, requirements and restrictions of several institutions connected to their financial situation and their residential status.

## A Multitude of Bureaucratic Requirements

The life of asylum seekers is highly regulated in Germany. Benefits, accommodation and integration support like language classes or integration courses are connected with official requirements they have to meet. They differ locally by state and on the municipal level, and partly depend directly on the person responsible. Schammann shows exemplarily how the Asylbewerberleistungsgesetzes (AsylbLG), the law that regulates social benefits for refugees in Germany, depends on the interpretation of local officials (Schammann 2015, p. 168 et seq.), and Täubig argues that the highly regulated and repressive everyday living conditions of asylum seekers and refugees are designed to inhibit quick integration rather than to support it (Täubig 2009). The complication of access to higher education can be one example for that. Especially during study preparations, different and even

contradicting regulations and unclear responsibilities can lead to difficulties for prospective refugee students. For example, meeting the requirements for social benefit can contradict or prevent the visit of preparatory classes. A member of the international office at university E describes a case when several members of a family had to drop out study preparations in order to take part in a job-creation program:

I experienced it once with a whole family that somebody really worked against it. So he, I fought a long time for him to be allowed to take the German class, and fought long for the wife to also be allowed to take the German class. They all had to sto, because the job-centre or the consultant did completely not support it. It simply could not be. They absolutely had to take part in a job-creation program.

(Interview international office member, University E, translated by JB)

## Finances

Depending on the level of income in the country of origin, the family background and potential scholarships, finances can be a serious difficulty for international students, despite the comparatively low study costs in Germany (Morris-Lange 2017: 23). For asylum seekers and refugees, finances can be a crucial hindrance. Especially during the preparatory classes, they depend on benefits under the “Asylum-seekers Benefit Act” or “Unemployment Benefit II” (ALG II) (Study In n. y.b). Depending on the length of their stay and their residential status, refugees can be supported by student loans granted under Germany’s Federal Education Assistance Act (BAföG) while studying, which in one interview is described as an advantage of refugees in comparison to other international students. The application requires a confirmation of admission to a HEI and can be a high bureaucratic obstacle even for national students (Morris-Lange 2017, p. 12; also see Schammann and Younso 2016, pp. 12–13). Even though a lot of the programs universities offer for refugees are for free or financially supported, especially the time of study preparations is precarious up to impossible; while official responsibilities for financial support are unclear.

The BAföG-office says, it is the job-centres’ responsibility to pay during the hold-up time, and the job-centre says, nah, we don’t, because it is supposed to be supported by BaföG.

(Interview international office member, University E, translated by JB).

## Entrance Qualification and Missing Documents

While 32% of refugees hold a secondary school degree with a university entrance qualification which, according to the IAB, is in most cases likely to be acknowledged as such (Brücker et al. 2016, p. 5), as for all prospective international students, the non-recognition of foreign degrees can be a serious obstacle. In 2012,

18% of all international students had to visit a preparatory college, because their qualification was not recognised as university entrance qualification (Apolinarski and Poskowsky 2013, p. 5). For refugees, there are some additional hindrances to be considered, an example for some cases is incomplete paperwork due to the circumstances of migration. A special case is the students from Eritrea, where a lot of people go to school, but only get a certificate after finishing their military service (ibid., p. 6). Also, especially in areas of armed conflict, a lot of refugees dropped out of school without finishing it. In case a certificate or diploma is missing, the residential status becomes important. Based on a decision of the German ministers of Education and the Arts, refugees can be given several options to still apply for higher education in case their documents are missing due to the circumstances of forced migration. The possibilities range from suitability tests to declaration on oath, and vary not only in between German states but also between single universities (Study In n.y.c).

### **Gap in Educational Biography**

Another challenge for refugees is the gap in their educational biography. It can be assumed that it took them some time to arrive in Germany, and then it takes time to meet the criteria for applying and enrolling at HEIs. At the time they are able to start preparatory colleges or apply for higher education, they might have been outside educational institutions for years. That adds up to cultural differences of learning and language barriers. Because of the time needed for study-preparation, the interview-partners argue that the numbers of applicants with the experience of forced migration will increase heavily soon, since the people that arrived in 2015 and 2016 will soon meet the formal criteria and language proficiency to enrol.

### **Study Culture**

Studies show that typical elements of higher education differ internationally. According to the members of the HEI, mode of discussion, self-discipline etc. can be issues for international students and refugees who have been socialised in different learning environments. Getting accustomed to a new study culture can take time and hard work, especially after some time completely outside of educational institutions (Morris-Lange 2017, p. 22). When asked about specific challenges for refugees that want to access higher education, five of the eight interview-partners described teaching and learning styles and different organisation structures of HEIs as crucial issues.

That group work is rather unknown. That “chalk and talk” teaching is preferred.

(Interview first contact, University D, translated by JB)

As a solution, they proposed social integration and intense counselling.

## Social Isolation

Many international students state that they would like to have contact with national students but find it difficult (Apolinarski and Poskowsky 2013, p. 48). Since their support networks are mostly abroad, they need that contact for personal reasons but, most likely, also to help them get along in German higher education institutions (Morris-Lange 2017, p. 25). One interview-partner also mentioned this network when it comes to getting internship-positions. Throughout the interview, contact with peers is argued to be an important factor for social integration and therefore academic integration in Germany.

Actually, the biggest win is that they finally meet Germans at the same age. Which is great and to me an example of really successful integration, because at some point this, this factor, is somebody a refugee or not, it does not matter at some point, because it is simply, yes, contact to peers.

(Interview first contact, UAS B, translated by JB)

Based on this, the interview-partners argue to teach international students with and without the experience of forced migration together as soon as possible and quickly integrate refugees in regular classes.

## Information

The availability and utilisation of consultation and support vary in connection to the local network and available information. As the first contacts describe it, for many refugees, personal interactions seem to be more important than information on the websites (see Baker et al. 2017).

They generally look for information. So the self-information is not very strong. Many want information from face to face interaction, instead of looking it up at the internet first, as I would do it.

(Interview first contact University D, translated by JB)

Generally, international students make use of information centres more often than national students (Ebert and Heublein 2017). For refugees, counselling is especially important and also difficult because of the already mentioned involvement of many actors and regulations: “The plurality of actors involved and complexity of legislation furthermore make it difficult for refugees to quickly get the information they require, and to understand it correctly” (Levantino 2016, p. 90). Especially during the interview with first contacts, the need of valid information was constantly emphasised and it was criticised that information gained via a personal network can be misleading, but also that incorrect information was given to the refugees from other institutions.

Many refugees that come to me daily have been given wrong information. [...] For example from friends, acquaintances, the job-centre.

(Interview first contact UAS A, translated by JB)

## **Residential Status**

More than two thirds of international students come from countries outside the European Union and need a residence permit in order to stay in Germany which needs to be renewed frequently. Academic success and finances have an impact on the renewal process. Even for successful students, this process can mean a lot of stress and put additional pressure on them and their studies (Morris-Lange 2017, p. 24). Nonetheless, the specific situation of refugees generally seems to be more insecure. Processing times in the Asylum procedure can be months, but can also last over a year (Brands and Morris-Lange 2016), and it is unclear if study success influences the procedure at all. Long waiting periods accompanied by the fear of deportation can cause high “psychological cost of uncertainty awaiting the outcome of the recognition process” (Levantino 2016, p. 90).

## **Residence Obligation and Infrastructure**

The (in)ability to choose their place of living and their freedom of movement inside the country can be an important factor for refugees. Especially during the first months, they are under residence obligations and not able to choose their place of living. Even after that, preparatory classes are only available at certain locations, so if refugees are able to participate depends on where and how well connected they live. In relation to the cooperation with other relevant institutions, as the job-centres, one interview-partner mentions that it was much easier to work with the one in the university’s city than with job-centres in the region. Two interview-partners mentioned the financing of public transportation tickets as a crucial hindrance for some prospective students.

But it is very difficult that the refugees pay for the ticket to the free language class themselves. Not all of them can do that.

(Interview first contact UAS A, translated by JB)

## **Trauma and Psychological Stress**

Having to flee a conflict zone, potentially leaving family and friends behind, living in a new country under restricted conditions and never knowing how long one is able to stay—all interview-partners mention the insecure living conditions and past and present trauma as a huge challenge for refugees; they are at least a constant distraction up to a major influence on productivity and aspirations. Most HEIs do not offer specific psychological counselling for traumatised people. While on the one hand, refugees can use the HEIs’ general psychological counselling, the vice-president for internationalisation at UAS A refers to the responsibility of the whole society which points at the fact that the integration of refugees into higher education does not only depend on the support they receive from preparatory colleges and HEIs.

When we have many traumatised people in the country, then it is actually a task of the country to take care of it. And I do think it has to be taken care of, but I don't know if it is the university's task.

(Interview vice-president for internationalisation, UAS A, translated by JB)

## **Absence**

Three interview-partners describe absence from preparatory classes as a central issue. They explain it with other responsibilities within the multitude of bureaucratic requirements, family issues, a lack of motivation caused by trauma, the need to work due to financial issues and religious reasons for absence during Ramadan. This shows how challenges on several levels manifest as an influence on study success.

If a family member is doing badly, they sometimes stay at home. Because at this moment one has to take care of the family, not of the German class.

(Interview first contact, University D, translated by JB)

## ***Support Structures at German HEI***

In order to help refugees to deal with the previously described challenges, many German HEIs institutionalised different support structures and offers. The sample shows some differences in the specific offers; within the path dependency of pre-existing organisational structures, some of the specific offers of the sampled HEIs include strong collaboration with local businesses, specific offers for traumatised students or extensive online-classes. What all sampled HEIs have in common are language classes, academic preparation like math-courses, offers to support the social integration and the offer of access to infrastructure like libraries and Wi-Fi for refugees. Hereafter, the HEIs will be shortly described, and an overview of their specific support for refugees will be given.

**University of Applied Sciences (UAS) A** is focused on the combination of theory and praxis with praxis-oriented teaching and on internationally oriented research. Internationalisation is a crucial part in the UAS mission statement and broadly promoted in order to support students' career opportunities and extend research possibilities in a globalised world and market. Therefore, the position of a vice-president for internationalisation has newly been implemented and online-courses, international study-programs, exchange programs, partnerships and international research cooperation are maintained and extended. The UAS A is well appointed with funds and staff: While the Universities of Applied Sciences A and B have about the same number of students, there are 532 enrolled students per person working at the international office, 182 less than at UAS B.

Within the international office, a position for the counselling of refugees has been established in November 2016. Because there is no nearby preparatory college available, the UAS offers a three stages study preparations program, including counselling, language classes and academic preparation. The program is supported by local companies, which offer funding. Further offerings are social events, (already existing) international study programs in English and online classes. The information on the website is addressed to prospective refugee students. While there is broad support and even funding offered, the online information for refugees is only available in German. This HEI is the only one in the sample that offers applying refugees to benefit them by raising their entrance qualification grades during the application process.

**University of Applied Sciences B** is practice-oriented and works closely together with relevant companies. In the University of Applied Science's Profile, student mobility is described as a crucial part in supporting the career opportunities for local students. The international office mostly focuses on student mobility, mainly via exchange programs and international study programs. There are 714 enrolled students per person working at the international office. A position of a vice-president for internationalisation and a mission statement for internationalisation have not been established yet, but within the international office, there is a department for the support of the internationalisation process and of social inclusion for international students.

Within this department, the engagement for refugees is coordinated. This was initially done within the regular working hours and partly as voluntary work. Starting with September 2017, a 20% position for the consultation of refugees was established. Even though there was no institutionalised position to do it, due to a lot of voluntary activities, the UAS B started a supporting program in 2015. The three stage program includes counselling, language and academic courses and support for social integration. The UAS B has its own preparatory college. In addition to this and in cooperation with the local university, audits, trips and other social events, access to the library and Wi-Fi and information on studying and applying are offered. Detailed information and related links are provided on the website in German and English. They are addressed to prospective refugee students and to already enrolled students who want to support refugees. Special about this HEI is a program that allows enrolled students to do an intercultural training and collect credit in exchange for their support of refugees. In an interview, the first contact for refugees explained that this way the voluntary engagement should be acknowledged and maintained after the topic is not present in the media anymore.

**University (U) C** is a university of excellence with a profile of high-quality research and a strong orientation towards internationalisation and diversity. The mission statement for internationalisation includes the mobility of students and academic staff, as well as research-cooperation and the internationalisation of teaching, including international study-programs. It explicitly emphasises service for all international incomings beyond academic questions, and a comprehensive approach. Internationalisation is meant to attract the best researchers and students and not only understood as the international office's task, but as a mission of the

entire organisation. Per person working at the international office, the university has 571 enrolled students.

The support for refugees is located at the university's centre for diversity, where a 50% position has been established as a first contact and counsellor for refugees. This allocation is different to the other HEIs, where support for refugees is mostly located within the international office. That can be explained with a focus on the special needs of refugees and also with a generally stronger involvement of the centre for diversity with international students. Information for refugees on the website are available in German and mostly also in English; they address prospective students as well as academics with the experience of forced migration. Most information is about the university counselling and support offers and the criteria to apply and enrol. Support programs for refugees at university C include language classes, audits, infrastructure (access to premises, the library and Wi-Fi), a buddy-program and students initiatives like a refugee law clinic. The first contact for refugees explains in the interview that most of the service for refugee and asylum-seeking prospective students is included in services that already existed and are now extended. Newly implanted offers are the counselling service and language classes. They started in 2015. A special offer that is embedded in the already existing institutional structures is psychological counselling for people with trauma.

**University D** is one of the leading Technical Universities in Germany. Within its extensive internationalisation mission statement, the focus is on student mobility and exchange, additional points are networking, research cooperation, researcher's mobility and the support of a north-south dialogue. Cooperation and aims to win new international students are targeted at certain countries. The head of the international office explains this regional focus with historically grown structures. Within the sample, the international office has about half the staff compared to University E and also less international office employees but more than double as many students as University C. There are 1627 enrolled students for every person working at the international office.

Within the international office, a 50% position has been established to counsel refugees and administrate special offers for them. The university's homepage offers information for prospective students, mostly on entrance criteria, preparatory courses and colleges, relevant institutions and offers at the university and finances. For researchers with a refugee background, contact information is given in order to support connection and access to the university. All information is given in English. In addition to academic and language preparation and the regular offers of the international office and student counselling, a buddy program and students volunteer projects offer social inclusion and a refugee law clinic.

**University E** is the biggest university in the sample; it is almost two and a half times as large as University C. While it does have a strong focus on internationalisation in its mission statement, no position of a vice-president for internationalisation has been established yet. Internationalisation includes research cooperation, student and staff mobility and international study programs and is strongly seen in connection with a globalised market. Per person working at the international office, there are 982 enrolled students.



Within the international office, a 50% position for the counselling and the coordination of support-offerings for refugees was established in April 2017. Before that, it was done in addition to the regular work by another member of the international office. The person the university lists as a first contact for refugees is a volunteering emeritus professor, who also offers counselling for refugees. The university's homepage offers detailed information on formal criteria for application and enrolment, missing documents, language classes and preparatory courses for prospective refugee students and academics with the experience of forced migration, in German and English; central information is also available in Arabic, Sorani and Kurmanji. Compared to most other HEIs, the extensive information available on the website for refugee and asylum-seeking academics is remarkable. The university supports refugees with German classes, audits, counselling and library-access and offers cooperation and networking for academics with a refugee background.

## Conclusion

All sampled HEIs did not have special offers for refugees before 2015, which shows how closely the HEIs are connected to the topics of society. It can be understood as part of their "*Reflexivität*" (self-reflexivity) (Weinbach 2008, p. 183), which means that HEIs as organisations reflect on their environment and react to changes as they are currently trying to find ways to include refugees in their system of higher education. Generally, this reflectivity results in special offers to prepare refugees. Many HEI members describe helping to integrate and educate refugees as one of the HEI's contributions to society, while also they expect support and integration programs from society, the government and other actors. How far they can support refugees depends on funding, individual engagement and also on previously existing structures. For example, the only university in the sample that offers special counselling for traumatised people did already work on that topic before. For some questions, the HEI's international office and counselling staff are just not qualified, so other structures are necessary.

Of course sometimes people come, who are in the middle of legal actions because [...] they got a negative notification. Then we say, okay, there is a refugee law clinic or a lawyer must be asked, but we can't do this, also counsel on legal questions of asylum

(Interview first contact University C, translated by JB)

After 2015, even HEIs with small international offices set up broad support structures. A lot of them started out as volunteer work and then were institution-alised; at UAS B even the student support initiatives became a part of the "Studium Generale" and can be rewarded with credit points. When the interviews took place in summer 2017, all sampled HEI either already had established or were establishing part-time positions for people in charge of counselling refugees and administrate support structures and courses. This is made possible by the "Integra"-

program of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research. In most interviews, money was emphasised as a crucial factor in order to be able to guarantee the support. While generally, the first contacts for refugees maintained connections to other people in similar positions, the need for a network to exchange ideas and experiences was mentioned several times.

Within their mission statements on internationalisation, most HEIs focus on student mobility, more or less in accordance with the academic staff's mobility and academic exchange. Different actors at the HEIs work on different aspects of the process of internationalisation: academic exchange and international research projects are usually in the area of responsibility of individual academics or departments, student mobility and service for internationals is a huge part of the international offices work, while presidents and vice-presidents for internationalisation focus on strategic cooperation and transfer of organisational structures. The support-offerings for refugees are usually also facilitated by many institutions throughout the HEIS, such as language centres, student counselling, centres for diversity and student initiatives. Their coordination is mostly located within the international office, but partly also in diversity centres.

Whether and to what extent refugees are understood as part of the HEI's internationalisation or otherwise, for example its diversification, as part of a third mission etc. will need further investigation, but in the interview, they generally seemed to be understood as prospective students with special needs. Most interview-partners mention the social and academic inclusion of refugees and eventually their transformation to the status of (regular) international students as highly important. Several challenges to refugees' inclusion in the HEI are emphasised by the HEI actors, and for some of them, solutions are proposed. The integration of refugees into higher education is seen as a chance for refugees to improve their living conditions and help a quicker integration. Generally, all interview-partners assume that the number of refugees applying for higher education will keep rising.

The similar challenges that are described from the experience of different actors at 5 HEIs in 4 different German states suggest that structural support for refugees on their way to higher education is necessary; so are efforts to help social integration. The aim should be to minimize disadvantages. While the different challenges can be understood as interdependent intersections, their exact occurrence and impact depend largely on the individual situation. They cannot all be addressed by just one institution, but refugees rather depend on the support by several actors and institutions, individually addressing the numerous challenges they face. This also means that refugees can be included in pre-existing support structures, and newly implemented offerings can, on long term, be of help for other groups (partly) facing similar challenges.

The support structures include several parts of the HEI, but also actors and institutions outside of higher education. Since language skills and entrance qualification are the most direct influence on compatibility with the HEI, all sampled HEI offer courses in this context. Within their path dependency of already existing

structures, they organize additional offers to meet other challenges. In order to include refugees, as many of the named factors as possible should be addressed by HEIs and surrounding organisations. Especially the extension of pre-existing structures, the provision of extensive and detailed information, the interconnection of support structures within and outside of HEI and the possibility of individual solutions seem crucial in order to support (not only) refugees on their way to German HEIs. Additionally, HEIs should reflect on some of their organisational structures, like their language requirements, the non-acknowledgement of some integration-courses refugees have to visit and other bureaucratic challenges they create for refugees. For example, some access criteria might need to be revised in order to comply with the situation of refugees in Germany. This would mean to take the organisational *Reflexivität* one step further and adjust organisational structures in order to enable the integration of a new group of students into the system of higher education.

The internationalisation of higher education, as described in the corresponding mission statements, is usually focused on program- and network-based partnerships and mobility and aims at winning high-income, highly trained students from specific areas. It mostly is a process that is pushed by and takes place within international competition. In this context, it seems obstructive to focus on refugees solely as people with special needs. Regarding the aim of the HEI members to see refugees become regular international students, it would make sense to frame them as a potential enrichment of a diverse and international HEI, but also as potential highly educated international students. This could also mean to re-think the connection between internationalisation and diversification of HEIs, and maybe shift the competitive focus of internationalisation-strategies. Structures that are implemented to support refugees can then be seen as a positive influence on the entire organisation since the support structures enrich a diverse internationalisation and might also be of use for other students on a long-term (see Schammann and Younso 2016, p. 46). Therefore, the investment in support for refugees can be seen as a general effort towards a social and diverse system of higher education.

As a bottom line, the following points should be taken into consideration for higher education policy:

- The HEIs support of refugees depends on funding. Since finances are important to refugees as well as universities, the institutionalisation of support structures like counselling and special offers for refugees as well as the funding of refugees costs of living should be supported as much as possible.
- Most HEIs started their programs with volunteer work based on a try and error strategy. A strong network and guidelines concerning regulations and demands of other institutions can be a lot of help for them.
- While the HEI do an important job for integrating refugees, they cannot do it on their own. Integration and information for refugees should be treated as general tasks of the whole society. HEIs and actors outside of higher education should be encouraged to network and cooperate as much as possible.

- The information on the possibilities of studies for refugees should be pointed out to other relevant actors active in counselling refugees.
- Diversity and internationalisation should be framed as positive factors within a globalised world, and refugees should be seen as prospective highly capable students instead of exclusively focussing on their special needs.

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# Studying and Working—Hurdle or Springboard? Widening Access to Higher Education for Working Students in Malta



Christine Scholz Fenech and Milosh Raykov

## Introduction

Higher education has a significant influence on all members of a society as well as on the overall national social and economic development. The provision of equitable access to higher education is not only imperative for attaining inclusive societies but also central to fostering economic development and harnessing the creative potential of people (Bergan 2005; Zgaga 2005; Orr 2012). This has also been acknowledged by policymakers (Brooks 2017), which in the Bologna Process stressed:

the societal aspiration that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should reflect the diversity of our populations. We reaffirm the importance of students being able to complete their studies without obstacles related to their social and economic background. We therefore continue our efforts to provide adequate student services, create more flexible learning pathways into and within higher education, and to widen participation at all levels on the basis of equal opportunity. (London Communiqué 2007, p. 5)

The impact of higher education on economic development is also the focus of the Lisbon Strategy, which in 2000 established the goal of becoming “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion” (European Council 2000, p. 3). More recently, it was emphasized in the EU 2020 strategy seeking to increase the educational attainment among 30–34-year-olds to

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40% by 2020 (European Commission 2010). Through the recent skills agenda, the European Commission also emphasizes the importance of the higher education sector to respond to labour market needs (European Commission 2016).

Thus, the importance of widening access to higher education is not only a question of ensuring an inclusive society but also a response to labour market demands. Orr (2010), with reference to Koucký and CEDEFOP, has argued that maintaining current graduate rates will not be sufficient to meet the market demand for highly skilled labour. Increasing attainment levels may not be realised only by increasing the share of post-secondary school graduates continuing in higher education but also through attracting and re-integrating those who did not continue their education. Thus, meeting the labour market demand requires catering to the needs of a more diversified student population. As Beerkens et al. (2011) argues, this is particularly the case for strong and rapidly expanding economies with a shortage of skilled workers that incentivise an early entry into the labour market, and the likelihood that those who took up employment would be hesitant to give it up to take on full-time studies.

Malta is an example of such a situation. As Auers et al. (2007) argue in the case of Latvia, Malta faced a triple challenge. First, as a young independent nation-state, it remained dependent on its former colony economically well up to 1990 (Vella 1994) through a low-paid and low-skilled export-driven manufacturing sector restricting its potential for self-sustained growth. Second, as a result, it experienced an expansion of its higher education system only recently resulting in a slow increase in educational attainment. Third, it has a strong labour market with a low unemployment rate not only for high-skilled labour but also for medium and low-skilled jobs. This situation serves as an additional pull factor that encourages an early entry into the labour market, in particular for youth without a family background in higher education. Consequently, increasing higher education will require attracting a higher share of mature students, who are more likely to have commitments outside of higher education, such as time dedicated to work or family. This group probably needs to reconcile their various commitments with their studies, and higher education providers and policymakers should be sensitive to these needs in order to facilitate their engagement in higher education (Astin 1999; Orr 2012).

The article provides an overview of the challenges to higher education expansion and presents findings from the 2016 EUROSTUDENT student survey conducted in Malta. The article will conclude with recommendations for higher education providers and policymakers.

## **Higher Education Expansion and Working Alongside Studies**

Increasing participation in higher education in countries that witness the ‘massification’ of their higher education systems is associated with reaching out and attracting a more diverse student body (Orr 2010). This expansion in Europe and

other OECD countries is characterized by an increased participation of employed students (Auers et al. 2007; Lewis et al. 2007; Callender 2008; Hall 2010; Lowe and Gayle 2016; Mercer et al. 2016; Billett et al. 2016; Sanchez-Gelabert et al. 2017). Research in the domain of student employment and learning demonstrates not only an increasing prevalence of students involved in paid work during their studies but also that the number of hours dedicated to employment is increasing (Beerkens et al. 2011; Logan et al. 2016).

The increased prevalence of students working alongside their studies raises concerns about its impact on their academic achievement since a large body of research suggests that paid work alongside studies negatively affects academic achievement by reducing the amount of time available for studies (Svanum and Bigatti 2006; Auers et al. 2007; Callender 2008; Miller et al. 2008; Torres et al. 2010; Richardson et al. 2014; Logan et al. 2016; Mercer et al. 2016; Burston 2017; Sanchez-Gelabert et al. 2017). Moreover, research suggests that working alongside studies negatively affects the quality of the student's educational experience (Lederer et al. 2015; Lowe and Gayle 2016), stress levels and mental health (Miller et al. 2008), increases the time to degree (Tur-Sinai et al. 2017) and the likelihood of dropping out (Bozick 2007; Torres et al. 2010; Moulin et al. 2013; Hovdhaugen 2015).

However, several studies also found that working alongside studies had a limited impact on students' academic performance (Wang et al. 2010; Beerkens et al. 2011; Roshchin and Rudakov 2017) and, in some cases, even had a positive impact (Kouliavtsev 2013). Body et al. (2014) found that the impact of students' work on their academic achievement depends on their work intensity and the flexibility of their job. Similarly, Tuononen et al. (2016) suggest that students' organisational skills are also an important factor determining study progress and the impact of work on their studies. Moreover, Sanchez-Gelabert et al. (2017) found that working alongside studies had a positive impact on the transition into the labour market, especially for students whose work was related to their studies. In addition, some studies also suggest (e.g. Hall 2010) that work related to one's studies strengthens students' goal orientation.

Given that the main reason for working alongside studies is a lack of financial resources (Auers et al. 2007; Lewis et al. 2007; Hall 2010) rather than to gain work experience (Hall 2010) and since it mainly affects disadvantaged and underrepresented students in higher education (Callender 2008; Sanchez-Gelabert et al. 2017), research has stressed the need for policymakers and higher education providers to ensure a flexible provision of higher education to better support this vulnerable group of students (Hall 2010; Lowe and Gayle 2016). This would also contribute to making higher education more responsive to labour market needs by enabling those already in employment to return to higher education and undertake studies that could contribute to their career progress without the need to interrupt their employment (Beerkens et al. 2011).

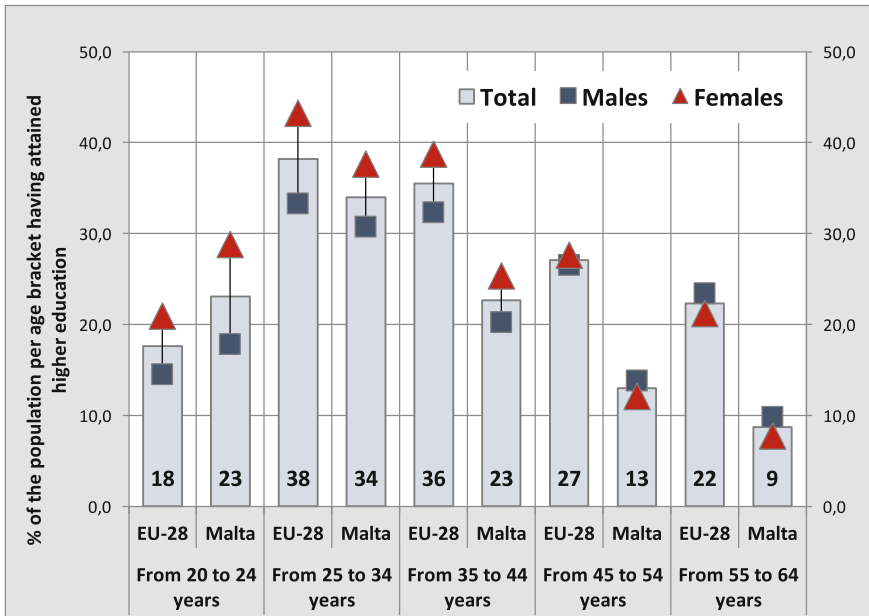


## Challenges to Higher Education Expansion in Malta

The challenges to higher education expansion in Malta are specific due to the country’s prolonged economic dependence on its former colony after gaining independence in 1964. This dependence was evident until 1990 and included a low-paid and low-skilled export-driven manufacturing sector (Vella 1994), which influenced higher education until the beginning of the new millennium.

This influence is evident through the higher education attainment levels in 2016 of different age groups of the population (see Fig. 1), which confirm that in previous decades participation in higher education was very limited and available only to a small share of the population. The same figure also indicates that the increase in higher education attainment in the past three decades was more considerable in Malta compared to the average of the EU 28, most notably among females, who show considerably higher rates of attainment than males.

Similarly, numerous studies including the EUROSTUDENT V survey (Hauschildt et al. 2015, p. 53), which indicates that the share of students with lower educational backgrounds is high in Malta compared to other European countries, have to be interpreted as a result of the continued overall high share of the population with a relatively low level of education.



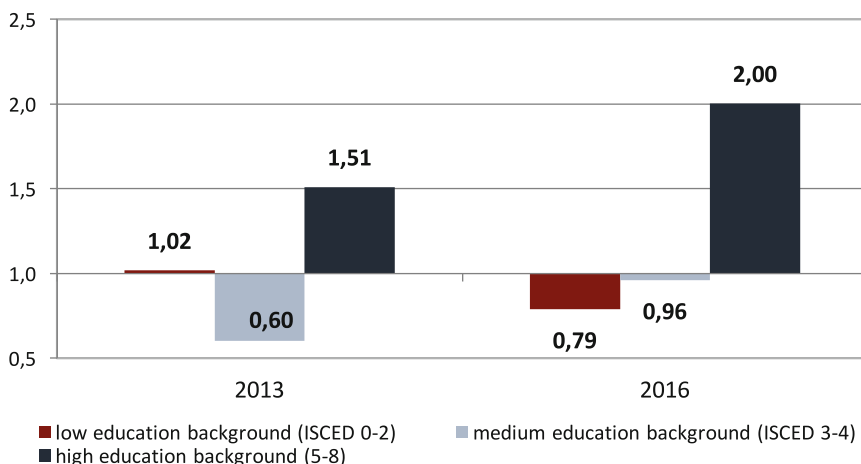
**Fig. 1** Higher Education attainment rate in Malta and the EU-28 in 2016 by age group. *Source* EUROSTAT, edat\_lfse\_03

EUROSTUDENT data for Malta also shows that students from families with a higher educational background are overrepresented in higher education in Malta in contrast to students whose parents have attained compulsory or upper secondary education, who are underrepresented in higher education (see Fig. 2).

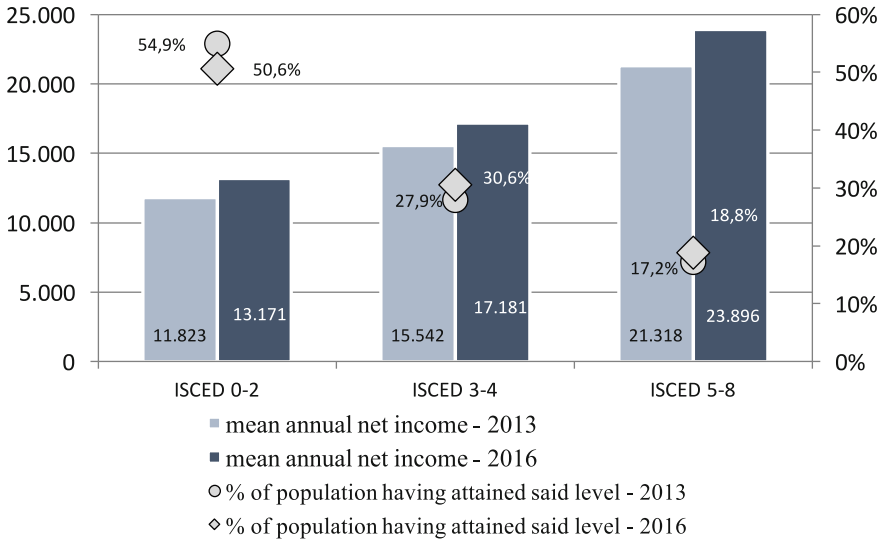
This persistent underrepresentation of students from families with lower education attainment is of concern in view of the link between education attainment and labour market outcomes, since EUROSTAT data shows that higher levels of education are linked with higher income (see Fig. 3).

The continued expansion of the higher education sector in Malta is expected to further increase higher education attainment and the participation of underrepresented groups. However, despite a rapid increase in the higher education attainment rate among 30–34-year-olds in Malta from 17.6% in 2005 to 29.8% in 2016, this progress is still well below the average EU-28 rate which increased from 28.1 to 39.1% over the same period (see Fig. 4). In view of this development, Malta has set itself the target to increase higher education attainment among 30–34-year-olds to 33% by 2020 (NCFHE 2015) compared to the overarching EU 2020 target of 40% by 2020 (European Commission 2010). This target appears to be realistic if higher education participation and attainment levels continue to increase as witnessed in the past decade.

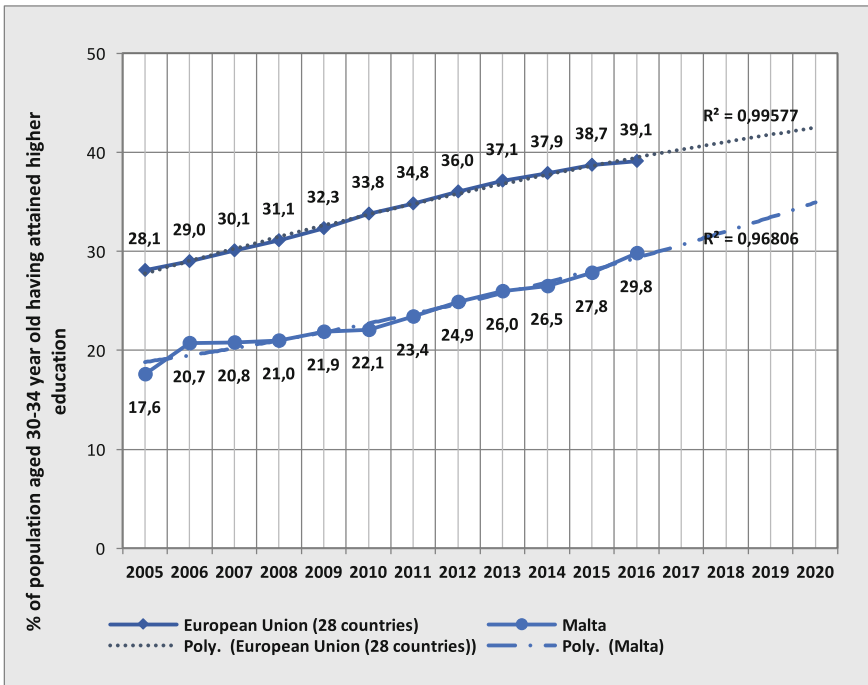
The presented data indicates that further efforts are required to increase the share of students who continue their studies at post-secondary level following compulsory education in order to increase the share of those eligible to enter higher education. Data on early school leaving in Malta (see Fig. 5) shows a sharp decrease from 33.0% in 2005 to 19.6% in 2016. However, this rate is still considerably above the average in the EU 28 which decreased from 15.7 to 10.7%



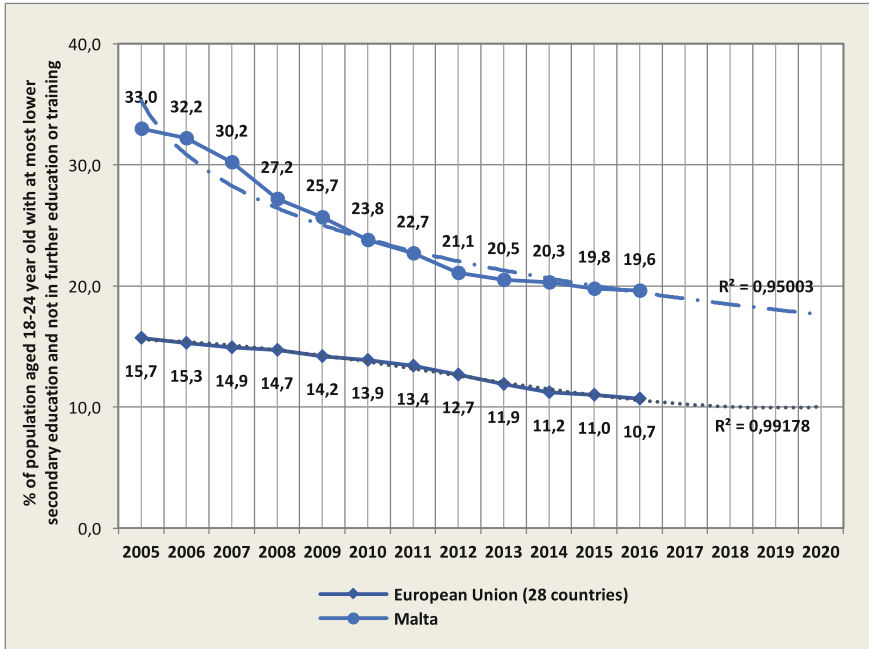
**Fig. 2** Representation of students from high, medium and low educational backgrounds (based on fathers’ educational attainment). *Source* EUROSTUDENT V national data for Malta, 2013 and EUROSTUDENT VI national data for Malta, 2016



**Fig. 3** Attainment rate and mean annual net income by education level attained, Malta in 2013 and 2016. *Source* EUROSTAT (2016), ilc\_di08



**Fig. 4** Higher education attainment rate among 30–34-year-olds in Malta and EU-28. *Source* EUROSTAT (2016), edat\_lfse\_03



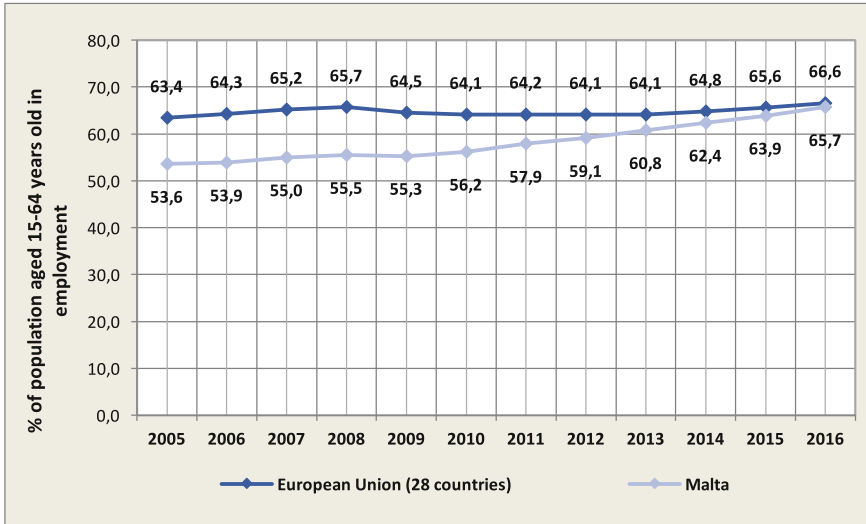
**Fig. 5** Early leavers from education and training among 18–24-year-olds in Malta and EU-28. *Source* EUROSTAT (2016), edat\_lfse\_14

during the same period. If this development continues as is indicated by the trendline, it appears very unlikely that Malta will succeed to achieve the EU 2020 target of reducing the incidence of early school leaving to 10% by 2020.

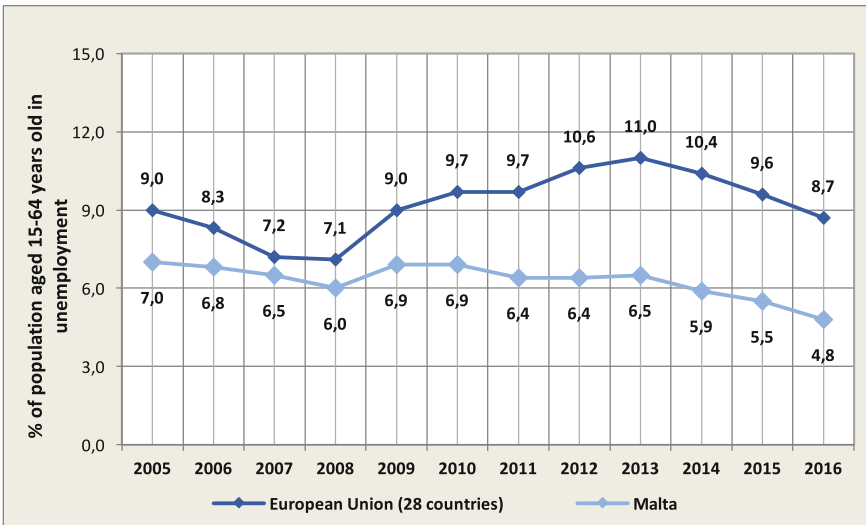
It appears that a strong labour market and a low unemployment rate in Malta are strong pull factors for an early entry into the labour market. As can be seen from EUROSTAT data, the employment rate of 15–64-year-olds in Malta has been increasing steadily in the past decade and is now just below the average of the EU 28, while the average employment rate for the EU 28 remained rather unchanged (see Fig. 6). Moreover, over the same period, the unemployment rate in Malta decreased considerably in comparison to the average unemployment rate of the EU 28 (see Fig. 7).

This suggests that the labour market in Malta has witnessed a considerable growth when compared to other EU countries. This growth in the labour market demand in Malta appears to have been satisfied in part through an increase in the skilled labour force and in part by reintegrating unemployed workers into the labour market. However, with a currently very low unemployment rate, any future demand for skilled workers will serve as a strong pull factor for new entrants into the labour market.

This is already evident when comparing the employment rate among young people aged 15–24 in Malta and the EU 28 (see Fig. 8), whereby close to half of all

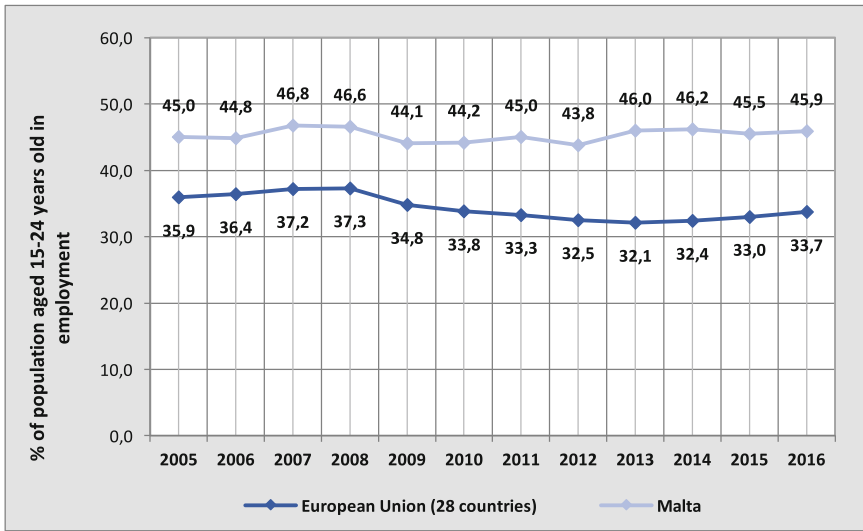


**Fig. 6** Employment rate among 15–64-year-olds in Malta and the EU 28. *Source* EUROSTAT (2016), lfsa\_ergaed



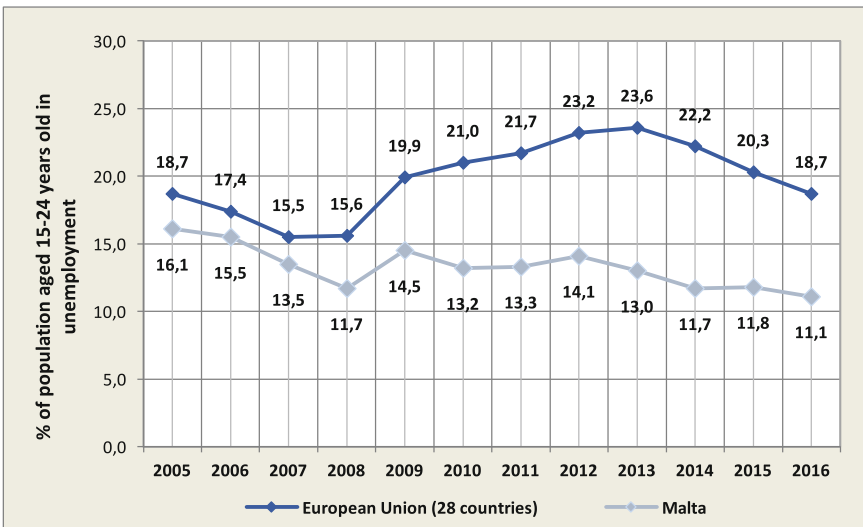
**Fig. 7** Unemployment rate among 15–64-year-olds in Malta and the EU 28. *Source* EUROSTAT (2016), lfsa\_urgaed

young people in Malta are employed compared to about one third in the EU 28. Young people in Malta are also less likely to face unemployment. While nearly one-fifth of young people aged 15–24 in the EU 28 are unemployed, the share in



**Fig. 8** Employment rate among 15–24-year-olds in Malta and the EU 28. *Source* EUROSTAT (2016), lfsa\_ergaed

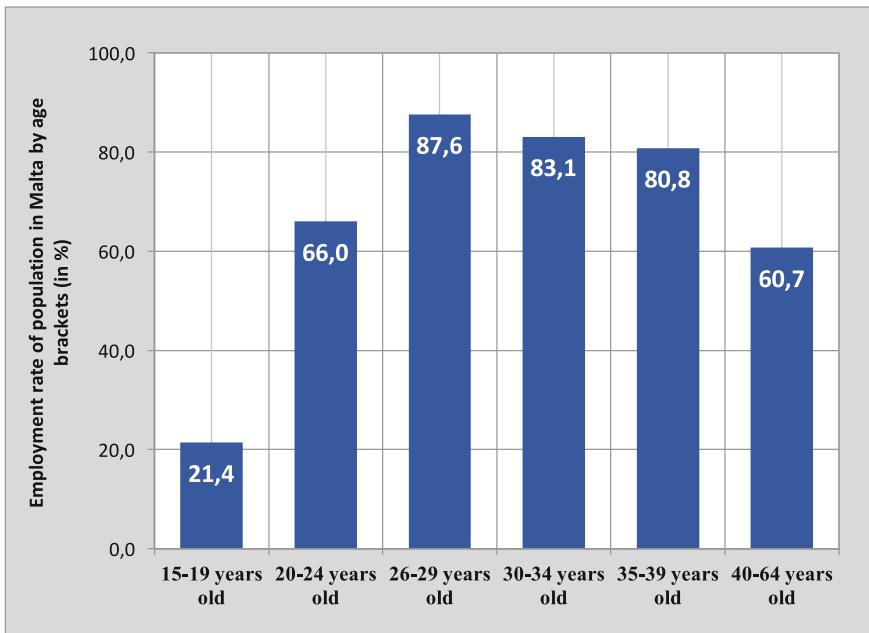
Malta in 2016 was 11.1% (see Fig. 9). Thus, a strong labour market demand with a low unemployment appears to attract many young people into employment. This is a challenge for retaining young people in education or attracting them to return to education.



**Fig. 9** Unemployment rate among 15–24-year-olds in Malta and the EU 28. *Source* EUROSTAT (2016), lfsa\_ergaed

Finally, our analysis of the age at entry into the labour market shows that the entry occurs as early as following the end of compulsory education between age 15 and 19 with 21.4% of this age group being employed in 2016 (see Fig. 10). However, the labour market entry is more common among youth at the ages of 20–24 and 26–29 with 66.0 and 87.6% respectively being employed. It seems, therefore, that the entry into the labour market takes place most often after completion of post-secondary education and at the first cycle of higher education.

In sum, it appears that the main challenge to higher education expansion in Malta remains the high incidence of early leaving from education, which is compounded by a strong labour market and a low unemployment rate serving as pull factors for an early entry into employment. In this scenario, the main concern of the discussion on combining work and learning in Malta might be how to encourage those who discontinued their studies to return to education in an effort to increase participation and attainment levels in higher education. This may not be achieved only through increasing the share of those entering higher education following post-secondary schooling. Since youth who entered the labour market are unlikely to return to full-time studies (Beerkens et al. 2011), they will require more flexible modes of learning. A closer look at the profile and situation of working students in Malta provides insights into the obstacles encountered by this group to provide policymakers and higher education providers with guidance on how to improve higher education provision for students combining work and learning.



**Fig. 10** Employment rate in Malta in 2016 by age bracket. *Source* EUROSTAT (2016), *lfsa\_ergaed*

## Working Students in Malta

Our analysis of working students is based on the national student survey carried out in Malta in 2016 (N = 1,423) and forms part of the data collection for the EUROSTUDENT project which seeks to collect comparable data on the social and economic conditions of student life in different European countries through a common core questionnaire and common set of indicators.

Based on the findings from this survey, 52.5% of students in Malta are working alongside their studies, of which 39.0% are working regularly and 13.5% occasionally throughout the entire lecture period. Only a quarter (26.9%) of participants in this national study reported not to work at all. This data includes both full-time and part-time students. When comparing these findings with data collected in 2013 for EUROSTUDENT V (see Fig. 11), the findings are consistent. However, one has to bear in mind that data for 2013 refers only to work during term time, excluding work during semester breaks. In 2013 54% of Maltese students reported to be working during term time, which compares to 52.5% reported in 2016. The data also shows that Maltese students work more frequently than their counterparts in other countries, with the exception of students in the Netherlands.

Working alongside studies is more common among older students with 80.6% of those aged 30 years or older working regularly or occasionally compared to 40.8% of students up to 21 years of age. Also, approximately one third (31.8%) of young

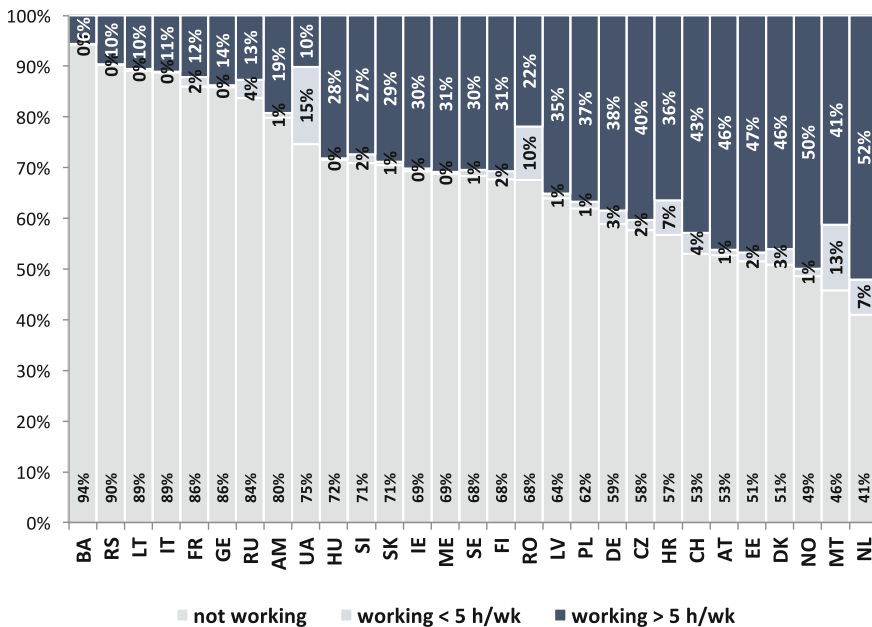
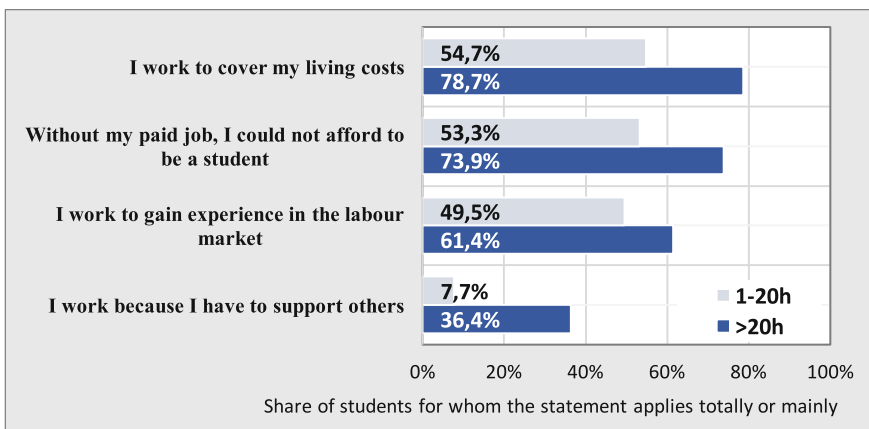


Fig. 11 Employment rate of students during term time. Source EUROSTUDENT V



students up to the age of 21 do not work at all, while the corresponding share for students over the age of 30 is only 15.2%. Students without a family background in higher education are also more likely to be working: 54.8% work during term time compared to 45.0% of those whose parents have attained higher education. This may be linked to the continued expansion of the higher education sector in Malta since students without a higher education background in their family are more likely to be older (mean age of 26.4) than those with a higher education background (mean age of 23.4) and, as shown before, older age cohorts are less likely to have benefitted from higher education. Given that higher levels of education attainment tend to be linked to higher earnings, it is not surprising that working students also tend to assess their parents' wealth more negatively than students who do not work at all. Overall, 25.5% of students who work during term time consider their parents as not very well-off compared to 14.9% of students who do not work at all. Moreover, it appears that with increasing time dedicated to work, the share of students who consider their parents less well-off is increasing, namely 20.7% of those working between 1 and 20 h per week compared to 30.7% of those working more than 20 h per week. Thus, the need to work more may be linked to parents' limited means to provide support to their children, suggesting that working alongside studies is linked to financial demands.

Indeed, students working alongside their studies in Malta mention most often that they do so to cover their living costs or would not be able to continue their studies without the income from their paid job (see Fig. 12). While students also value the quality of work experience gained through their paid job, this factor is of less importance compared to the income, and the difference in rating is most notable for those working more than 20 h per week while it is less pronounced for those working between 1 and 20 h per week. It is also important to note that over one third (36.4%) of students working more than 20 h per week do so because they



**Fig. 12** Reasons for working during term time by hours per week spent in paid jobs. Source EUROSTUDENT VI national data for Malta, 2016

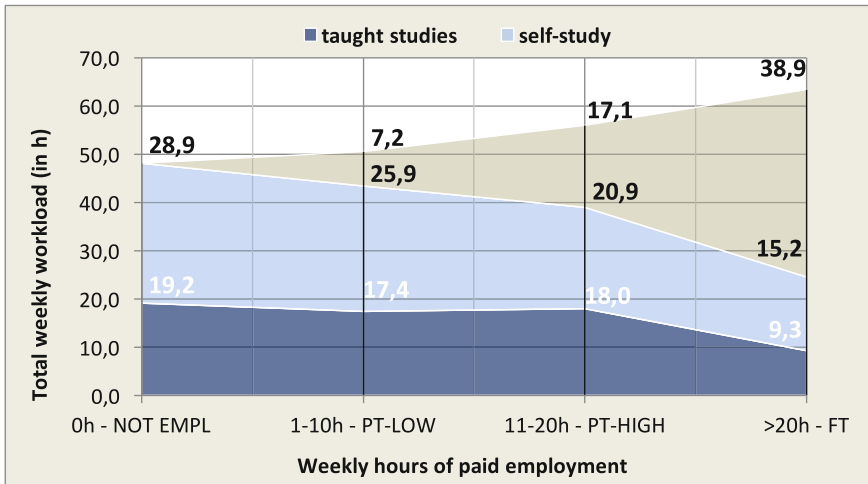
need to support others. Consequently, family responsibilities are not only a potential time constraint on students, but also increase financial commitments.

Our findings are consistent with other studies that examine the relationships between work and learning indicating that students working alongside their studies are generally older (Auers et al. 2007; Beerkens et al. 2011; Hauschildt et al. 2015) and tend to be driven by financial constraints to engage in paid work alongside their studies (Callender 2008; Beerkens et al. 2011; Hauschildt et al. 2015).

When looking at the programmes followed by students combining work and learning, it appears that students enrolled in short-cycle higher education (74.6% work) or following Master programmes (55.3% work) are working more often than students enrolled in a Bachelor degree (46.1% work). The results of our study indicate that combining work and learning is common both among students seeking to attain a first higher education qualification and those following postgraduate degrees. This is further corroborated by the fact that students with a delay of more than 2 years between attaining the entry qualification for higher education and eventually entering higher education are more likely to be enrolled in short-cycle programmes, namely 24.6% of them, compared to 11.5% of students who entered higher education directly after attaining the entry qualification. Students who delayed their transition into higher education are also more likely to work during their studies (70.9%) than those who entered higher education directly after graduating from post-secondary education (48.5%). Providing more flexible study programmes that would allow students to combine work and learning could, therefore, serve as a strategy to help individuals who have left the education system to return and continue their studies. This would contribute to increasing the share of non-traditional students in higher education as well as increase education attainment of the entire population.

Considering that research frequently links working alongside studies with lower academic achievement (Svanum and Bigatti 2006; Auers et al. 2007; Callender 2008; Miller et al. 2008; Torres et al. 2010; Richardson et al. 2014; Logan et al. 2016; Mercer et al. 2016; Burston 2017; Sanchez-Gelabert et al. 2017), increased stress levels and diminished health (Miller et al. 2008), increased time to degree (Tur-Sinai et al. 2017) and higher chances of drop-out (Bozick 2007; Torres et al. 2010; Moulin et al. 2013; Hovdhaugen 2015), further analysis of the impact of paid work on time dedicated to studies and the outcomes of work for students in Malta are necessary (see Fig. 13).

Overall, students in Malta without any work commitments spend on average 48 h per week on study-related activities, of which 19 h are dedicated to taught lessons and 29 h to self-study. When comparing this with data from EUROSTUDENT V, which was collected in 2013 (Hauschildt et al. 2015), it appears that students in Malta spend a considerable amount of time per week on study-related activities. In fact, the (unweighted) average time spent on study-related activities across all countries participating in EUROSTUDENT V by students who were not working was 38 h, of which 20 h were dedicated to taught lessons and 18 h to self-study (Hauschildt et al. 2015, p. 108). In comparison to



**Fig. 13** Time budget of all students for study-related activities by extent of employment—Malta (in hours/week). *Source* EUROSTUDENT VI national data for Malta, 2016

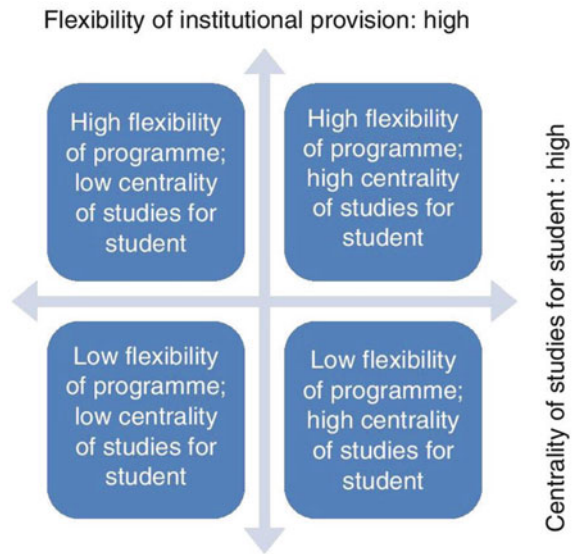
students in other European countries, students in Malta appear to spend considerably more time on self-study.

In view of this, it is plausible that students who are working alongside their studies would compensate for the additional workload arising from their paid job first and foremost by reducing the time they spend on self-study. Indeed, the time spent on taught lessons hardly decreases for students working between 1 and 20 h per week compared to those students who do not work at all. This is consistent with the pattern observed across EUROSTUDENT V countries, namely that work commitments encroach on study-related activities and, first and foremost, on time spent on self-study (Hauschildt et al. 2015, p. 108).

Moreover, it is evident that students with work commitments report a higher overall weekly workload compared to students who do not work at all and their time budget increases considerably with increasing time dedicated to their paid job. While students who do not work at all have a weekly time budget of 48 h, students working more than 20 h per week have an overall weekly time budget of approximately 63 h. As a result, time spent on paid jobs does not only encroach on time dedicated to studies, but also on students’ free time reducing the time available for relaxation and recreation (Astin 1999; Miller et al. 2008; Lederer et al. 2015; Mercer et al. 2016; Lowe and Gayle 2016). For students with family commitments apart from work, this may be a considerable strain.

Given the diverse needs of students and the centrality of studies in their lives, Orr (2012, p. 185) proposed a model of four constellations of organisational learning (see Fig. 14). He suggests that the programme design that is responsive to these diverse needs could be guided by this model, whereby it may be appropriate to design programmes expecting a high degree of centrality of studies for young

**Fig. 14** Four constellations of organizational learning.  
 Source Orr (2012: 185)

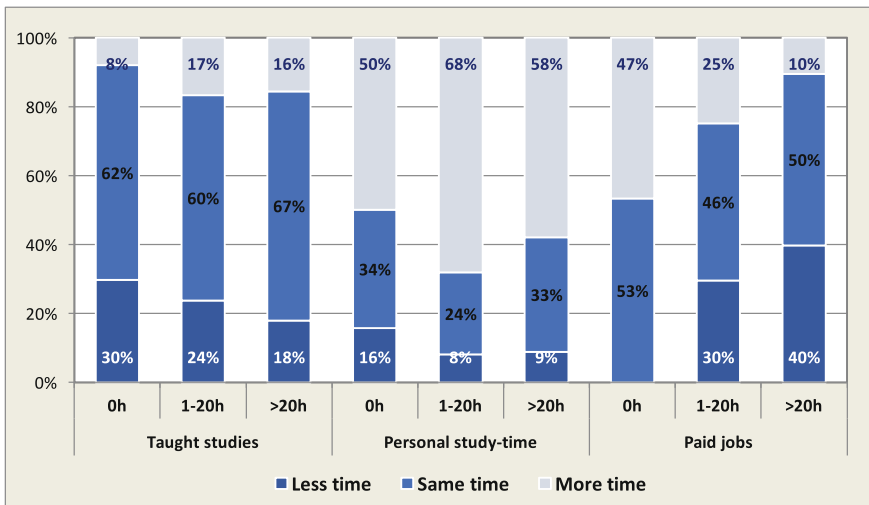


students, but this may be less appropriate for mature students that may have to reconcile studying with other commitments, such as work or family life. This is in line with recommendations arising from the research of Perna (2010), Hall (2010) and Lowe and Gayle (2016). Besides the need for flexible forms of programme delivery, research also suggests that learning styles of mature students differ from those of traditional students (Morton 1963; Richardson 1995; Toynton 2005) by benefitting from the recognition and utilisation of their prior experience and multidisciplinary approaches to learning. This means that higher education institutions need to be sensitive to these needs and accommodate them in their teaching methods in order to adequately support mature students.

The analysis of the study-related workload of students working more than 20 h per week shows that it is about half (24.5 h per week) of the study-related workload reported by those students not working at all. This suggests that those working more than 20 h per week are more often enrolled in part-time programmes, which in Malta generally correspond to half of the weekly workload of a full-time programme. Indeed, working alongside studies appears to be the norm among students following their programme on a part-time basis (93.3%), while those studying full-time work considerably less often (42.2%). In addition, the former are most often in regular employment (91.9%) rather than working only occasionally during the lecture period (1.4%). This suggests that students working alongside their studies seek programmes providing them with more flexibility to combine their work commitments with their studies, which supports Orr’s model (2012) arguing for more flexible forms of learning for students with a low centrality of studies in their lives.

It is also evident that employment is more common among students enrolled in non-university type institutions (67.5% work) than in universities (48.6% work). This could point to non-university institutions providing easier access to higher education for working students or possibly more flexible or less workload intensive study programmes. This is further corroborated by a much smaller share of non-university students spending more than 40 h per week on study-related activities (39%) compared to students at universities (49%) despite the fact that there is little difference in the share of students enrolled in full-time programmes at universities (80%) and non-university institutions (78%). Further analysis also shows that students enrolled in non-university institutions are more likely to have parents that did not attain higher education (78%) than students enrolled at universities (58%). This clearly indicates that non-university institutions are more easily accessible to non-traditional students.

The impact of work on students’ overall workload and the resulting strategies for enrolment in more flexible study programmes raise the question of the extent to which such strategies are successful in terms of raising the quality of their educational experience (Lederer et al. 2015; Lowe and Gayle 2016) or having a positive impact on their stress levels and health (Miller et al. 2008). This may be reflected in students’ satisfaction with their time-budget for study-related activities and paid jobs (see Fig. 15). It appears that those students who are working more would like to dedicate more of their time to study-related activities and less to paid jobs. This suggests an additional opportunity for improvement of the educational experience of working students by providing them with more flexible opportunities for combining work and studies. It appears that more flexibility may be needed



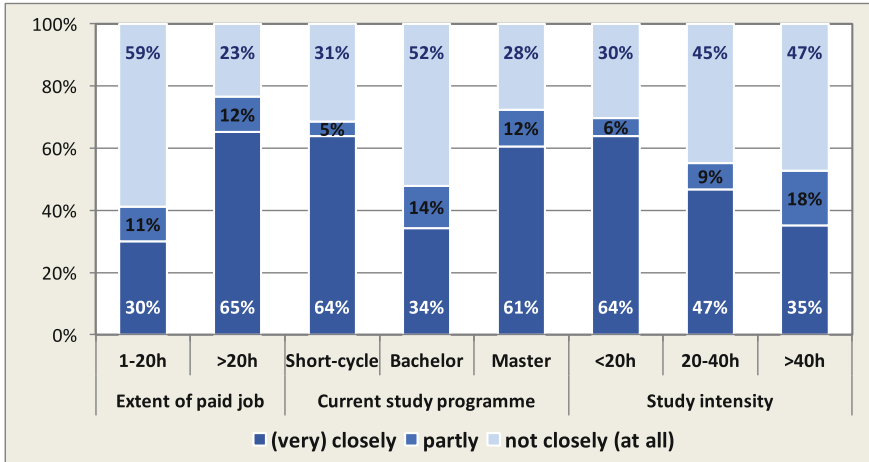
**Fig. 15** Students’ satisfaction with time spent on taught studies, personal study time and paid jobs by extent of employment. *Source* EUROSTUDENT VI national data for Malta, 2016

from employers to release staff engaged in education. Given the importance of working for financing living costs, such initiatives should not result in loss of earnings. Government incentives may help in this regard and may provide positive impulses for both employees and employers to encourage further studies alongside work that could be beneficial for both parties while contributing to an overall increase in education attainment. Research on employers' perceptions of the attractiveness and effectiveness of such measures as well as on existing initiatives undertaken by employers and governments to promote further education of their employees may prove useful in this regard.

It is also interesting to note that working students overwhelmingly wish to spend more time on personal studies rather than taught lessons. Indeed, since time for personal studies is reduced first in order to compensate for additional workload arising from paid jobs, this response is consistent. This desire to increase their personal study time rather than taught lessons underscores the need for more flexible forms of learning for those students with commitments apart from studies since an increase in taught lessons may cause conflict with their work schedule or family commitments (Orr 2012).

Apart from the negative impact of an increased overall weekly workload on students' academic progress, research indicates that combining work and learning has a more detrimental effect on academic success if the students' job is not related to their studies (Sanchez-Gelabert et al. 2017). The link between job and studies is also important since research revealed that the transition into the labour market is improved if students work in jobs that are related to their studies (Sanchez-Gelabert et al. 2017). Such a close link between job and studies could contribute to contextualise what is being learned and, in this way, increase the relevance of higher education to the labour market. Indeed, linking higher education more closely with the needs of the labour market has also been highlighted by the New Skills Agenda of the European Commission (European Commission 2016). Given that in Malta combining work and learning is particularly common among mature students seeking to attain a first higher education qualification and those with a delayed entry into higher education, it is worthwhile exploring whether these generally underrepresented and vulnerable groups of students hold jobs that are related to their studies.

In view of this, it is positive to note that the data indicates that those most likely to be negatively affected in their studies by their extensive job-related workload hold more often jobs related to their studies (see Fig. 16). Most students working more than 20 h per week hold a job that is (very) closely related to their studies (65.1%), while only 30.0% of students working 1–20 h per week have a job that is closely related to their studies. Moreover, most students enrolled in short-cycle or Master programmes hold jobs that are closely related to their studies (63.9 and 60.6% respectively). Consistent with the previous finding that students with a more intensive job-related workload are more often enrolled part-time, our results also indicate that students with a study-related workload of up to 20 h per week, which is consistent with a part-time programme, are more often in jobs related to their studies compared to students following programmes with a higher study-related weekly workload.



**Fig. 16** Link between studies and job of students working throughout the lecture period. *Source* EUROSTUDENT VI national data for Malta, 2016

Despite the increased burden arising from combining extensive work commitments with their studies, students working more than 20 h per week and those enrolled in short-cycle or Master programmes have more often jobs that are related to their studies. This would allow them to contextualise what they are learning in their workplace or explore aspects of their work more deeply through their studies. This clearly contributes to the policy objective of making higher education more responsive to the needs of the labour market (European Commission 2016). Given that students undertaking short-cycle or Master programmes appear to have been employed before taking up their studies, the link between studies and job may be the result of students choosing programmes aimed at furthering their career development. This appears to indicate that it is likely that combining work and learning in Malta may be a springboard to increase both one’s level of education as well as improve labour market chances. From a policy point of view, this finding is positive since combining work and learning delivers both on making higher education more inclusive by increasing attainment levels as well as on making higher education more responsive to labour market needs.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall, EUROSTUDENT VI data for Malta are consistent with other research on work and learning indicating that working students in Malta are usually older, from families without a higher education background and with limited financial resources. As a result, students work most often because of financial necessity, in particular, if they have to support other family members. Students working more

than 20 h per week alongside their studies have a considerably high workload resulting from their paid job and their studies and that is despite the fact that they seek more often part-time study programmes offering them more flexibility in terms of combining work and learning.

The fact that combining work and learning is more frequent among those undertaking short-cycle programmes and those with a delayed entry into higher education suggests that the provision of flexible study programmes which allow for combining studies and work could encourage those who have left the education system to return and continue their studies. From this perspective, combining work and learning appears to be a springboard to increase the share of non-traditional students in higher education and also contribute to increasing educational attainment in Malta. In this context, it is encouraging to note that this underrepresented group of students is often enrolled in programmes of study related to their job. Therefore, despite the increased workload arising from working alongside studies, this close link can help work and learning and positively contribute to long-term labour market outcomes.

Research also shows that working students need more time for their studies, in particular time for personal studies, which sharply decreases with increased work intensity. At the same time, a considerable share of students working more than 20 h per week expresses the desire to reduce the weekly workload associated with their paid job. Since financial constraints are the main reason for combining work and learning, such decrease of work-related hours is most likely an option only if it does not result in loss of income. This suggests that strategies to facilitate combining work and learning should focus on both increasing the flexibility of study programmes and encouraging employers to support their employees who are seeking to further their studies. The support could come in the form of a variety of measures, including paid study leave or sabbaticals. Financial incentives by government to this end may be useful, apart from support for students with financial needs. This support is particularly valuable in view of the high incidence of working students undertaking studies that are related to their job. Thus, their involvement in higher education contributes to increasing educational attainment, productivity and improves the quality of work.

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# Access, Qualifications and Social Dimension of Syrian Refugee Students in Turkish Higher Education



Armağan Erdoğan and M. Murat Erdoğan

## Introduction

This paper is based on the findings of the “Elite Dialogue” project which was designed and implemented as a comprehensive and multi-layer study on Syrian teachers and higher education students in Turkey. Considering the numbers and tendency of Syrians to stay in Turkey, this paper argues that the qualified young groups, higher education students within the refugee population, must be involved to set up the inclusive, comprehensive and long-term adaptation policies. This group has a potential for bridging the Turkish and Syrian communities; their profile, expectations and challenges might help design new data-based policies.

Although the research focused on two target groups in the higher education Syrian teachers and students, this paper will only focus on the students’ results. The main question of the survey was “how do the Syrian higher education students adapt to the Turkish higher education system and in the Turkish society?” More specifically, the research tried to find out what their academic and social profile was, what challenges they faced and what expectations they had so that some recommendations for the new policies could be suggested. As Turkey has a young population, and accessing higher education is highly competitive for all high school graduates, the young group of Syrian refugees needs to be dealt with delicately.

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They have potential to be mediators between their community and the Turkish society since the majority of refugees in Turkey have a lower educational background. Secondly, Turkish higher education system is already the second largest one in the EHEA in terms of student numbers. Adding some thousands of Syrian students to the system is a big challenge in terms of capacity and quality.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, this research was aimed to contribute to better understanding the profile, qualifications, and expectations of the Syrian students already admitted into the system. A survey was conducted with 497 Syrian higher education students, out of which 395 respondents qualified to be evaluated, which makes this survey the most extended one done with Syrian students so far in Turkey.

## Syrian Refugees in Turkey<sup>2</sup>

The Syrian crisis, which has been identified as “the biggest migration wave in recent history” by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), began with the demonstrations and protests in Syria, which then turned into a serious conflict and later into a civil war (Fig. 1).<sup>3</sup>

Number of Syrians fleeing from this hostile environment, initially to neighboring countries, has exceeded six million people between April 2011 and July 2017. In Syria, which had a population of 22.4 million in April 2011, at least 465,000 people were killed, hundreds of thousands of people were injured, more than six million people left Syria, and 7–8 million were forced to move within the country.<sup>4</sup> This uncommonly high number shows that in the last five years, at least 25% of Syrians were forced to leave their country. The total number of refugees in Turkey was over 3.5 million in November 2017, which makes up 4.5% of Turkey’s 80-million-population.<sup>5</sup> The majority of refugees live all around Turkey as it can be seen from the map below, and only 8% live in the camps established in the region.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See AlAhmad (2016), de Wit and Altbach (2016) and Watenpaugh et al. (2014).

<sup>2</sup>This study uses the concept of “refugee” for Syrians in Turkey, regardless of the legal-administrative context in Turkey, acknowledging they are not legally “refugees”, and as a concept reflecting the situation better in a sociological sense. The legal framework in Turkey and the reasons for this use are addressed in the section titled “Legal and Administrative Regulations on Refugees”.

<sup>3</sup>Erdoğan (2018), p. 11.

<sup>4</sup>The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (London) (<http://www.syriahr.com/en/>) and Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 14.04.2017) and see Brookings Institution and USAK (2013)

<sup>5</sup>Erdogan (2017).

<sup>6</sup>Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) ([http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik6/duzensiz-goc\\_363\\_378\\_4710\\_icerik/](http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik6/duzensiz-goc_363_378_4710_icerik/)) See also Brookings Institution (2015).

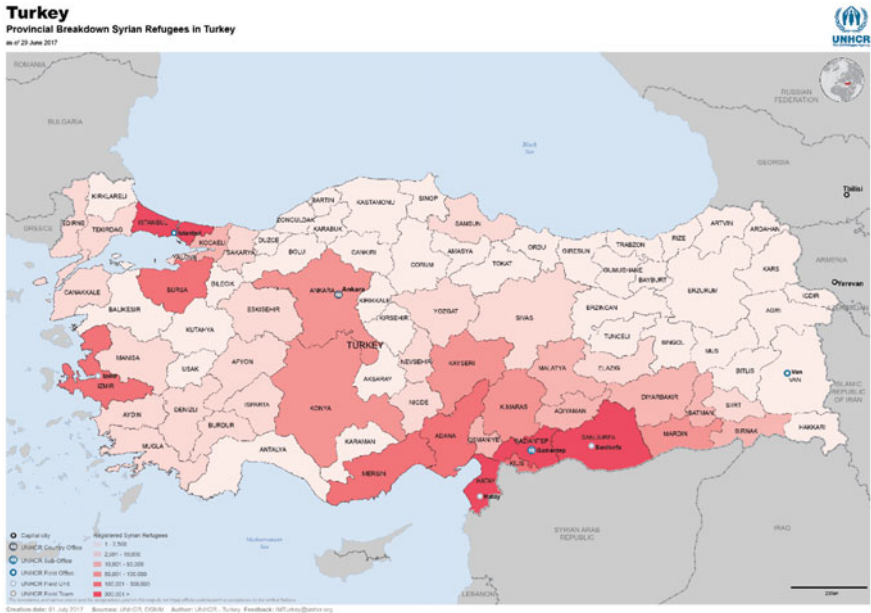


Fig. 1 Provincial breakdown of Syrian refugees in Turkey. Source <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=224> (access: 2 July 2017)

### Legal and Administrative Regulations on Refugees

The UN defines a refugee as “owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it”. Developing this status in the international context was mainly due to the human tragedy experienced in World War II. In 1948 the Universal Declaration of Human Rights used the phrase “Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.” (Article 14/1). When the reasons for people seeking asylum in another country are justified, “refugee” status is granted. The legal status of refugees in the international arena is determined by the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 “Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees”. Two important exemptions were given to signatory countries on the validity of the convention, one regarding history (except those experienced before 1951 or at all times), and geographical area. International liabilities of Turkey around asylum seekers and refugees are also determined under “The 1951 Refugee Convention” and “The 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees”.<sup>7</sup> With a declaration in 1961, Turkey, one of the

<sup>7</sup>The 1951 Refugee Convention: <http://www.unhcr.org/1951-refugee-convention.html>.

first countries to sign the Geneva Convention, stated that “geographical limitations” will be applied, meaning that whatever the reason, Turkey will not accept people coming from outside of Europe as “refugees”. Many signatory countries of the 1951 Convention used this exemption for a while and afterwards ceased this practice by choosing “situation” over “country of origin”. The national legislation amended after the Syrian crises, “Law on Foreigners and International Protection” (2013) which constitutes Turkey’s legal framework on migration and refugees and Temporary Protection Regulation (2014), adopts this geographical limitation principle. This means that, under the current legal regulations in Turkey, regardless of the situations they are in, people who are in Turkey and are in fact defined as “refugees” by international law are not considered officially refugees in Turkey.<sup>8</sup> The legal status of Syrians in Turkey is “temporary protection” under the latest “Temporary Protection Regulation”.<sup>9</sup> The Regulation translates into “well-meant support from the host for the guests—within the bounds of possibility”, rather than “rights” of refugees and involved liabilities of the state (Fig. 2).

According to the current data, educational backgrounds of Syrians in Turkey are as follows: 33.3% of Syrians in Turkey are illiterate; 13% are literate without a school degree<sup>10</sup>; 25.6% of Syrians chose not to make any statements on their educational backgrounds, which should probably be added to lower education level; 16.5% of Syrians in Turkey are primary or equivalent school graduates; 6.5% are secondary or equivalent school graduates; and 5.6% hold high school diplomas or higher degrees.<sup>11</sup> There is serious doubt about the reliability of this information gathered during the registration process performed by Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM).

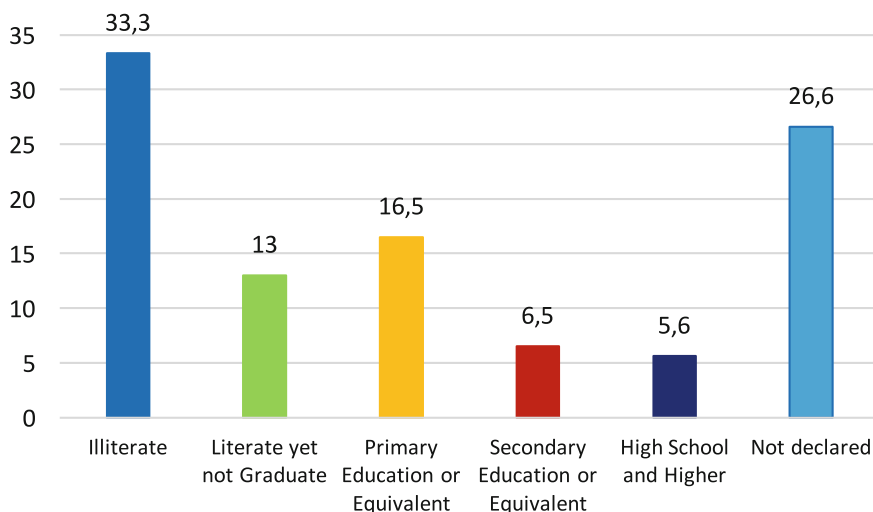
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<sup>8</sup>See: Law on Foreigners and International Protection (2013) Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM), ([http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik/law-on-foreigners-and-international-protection-lfip\\_913\\_975](http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik/law-on-foreigners-and-international-protection-lfip_913_975)).

<sup>9</sup>See: Temporary Protection Directora (2014), Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM), ([http://www.goc.gov.tr/files/\\_dokuman28.pdf](http://www.goc.gov.tr/files/_dokuman28.pdf)) Article 91—Law on Foreigners and International Protection (2013) *(1) Temporary protection may be provided for foreigners who have been forced to leave their country, cannot return to the country that they have left, and have arrived at or crossed the borders of Turkey in a mass influx situation seeking immediate and temporary protection. (2) The actions to be carried out for the reception of such foreigners into Turkey; their stay in Turkey and rights and obligations; their exit from Turkey; measures to be taken to prevent mass influxes; cooperation and coordination among national and international institutions and organisations; determination of the duties and mandate of the central and provincial institutions and organisations shall be stipulated in a Directive to be issued by the Council of Ministers.*

<sup>10</sup>Ministry of Development (March 2016) Turkish Ministry of Development Ministry, “First Stage Need Assessment Covering 2016–2018 Period for Syrians with Temporary Protection Status in Turkey” March 2016, p. 7.

<sup>11</sup>For the educational conditions of Syrian refugees see also, Bircan and Sunata (2015).



**Fig. 2** Syrians uTP in Turkey according to their Educational Statuses (%). *Source* Turkish Ministry of Development Ministry, “First Stage Need Assessment Covering 2016–2018 Period for Syrians with Temporary Protection Status in Turkey” March 2016, p. 7

## Research on Syrian Students in Turkish Universities

The main goal of the “Elite Dialogue” project is to understand the evaluations of Syrian college students regarding their educational programs, social and economic surroundings, integration attitudes and future expectations. How do they like their universities? What kind of challenges were they faced with when applying and registering? What are their main difficulties at the moment? What are their plans for the future in terms of preferred location and their economic and political expectations from their home and host countries? What are their integration attitudes or their interest in becoming citizens? What are their relations with Turkish students in terms of social distance or inclusion? These are some of the questions the research team sought to answer in this study.

An online survey was designed to be implemented through a Survey Monkey module. The survey was announced mostly through social media i.e. Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp. Syrian student group page admins of several universities were contacted to reach the individual students. A snowball sample was used in order to approximate the actual distribution of Syrian college students across Turkey. For these interventions, a multitude of methods was employed including asking for the assistance of Syrian and Turkish students and professors at these universities. Also, several NGOs such as SGDD and Hilalder and language schools such as DILMER assisted in announcing the survey to a variety of student groups.



## Syrians Students in Turkish Universities

According to data from November 2017 provided by YÖK, the number of Syrian students studying in 140 public and foundation universities in Turkey is 15,000 (9700 males, 5300 females).<sup>12</sup> The actual ratio of Syrians in Turkey who have studied at a university or graduated from one is expected to be under 2%. This is a crucial rate in terms of future projections for education and integration policies. It is observed that 86.7% of these students study in public universities, whereas 13.2% study in private foundation universities.<sup>13</sup> Although there are Syrian students studying in all 140 universities, 46.4% of these students study in 10 of these universities, and 65% are grouped in only 11 cities. Gaziantep University alone hosts 11.2% of these Syrian students, and Istanbul alone hosts 21.8% (Fig. 3).

In 2013, various measures were taken by the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) regarding the students from the countries in which education cannot be pursued due to violence and crisis. The following decisions were taken on the transfer/recognition of undergraduate degrees for those students who attended undergraduate programs (except for Medicine and Dentistry programs) before the 2013–2014 academic year in Syria or Egypt. To ease the recognition of the qualifications of the refugees UNESCO and Council of Europe developed “Recommendation on the Recognition of Refugees’ Qualifications under Lisbon Recognition Convention and Explanatory Memorandum”, Paris/Strasbourg, 14 Nov 2017:

1. If students present the documentation required for the recognition unit, they can be transferred to the Turkish HE institutions
2. Undergraduate applications will be assessed and admitted by the higher education institutions (provided that such applications do not exceed 10% of ÖSYS quota of the applied department in the respective year, to protect the balance of the national students)
3. Students who cannot present documentation will undertake courses as special students at the seven universities in the region (Gaziantep, Kilis 7 Aralık, Harran, Mustafa Kemal, Osmaniye Korkut Ata, Çukurova, and Mersin).<sup>14</sup>

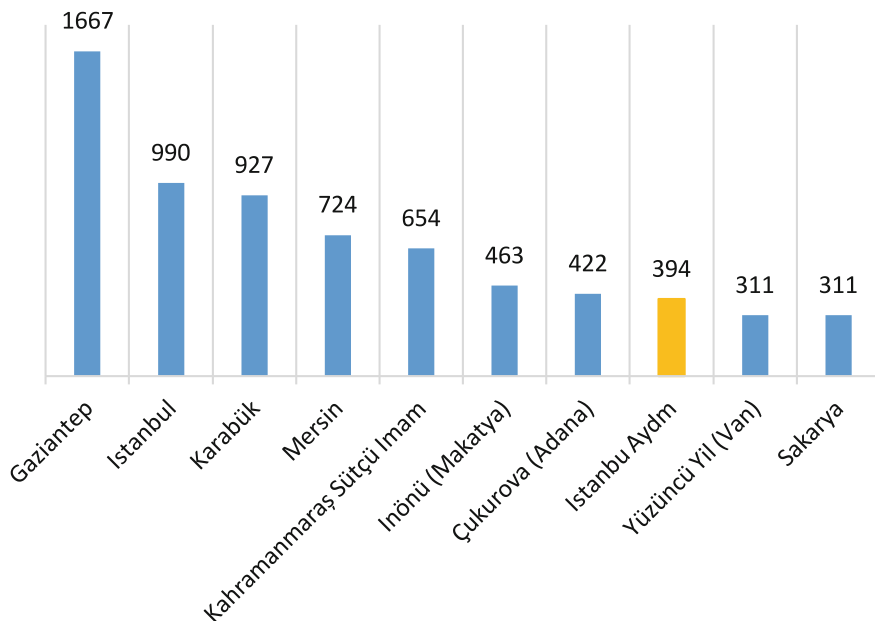
It was decided that programs in Turkish and/or a foreign language can be established in the above-mentioned universities. It was also decided that students who cannot present the required documents but apply for the second or third time can be accepted according to the results of the proficiency tests held by these universities.

In Turkey, since 2011, tuition fees for Turkish citizens were abolished. Council of Ministers decided that for the 2012–2013 academic year, tuition fees for Syrian

<sup>12</sup>Council of Higher Education (YÖK): [www.yok.gov.tr](http://www.yok.gov.tr) & <https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/>.

<sup>13</sup>Information regarding the numbers of students studying at universities in Turkey holding “Temporary Protection” and “Residence Permit” could not be found. Soon, “denizens” will be added to these categories. Distinguishing these categories is critical in planning the future. Systems in universities and YÖKSİS should be structured in a way to reflect this distinction.

<sup>14</sup>See YOK. (2017).



**Fig. 3** Top Ten Universities with Syrian Student. *Source* Council of Higher Education (YÖK) [www.yok.gov.tr](http://www.yok.gov.tr); <https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/> (accessed: 10 July 2017)

students enrolling in an institution through application to foreign student quotas will be covered from the budget of the public institution called Turks Abroad and Related Communities Presidency budget. For the later years, the tuition fees for the Syrian students were regulated by the “Decree on Determining Student Contributions to Current Service Costs in Higher Education Institutions and Tuition Fees for 2014–2015 Academic Year” issued by the Council of Ministers and published in 27/09/2014. The decree states that, in accordance with the principles determined by the Council of Higher Education, tuition fees for Syrian students who continue their education within the period of the program or enroll to daytime education and open education programs should be covered from the public institution “Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities” budget.<sup>15</sup>

## Survey and the Key Findings

The survey was implemented between January and March 2017. As already stated, 497 students across the country participated, of whom 395 took the online survey and the remaining 102 took the hardcopy survey the researchers conducted in

<sup>15</sup>See: Council of Higher Education Announcements (No: 57802651) <http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2014/09/20140927-6-1.pdf>.

Istanbul, Ankara, Gaziantep and Mardin during the workshops. The demographic features of the participants are consistent with the actual distribution of Syrians across universities, 35% of the participants were female and 65% male. The resulting sample was highly representative of this distribution, as evidenced in the following graph shows.

The average age of participants is 23.15 which also indicates that most of these students dropped out of their higher education program before arriving in Turkey. When we asked them if they attended a university in Syria, 45.47% answered yes (Fig. 4).

The survey questions have been divided into four parts, namely to inquire about post-war vulnerabilities, family background, academic qualifications and socio-economic conditions and expectations.

- **Post-war vulnerabilities:**

To start with the findings of their post-war vulnerabilities, we asked them how often they feel depressed remembering the war in Syria. About 60% indicated that they still suffer from this (Fig. 5).

In order to have an idea about the level/impact of this trauma, we asked them about their losses in the war. Only 14% of our respondents did not lose anybody close during the war, while 60% lost either a distant or a close relative, and 25% lost a friend. This makes the student population represented in the survey highly vulnerable in terms of their memories during the war (Fig. 6).

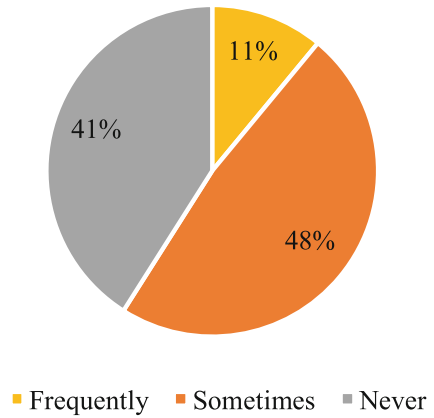
- **Family background:**

When we asked them about the current location of their family members, we got a result indicating a much dispersed family diaspora. Accordingly, 89% of those in our sample still have family in Syria and 78% of the participants stated that at least one member of their family lives outside of Turkey and Syria.

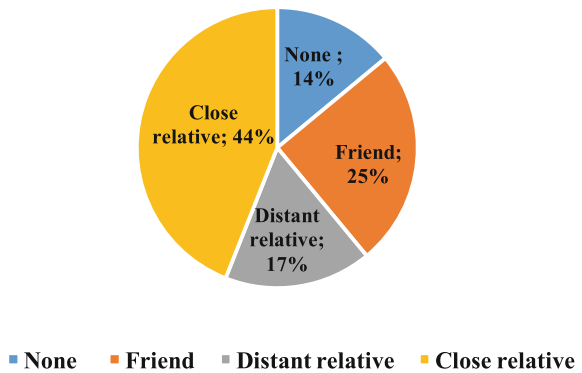


**Fig. 4** Distribution of the students in the sample of Elite Dialogue Survey

**Fig. 5** Feeling trauma after war

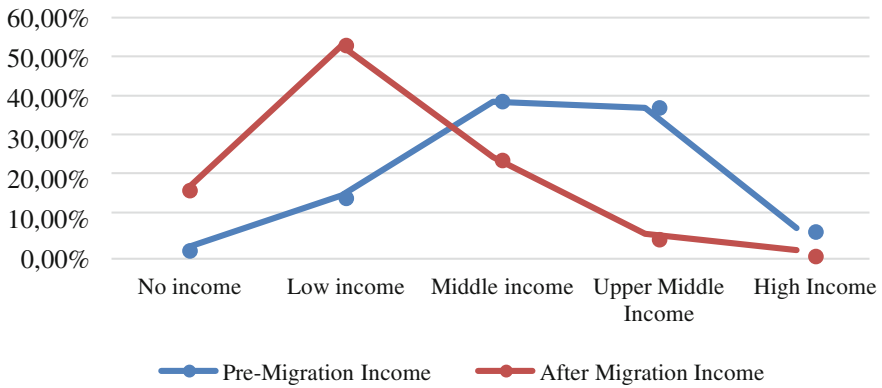


**Fig. 6** Loss of family/friends during war



In order to understand whether there is a relation between educational statuses of the parents, it appears that 21.3% of students have parents with higher education degrees. The percentage of men (fathers) (30.87%) is higher than that of women (mothers) (7.65). The share of people with no family members with a higher education degree is quite high at 40%. Educational statuses of siblings paint a similar picture. Approximately 54% of siblings of Syrian college students participating in the research have attended higher education institutions (Fig. 7, Table 1).

- **Academic qualifications:**  
 37.75% of Syrian students participating in the survey stated that they can speak Turkish at an advanced level, and 41% of them at the intermediate level. The high percentage of this result has two reasons; one is that they attended the TOMER (Turkish language) course after their enrollment, the other is that some participants are of Turkmen origin for whom Turkish is a native language. The share of students who can speak advanced English is 31%, French is 4.6%; and about a quarter of the students indicated that they can speak other languages such as Kurdish, German, Russian, etc.



**Fig. 7** Household income of before/after migration

**Table 1** Higher education attainment of the parents

Answer choices	Responses (%)	Responses (no.)
Both parents went to college	21.37	81
Only the mother went to college	7.65	29
Only the father went to college	30.87	117
None of them	40.11	152
Total	100.00	379

There is a very visible income gap when pre- and after migration household income is compared. The welfare level of Syrian refugee students has dropped dramatically after migration, as indicated by the high income skewed normal distribution of their household income that has heavily shifted towards lower income levels. As a result of this, many students find themselves in the labor market either to support their families or their studies.

Syrian college students participating in the research were asked about the kind of difficulties they encountered when registering for colleges in Turkey. Only 19% of these students stated that they did not encounter any difficulties, however, it is understood that there are two main problems regarding this process, one is paying tuition fees and the other is gathering the required documents. Once again, it can be seen that the lack of information sources and language barriers are other difficulties they face (Fig. 8).

When we asked the students, 74% of Syrian respondents chose their field of study based on their own decisions. This is very important and positive in terms of student’s motivation. 8.1% of these students stated that the university chose their field of study, which is due to the student and field quotas of certain universities (Fig. 9).

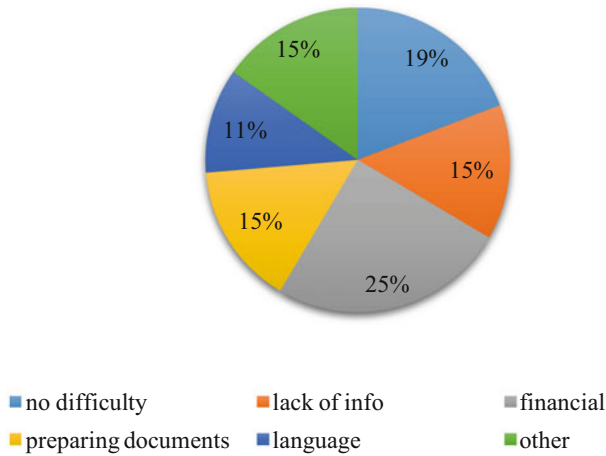


Fig. 8 Difficulties faced during admission

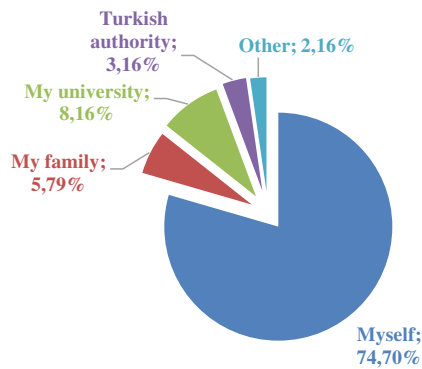


Fig. 9 Choosing the field of study

22.6% of Syrian college students participating in the research stated that they are beneficiaries of a scholarship. This ratio is consistent with the national average in Turkey. Turkish government gives approximately 3500 scholarships using its own and international resources. With 14,740 students, this number corresponds to 23.7%. This response is critical for the reliability and representative quality of our research. 51.45% of Syrian college students participating in the research stated that they applied for a scholarship but were rejected, whereas around 23% of them stated that they never applied for a scholarship. It is very important to support Syrian students coming from Syria with no financial resources so that they can continue their education and dissemination of the information regarding these scholarships (Fig. 10).

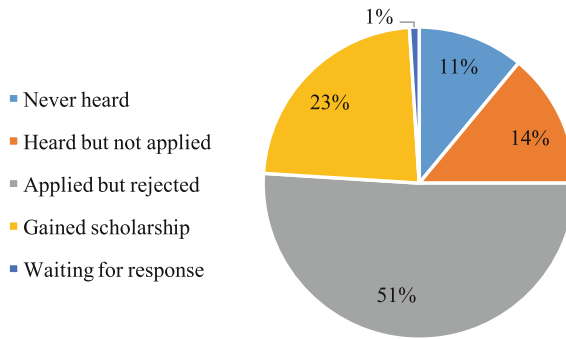


Fig. 10 Scholarships from Turkish government

### Success Levels in the Courses

Academic standings of Syrian students participating in the research in the last few years are rather promising. Of all participants in the survey, 75% stated that their success levels are “average”, “good”, or “excellent”. Students considering their success as “poor” are only 1%, those saying “average” are 15%. The level of success achieved despite very difficult conditions and a serious language barrier is indeed very promising (Fig. 11).

### Quality of Education

A major part of Syrian college students participating in the survey (64%) appears to be satisfied with the quality of education provided by their departments in Turkey. Still, 20% of students seem dissatisfied with the quality of education, indicating the need for assessing this lack of satisfaction (Fig. 12).

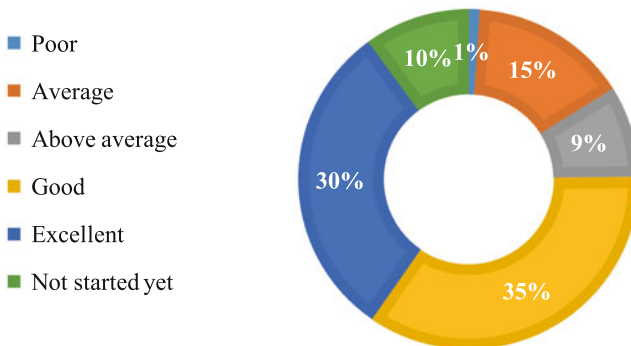
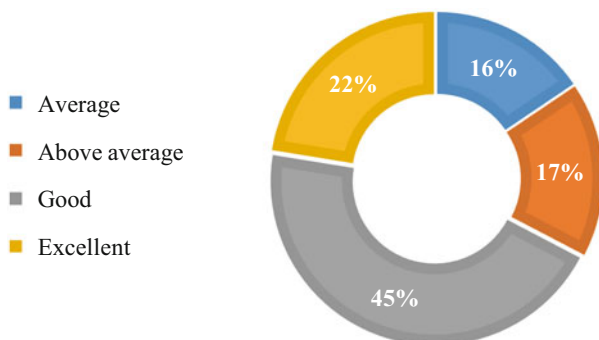


Fig. 11 Success levels in their courses



**Fig. 12** Quality of education

**Table 2** Social Relations

	Very Poor	Poor	Average	Good	Very good
Turkish friends	19.79% 75	20.32% 77	8.97% 34	24.54% 93	26.39% 100
Arabic friends	3.43% 13	8.18% 31	7.12% 27	31.40% 119	49.87% 189

- **Social Integration and Future Expectations**

In order to discover how happy and adapted Syrian students in Turkey felt, the research tried to focus on social relations and asked the participants about their relationships with their Turkish and Arab friends. More than 50% of Syrian college students participating in the research stated that they have good and excellent relationships with Turks, and 40% of them expressed bad relationships. The “good relationships” between this same group of students and other Arabs, including Syrians, is of 80%, the relationships between these groups defined as bad is of 11%. This might be because Syrian students have not yet socialized with Turks fully. However, language barrier and significant obstacles due to cultural differences should be kept in mind (Table 2).

## Living/Work<sup>16</sup>

Syrian students were also asked how they finance their education. About 18% of the students stated that they finance their education by scholarships, 25% of them said that they work, and the rest are supported by their families (Fig. 13).

<sup>16</sup>Syrians under temporary protection (refugees) in Turkey have work permit. But more than 90% of Syrians in Turkey work informal. See: Erdogan and Ünver (2015); and Icduygu and Migration Policy Institute (2015).



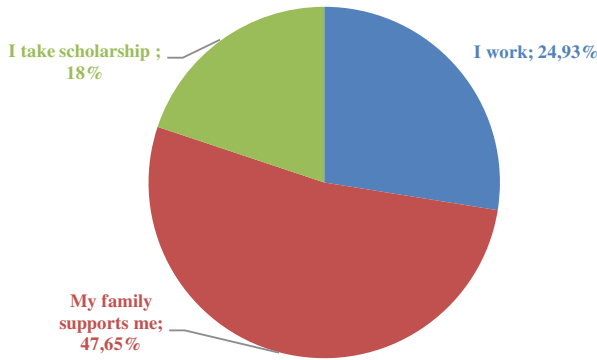


Fig. 13 Financial conditions

### Future Perspectives

At this point, it is also important to explore the employment prospects of Syrian refugee students as this is one of the main reasons why they are enrolled in higher education programs. First, when it comes to their future expectations, the figure below ranks these with regards to different issue areas where 0 indicates no hope and 4 indicates high hopes from the future with respect to each issue area. As shown, they have the lowest levels of hope with regards to politics and economy of Syria and sociological high hopes from both Turkish politics and economy. When it comes to personal issues, they are most worried about household finances and least worried about life in general.

As can be expected, the level of hopes for Syria’s future is the lowest, and Syrian college students participating in the research feel most hopeful about their personal lives and Turkish politics (Fig. 14).

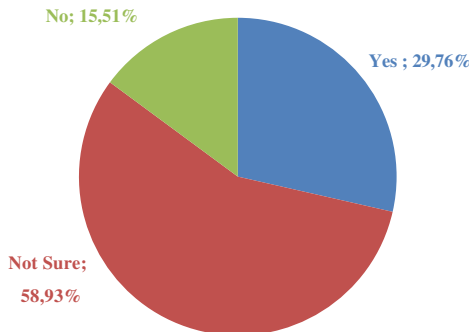


Fig. 14 Do you think you will find a job after graduation?

### Plans for the Future

11.39% of Syrian college students participating in the research said that they would go back to Syria under any circumstances, and 9.17% stated they would go back “when the war is over”. 27% of the remaining participants stated that they would never go back, and 52% is willing to go back when the war is over and their desired regime is established. However, considering their responses to other questions indicating that their hopes are rather low, it can be concluded that more than 80% of Syrian college students will not go back to their country (Fig. 15).

Responses to the question exploring this issue show that 52.5% of the students are not willing to migrate to a third country in the future. 30% of the students stated that they would go if they cannot finish their studies in Turkey or if they cannot find a job, whereas 14% of them would choose to go if they have the chance. 52.5% of the students stated that they would prefer to stay in Turkey. Although this is very valuable, it wouldn’t be surprising if these ratios would turn more to pro-migration intentions over time.

Responses of Syrian college students participating in the research to the question asking which country they would go to “if they would go” are quite interesting. According to their responses, the first choice of Syrian students would be to go to Canada (41%), followed by the UK (25%), and then Germany (18%) (Fig. 16).

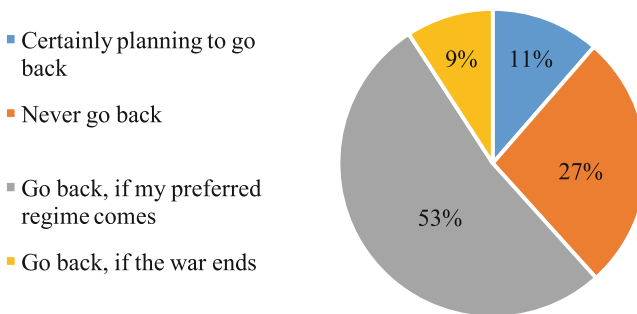


Fig. 15 Plans to move back

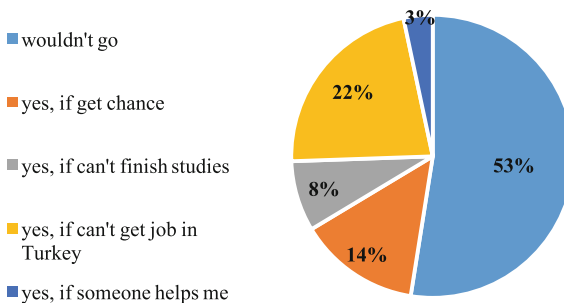


Fig. 16 Migration to third countries

## Conclusion

This project is the first comprehensive work on Syrian students in Turkey. A survey featuring a sample of 495 representing the 14,740 Syrian students studying at Turkish universities was conducted. The main purpose of the project was to determine the situation of higher education students in Turkey. However, there are two main objectives underlying this purpose. The first one is to determine the problems of Syrian students and put forward recommendations for policies on this matter, and the second one is to understand this qualified group's contribution to the long-term adaptation process of Syrians and to provide ways and means for them to motivate themselves. We mainly believe that most of the Syrians, whose numbers are over 3.3 million as of November 2017, will stay in Turkey, which was clearly confirmed during the study. The number of university students (14,700) is very small compared to the overall Syrian population (3.3 million) in Turkey. There are around 500,000 young Syrians between 18 and 25 years old.

Higher education is highly competitive in Turkey due to the large young population and the imbalance between supply and demand in the system. Admitting Syrian students into education and particularly higher education is one of the most discussed issues and one of the main areas of social conflict in Turkey. Despite the fact that Syrian higher education students do not deny Turkish students their educational rights and enroll in universities under foreigner quotas, this has been one of the most criticized points in Turkish society regarding the rights granted to Syrian students. On the other hand, from a right-based approach, these groups have to receive a quality education and for the inclusive integration policies, the education level of the overall refugee population in Turkey must be increased. In order to prevent new lost generations, to help the youth continue their education, to enable them to contribute to Turkish society and act as bridges in adaptation processes, new effective and data-based policies must be implemented. However, increasing this number of students and incentivizing policies should be structured in a manner to prevent any additional societal turmoil, and policies should be developed with support from the Turkish society.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>This approach can be noticed in the document for the most refugee hosting countries created by the UN. See 3RP (Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan). (n.d). Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan 2015–16: Turkey. *Report, 3RP*. Retrieved from <https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Syria/3RP-Report-Turkey.pdf>. For a European policy for the recognition of the qualification see Recommendation on the Recognition of Refugees' Qualifications under Lisbon Recognition Convention and Explanatory Memorandum, Paris/Strasbourg, 14 Nov 2017.

## Findings of This Research

Higher education students will play an important role in peaceful future prospects and contributions to all segments of the society including Syrian refugees. ED Project is based on this view, believing that Syrians students studying at universities in Turkey will play a rather important part in the process. The current profile, as gathered from the participants in the survey, shows that Syrian university students in Turkey:

- are traumatized young people experiencing deep psychological outcomes of the war;
- have low enrollment rates to universities;
- are academically vulnerable, having no clear perspectives and supervision;
- are not integrated socially with the local people;
- have unclear future prospects, second and more migration plans.

Our recommendations for new policies addressing the Syrian students are to create data-based and more inclusive policies, to have clear, sustainable, comprehensive mid and long-term migration strategies covering all areas of social integration, to determine more funding and more study places in higher education, focus on gender imbalance in all aspects of life and to implement lifelong education to increase their active participation in life.

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# Inclusive Practices in Response to the German Refugee Influx: Support Structures and Rationales Described by University Administrators



Lisa Unangst and Bernhard Streitwieser

## Introduction

New and rapidly evolving challenges in the German post-secondary ecosystem have followed the recent influx of refugees from the Middle East, North Africa and beyond. Actors in the public, private, and community-based sectors alike have contributed resources and initiated programs seeking to address some of these challenges and capitalize on opportunities (for example, utilizing MOOCs in new and innovative ways). However, it is the 16 federal states that are primarily responsible for setting the higher education policy, and indeed, public universities are the primary providers of post-secondary education in Germany. Thus, policies set by the states are mediated both by federal government structures and supports—German Academic Exchange Service (or DAAD) funding serving as a good example—as well as by institutional priorities. Indeed, the influx of refugees to Germany and significant shifts in higher education policy make this a timely human rights issue with broad impact. As Kogan, Gebel, and Noelke write, “understanding how different education systems generate or mitigate social inequalities in education is a central aim of social stratification research” (Kogan et al. 2011, p. 70). Refugees in the German context encounter distinct supports and barriers in accessing higher education.

This paper highlights the support systems developed by 12 German universities for refugee students, probing these structures through two separate interview-based studies conducted by the authors and targeting university faculty and staff. With an

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eye toward informing both practitioners and academics in the field, this paper presents data and seeks to encourage change at the institutional level, enabling understanding for and direct support of refugee student populations. We also seek to identify emerging best practices, particularly with practitioners in mind.

## Background

As asylum-seekers and refugee numbers in Europe swelled from 2014 to 2015, German Chancellor Merkel took the rather remarkable step of committing significant resources to the support of unregistered refugees, issuing a call to action enshrined in the now famous phrase, “Wir Schaffen Das” (“We will manage it”). “In September 2015, Berlin pledged 6 billion euros (\$6.6 billion) to support the 800,000 migrants—about quadruple the number from 2014—it was expecting to receive by the end of 2015” (Park 2015). However, initial optimism about taking a lead role in the refugee crisis soon turned to doubt, in large part because the financial burden was (and remains) substantial, with many costs falling directly on towns and municipalities. *Die Zeit* has estimated that costs ranged among German cities between Euro 132 and Euro 1666 per refugee per month in Germany (Friedrichs and Malter 2016).

Higher education in Germany is tuition-free, for domestic as well as for most international students (though this will soon change for non-EU students in the states of Baden-Württemberg and Nordrhein-Westfalen), including refugees. Further, all students who complete the university entrance qualification known as the Abitur become eligible to enter any public institution. However, because there are more applicants than spaces, in many institutions (particularly in the more popular metropolitan centres like Berlin or Munich), only those with top grades will be admitted; the problem is further heightened in the most popular subject areas. Of particular concern is the area of medical studies which tends to apply the “*numerus clausus*” most strictly. Despite their asylum status, refugees do not generally receive differential treatment in admissions decisions and must compete with all international students. However, while admission is competitive, there is some anecdotal evidence to suggest that there may be an informal cap on the number of refugee students per program.

Broadly speaking, the recent refugee influx has spurred the creation and extension of a suite of services for refugees who seek to enter the university in Germany. These services include verifying higher education entrance credentials, ensuring German language competency through preparatory classes, offering buddy and mentoring programs, auditing classes, and providing additional guidance and individual consultations services. Three general types of support ease the path to refugee entrance to German higher education. First, if tangible credentials are unavailable (if a refugee had to flee without documentation), one’s university entrance qualification, or *Hochschulzugangsberechtigung*, can be verified against the *Anabin* database (“*Anerkennung und Bewertung ausländischer*

*Bildungsnachweise*”) and then processed at the universities through the *Uni-assist e.V.* organisation, which is the credential service provider to universities. Second, the *TestAS* exam is available to verify scholastic aptitude through a centrally administered, standard examination. The test can be taken in numerous languages and is free of charge the first time it is taken. Third, verifying applicants’ *language proficiency*, which for university study at the BA, MA or PhD level in Germany must be at a level C1 competency, may be completed via a number of widely available testing mechanisms.

## Theoretical Framework

We ground our study of inclusive practices and institutional support for refugee students in Critical Theory to explicitly acknowledge the social, historical, economic and ideological forces that impact contemporary German universities as well as their faculty, staff, students, and community stakeholders. That is to say, we acknowledge the impact in Germany—and Western Europe more broadly—of unequal power structures in society at large, which are reflected in the university setting and necessarily influence the experience of both prospective and enrolled students. As Gutierrez-Rodriguez puts it,

universities reflect deeply entrenched social inequalities marked by class, race, disability and migration... Thus, universities reflect the inherent social inequalities within the nation state. When it comes to German and British state universities, what becomes apparent is the class and racial stratification of these institutions (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez 2016)

Critical Theory allows for both macro and micro level exploration, which works well in analysing narrative work: administrators, students and faculty alike have direct experiences that shed light on campus, area, and national phenomena, as well as on specific student support programs as they exist in the German context.

Further, in the mode of Solórzano et al., we situate our work within a transformative paradigm that emphasizes “the centrality of experiential knowledge” and encourages an intersectional approach, calling attention to the experiences of marginalized groups such as refugees (Solórzano et al. 2000, p. 63). Finally, we focus on the power dynamics of the university setting, which can be split in broad terms into *de facto* (in practice) and *de jure* (formalised) operations.

As noted by Hurtado, “Researchers who use a transformative lens are typically engaged in a research process that helps educators and students divest from inequality embedded in norms and structures to devise solutions for social and institutional change” (Hurtado 2015, p. 290). Indeed, researchers in this mode respond directly to Bourdieu’s problematisation of the school-based “reproduction of existing power relations in society by privileging the cultural background of students of the dominant class” (Kanno and Varghese 2010, p. 313). That is, transformative research commits to offering prompt, practical solutions for disadvantaged or marginalized groups. Transformative work is critical, in our view, to an



exploration of refugee issues; not only have students of colour, migrant and refugee students (distinct categories which may overlap) been traditionally marginalised in the post-secondary education sphere, but given massification, neo-liberalism, and immigration reform (which continue to produce structural changes), a closer examination of this sector is indicated (Heath et al. 2008; Kristen and Granato 2007).

## Methodology

In developing their interview protocols, both authors structured open-ended items with prompts that allowed ample opportunity to delve deeply into issues and experiences when the interviewee allowed while still maintaining a neutral stance as a researcher. Participants in interview series A (conducted by Unangst) were all attached to public research universities in northern or central Germany, with an even distribution among large cities, a medium-sized city, and large towns, all of which are situated in former West Germany (Unangst 2017). All participants were recruited through personal outreach and interviewed for about sixty minutes in nine in-person and one Skype conversations. A standard interview protocol was employed, with questions addressing administrator/faculty background, experiences with refugee and migrant students over time, conceptions of diversity at their university, and institutional support for their programming areas.

Participants in interview series B (conducted by Streitwieser) came from three universities of applied sciences (*Hochschulen*) in Berlin (both former East and West) and were recruited by a well-networked senior administrator from one of the institutions. The data were collected over four days in January 2017 through a series of one hour-long interviews. Four university administrators charged with refugee integration and two groups of six refugees each in focus groups were interviewed, however, this paper focuses on the administrator interviews (an analysis of the refugee student data is currently being prepared for separate publication<sup>1</sup>). A standard interview protocol was used and questions addressed to administrators asked them to describe the situation of refugees seeking access to their university, what their main constraints and support were, how they feel the higher education sector is responding, what their motivations and goals were for working with this population, and what they expected the ramifications to be in the coming years (Table 1).

In reviewing interview transcripts, an open coding technique was utilized to identify main concepts emerging from participant insights and observations. Next, axial coding was performed to group concepts into “families” employing a critical

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<sup>1</sup>Streitwieser, B. (in progress). Integration of Refugees into German Higher Education: Seeking Access to Berlin Universities. Chapter proposal accepted for inclusion in K. Magos & M. Margaroni for a Special issue on “Refugees Education and Experience” in the *Global Education Review*, Volume 5, No. 4, November, 2018.

**Table 1** Demographic characteristics of interview participants, Series A and B

Respondent	Number	Gender	Migrant background	University type
Faculty	5 (Series A) 1 (Series B)	2 male, 3 female (Series A); 1 female (Series B)	1 faculty (Series A)	Research Universities (Series A)
Administrators	5 (Series A) 2 (Series B)	3 male, 2 female (Series A) 1 male, 1 female (Series B)	2 administrators (Series A) 1 paid student administrative assistant (Series B)	Research Universities (Series A) Universities of Applied sciences serving 10,000 + students (Series B)
German student support	3 (Series B)	2 female, 1 male (Series B)	1 male	
Totals: 16				

lens (Kaveh 2014). While, assuredly, additional coding might result in important findings, the main emphasis in this iteration of the analysis was to identify broad themes relevant to a comparative case study of refugee student support at German universities.

In the mode of Pugach and Goodman, this paper seeks to offer a transparent evaluation of the author’s own positionalities, so as to provide important detail and nuance on the role of the researcher (Pugach and Goodman 2015). As a graduate student and tenure-track academic who have worked on questions surrounding educational policy relating to the education of migrant populations in Germany (Streitwieser et al. 2017a, b), the authors are both interested on a personal and professional level in equitable access and attainment. As a result, we view reporting in the popular media on the refugee influx and education as well as research literature with a particular, critical lens. As Kilbourn writes,

A fundamental assumption for any academic research is that the phenomena (data) that we wish to understand are filtered through a point of view (a theoretical perspective)—that is to say, it is assumed that there is no such thing as a value-free or unbiased or correct interpretation of an event. Interpretations are always filtered through one or more lenses or theoretical perspectives that we have for “seeing” (Kilbourn 2006, p. 545).

## Key Findings

### *German Language Proficiency as a Significant Barrier*

German is a difficult language, both grammatically and phonetically, and when it is used colloquially it is distinctly different from the way it is used in professional situations. Arguably, university-level German is the most complex version and

learning the particular academic language (*Fachsprache*) is exceedingly difficult. To learn this level of German sufficiently to successfully understand lectures and to produce quality written work takes time. Administrators in Series B noted frequently in this regard that refugees face a particularly difficult challenge as they compete with often more linguistically familiar international students, who may have a much longer history and familiarity with the German language (for example a Dutch or a Russian student) than a newly arrived refugee. Fear of inadequacy in German can then translate into a stronger reluctance to attend lectures and ask questions, thus further hindering integration. As the Staff Coordinator of Refugee Affairs at one Berlin universities noted

My goodness, it will not just take a few months but a few years. How are they supposed to get by with just a rudimentary understanding of the language?...If someone's been a foreign student in Germany for years, or maybe worked here as an Au pair, they pose significant competition to refugees, so language is really the main and first hurdle that they need to overcome.... I tell them the story of a Finnish student who also had a very hard time getting into a German university so they won't think it's just being made difficult for Syrian students.

Given that prospective students with a refugee background enter Germany with varying levels of German proficiency, the length of time to acquire even B1 level proficiency (required for applicants to the university pathway programs surveyed) may be substantial. Pathway programs are not credit-bearing programs, but rather span a range of language and orientation offerings, aiming to prepare students with a secondary-level leaving certificate to successfully enrol in a degree-granting university program. Not all students are familiar with this two-tiered system of study encountered by most refugees: as one interview participant in Series A put it, he spent a lot of time telling students “it's going to take longer to get into the university system and even to graduate from the university than they were expecting.” As noted by one staffer, a language preparation program launched at his institution was meant to bridge two language levels (from B1 to C1) in five months (in its first iteration), and the time allocated was found to be insufficient. The program was subsequently extended to six months, and a proposal for the third iteration of the initiative outlines a course of one year in length.

Several authors have noted that the relatively high threshold of C1 German language proficiency—generally required to enter a German language university degree program—prevents refugee students from accessing credit-bearing study for some time. C1 level proficiency is defined by the Council of Europe's portal as follows:

[Student] can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices (Council of Europe 2017).

Further, one interview participant in Series A highlighted the even higher language threshold for teaching training programs, which is set by the state at a C2 level.

In addition to these barriers to degree program entry, another difficulty identified by interview participants in Series A was in absorbing content knowledge concurrent with learning new academic vocabulary. One administrator reported that a degree-seeking student with C1-level German skills dropped out of their political science program for this very reason: “He took classes for the first six weeks and then he terminated his university program because, he said, the language barrier is so high” and went on to note that it was the *Fachsprache* (subject-specific language) that was the main difficulty. The student has since taken an internship in the field and plans to re-apply in the future, after having acquired these subject-specific skills.

### ***Distinct Programs Offered in Distinct University Contexts***

The development of refugee support structures has varied widely by university. At one institution included in Interview Series A, an orientation program is limited to six-eight weeks, after which “people can go into the educational settings and find out if the educational system in Germany will suit their expectations” and then pursue being admitted as a degree-seeking student in the subject of their choice (once they meet language and secondary school leaving certificate requirements).

Further, it seems that the professional background of key constituents plays a critical role in how these programs evolve. Given the structure of primary financial support for most refugee programming, this is indeed logical: the DAAD’s *Integra* program has funded a range of initiatives proposed by post-secondary institutions, which were developed to match university staff capacity and perceived current needs (Kanning 2017). For instance, one university staff member interviewed in Series A who has administered refugee programs since November 2016 noted that her prior experience working for the university played an important role in her current work. Building on a network of university, political, and community-wide contacts she had established over the previous years, she found it relatively easy to develop a range of seminars and modules which introduced refugee students enrolled in pathway programs to various academic specialties at the university, allowing them to consider whether they might like to study the topic more intensively. Further, she is responsible for continuing a pre-existing series of networking meetings for community stakeholders working on refugee issues. A Berlin university administrator interviewed in Series B spoke of how her prior experience living in Egypt and speaking Arabic had helped her to better understand some of the cultural nuances of refugee students from that region.

Another interview participant in Series A indicated that his university had launched programs supporting prospective refugee students in fall of 2015, after the city had received a swell of refugees in the summer of that year, and that it was very

difficult to build upon the initial program offerings for the first academic year, given that offerings were closely tied to planned seminars and other academic offerings. This participant also noted the emphasis on the financing of education in his university's pathway program and provided an example of how critical this issue can be to students: a student who had attended several consultations with the university staff over summer months made the staffer aware that he was living in a tent, and as winter approached, his situation became more acute. The staffer himself estimated that he had spoken with over twelve agencies in the area trying to assist the student with financing and housing, and that this experience (while extreme) highlighted how difficult the process of resettlement can be for refugee students. The staffer reported, "we had to get in contact with a dozen... even more different institutions, which all said 'ok, you have a problem, we know that problem, and we would be responsible, but we cannot help because first of all you have to go there, and then you have to go there [to different offices].'" He ended by saying that "that was so striking for me...how hard it was for *us* even to get clear information, to get clear direction... it must be really, really hard for people that don't know the system, that don't know the language... that don't even have a place where they can rest."

An additional Series A participant, a faculty member, noted that her university had offered to host refugees on the university campus itself at the beginning of the refugee influx and then convened a task force comprised of various university stakeholders to identify areas in which the institution could support prospective refugee students. She observed that she was not clear on whether students from a refugee background received, for instance, extra time for exams, which would be made available to other students who qualified for a "*Nachteilsausgleich*" (accommodations), but that she was in support of such an initiative.

### ***"Success" in Refugee Support Programming Is Opaque and Inconsistent***

Though how "success" was measured at the respective institutions was not a question explicitly addressed in either interview series, this emerged as a clear theme given a lack of data on student participation, lack of benchmarking practices, uncertainty regarding future funding, and lack of a clear mission or vision at the institutional level. In part, this difficulty measuring success via longitudinal evaluation is hampered by Germany's very strict data protection laws (*Datenschutz*), which make student tracking particularly challenging. These laws, which are even more restrictive than the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) regulations in the United States, do not allow for tracking of students with refugee backgrounds (*Fluechtlingshintergrund*), meaning that, as these individuals are mainstreamed into universities as regularly matriculated students, it becomes difficult to track whether they persist or drop out at proportionally higher rates than other international students. Universities, as a result, may only be able to anecdotally document the longer-term success of their refugee students after matriculation.

Additionally, data are lacking on several levels: first, almost all interview participants noted that their institution had had very little idea how many refugee students to expect when programming was launched, and many noted that this was still the case. For some universities, most of the students served to date arrived on campus in 2015, while for others, 2017 represented a year of significant growth in refugee student engagement. One interview participant in Series A noted that his institution enrolled 30 language program participants in the summer semester of 2015, and by summer 2017, 330 students were enrolled in at least one program at the same site. Another staffer noted that their program launched in October 2016, when they had “no idea what the needs of the people participating in the program would be” and that they “developed the program on the fly.” Only recently, he said, had they been able to plan ahead and proactively “plan solutions” for students, almost two years after program implementation.

In 2016, the secretary general of the DAAD, Dorothea Rüländ, made the estimate publicly that 30,000–50,000 refugees would be prepared—having overcome administrative hurdles and language requirements—to seek access to higher education in the next several years (Rüländ 2016). Universities surveyed did not have a “target” number of refugee students that they would like to be serving though, as noted previously, some had capacity limits on the number of students they were able to serve. It must be noted that, while in 2015 close to one million new refugees (890,000) entered Germany, by 2016, due to an EU deal with Turkey and the closure of borders in transit countries, the refugee influx entering Germany had been reduced to 280,000 (Trines 2017). But even so, as one administrator in Series B interviews noted, German bureaucracy had been confronted with a major challenge. He noted, for example, that Berlin’s state Office of Health and Social Affairs, known as LaGeSo for short (Landesamt für Gesundheit und Soziales) had had to hire 1000 additional workers with only three months of training, and yet empowered them with authority to make life-altering decisions about a refugees’ right or not to stay or need to leave the country.

As this enormous administrative challenge has filtered down to the university sector, we may also consider how nation-wide system actors seek success in terms of matriculated, degree-seeking students from a refugee background. According to a study by the German Rectors Conference (HRK), as of 2017, 1140 refugees had become officially enrolled in university study in the country, a fivefold jump over six months earlier, and the numbers of those seeking guidance to enter university had doubled over the course of one semester. Does this increase demonstrate “success” for the DAAD? For the HRK?

Students, staff and faculty interviewed almost universally displayed a lack of knowledge of refugee support structures at other universities. None of them had a clear sense of the most successful universities in this area; they were not aware of the number of refugee students in pathway or degree programs of other universities. A student interviewed in Series B was the only participant to mention the recognition that DAAD offers to notable refugee support programs. The DAAD has a small-scale competition that highlights student-led university programs that support refugees and it also holds regional conferences to highlight successful programs in

the area. However, apparently neither of these initiatives were known to the interviewees in Series A.

Indeed, it seems as if the DAAD as the primary funder of such programs would be the natural party to distribute this type of information. In any case, the lack of knowledge of the scope of institutional responses may demonstrate a lack of familiarity with best practices and, of course, this necessarily limits the construction of success in any given campus context.

Further, all institutions surveyed in both Series A and Series B noted uncertainty regarding future funding for refugee support programs. While defining concrete funding mechanisms was not a primary focus of this project, it seems that some universities dedicate more institutional funding to refugee-relevant programming, while others rely primarily on DAAD support, and still others seek a combination of institutional, DAAD, and state or federal level support. Naturally, a lack of clarity around the sustainability of programming impacts the scope of work attempted and additionally creates stress for staff and faculty who already feel overburdened by their workload and student needs.

Finally, while a few interview participants in Series A highlighted the direct involvement of their university's vice president or rector in refugee programming, it was primarily related to securing funding for *Integra* programs and not related to an overarching, long-term vision for refugee integration. That is to say, it does not seem that senior leadership level "talking points" have translated to the faculty and staff level on this topic. One exception is notable: a faculty member who also holds a senior administration appointment spoke at length about their goals for the institution as a whole around not only refugee integration but issues of diversity more broadly, including the integration of students from a migrant background. However, this individual noted repeatedly that university politics and power structures made change slower than might be optimal. To be fair, change management is a chronically vexing challenge for most large institutions, whether they are universities, businesses or any other type of enterprise. Several administrators in Series B, however, while generally pleased with the level of support from above, were quite proud of the level of support from below, namely from students stepping up to volunteer for refugee integration initiatives. For example, the "Welcome—Students Helping Refugees" program of the DAAD funds students offering refugees language programs and other training opportunities during the summer months.

Another issue worth contemplating is the substance, not just societally but also within the universities, of the oft-touted "Welcome Culture." While the German response from the highest levels of government down to the university level were clearly inspired by Chancellor Angela Merkel's inspiring "Wir schaffen das" mantra, it is fair debate whether the response was one of obligation and a desire to continue to rehabilitate the country's image, or a truly energetic movement to take up refugees and help them find their way throughout German society. Indeed, some of the student administrators interviewed in Series B questioned the intent of programs like the DAAD's *Integra* initiative; were programs developed by universities, they wondered, mainly because they were receiving monetary support from the DAAD and because other universities were establishing similar programs?

Speculation on this topic varied among respondents and was dependent on individual circumstances. However, it appears that many of the current programs on offer were not well thought out or carefully targeted to meet the needs of the refugees themselves. One administrator in Series B, for example, found it highly problematic that refugees themselves had not (at least to that point) been asked yet through an evaluation study to assess the services they were receiving. For her, any claim of the program's success could therefore only be anecdotal and unreliable. The respondent also noted that any future survey including identifying information would likely prevent a refugee student from responding candidly. After all, as she noted, who will bite the hand that feeds you?

### ***Enabling Access for Women Refugees Is a Key Goal***

It seems clear that interview participants perceive women to comprise a minority of refugee students being served at their institutions. In the Series A interviews, one staff member noted that 14% of participants in refugee support programs at her institution were women and that the university was making an effort to consider measures such as combining child care with programmatic offerings in order to increase participation in this area. Notably, the staff member who highlighted this gap identified herself as having a background in gender studies. In Series B, the administrators also voiced their concerns over the small number of Muslim refugee women in language courses then going on to seek entrance into university study. In this regard, the administrators noted a struggle between, on the one hand, wanting to encourage a greater participation among these women while, at the same time, not seeking to step into unfamiliar cultural territory and offend established norms.

In terms of the refugee influx to Germany in 2015–16, roughly 30% were women. The term “Asylum Darwinism” has been used to characterize the lower number of women who fled their countries for the simple reason that the passage was more dangerous for them (Lebecher). Once arrived in Germany, women also faced additional dangers in refugee centres where bathrooms and showers were not separate and sexual violence has been a significant factor (Hertie School). Some women may also serve as caretakers for the family, which may include children as well as older parents and partners, potentially resulting in limited mobility and time to pursue university access. The research shows that refugee women are also more reluctant to seek out health counselling, and psychological counselling, again compounding why women may face greater internal and external challenges in finding the time, money, and support to even contemplate, let alone find their way into a university, and eventually into a program of studies (Hertie report). Likely as a result of this, so far a much smaller percentage of women than men appear to be accessing language and university content courses. This gender disparity in university access is of concern to administrators, who would like to understand better what women refugees need in order to be able to access university opportunities (RUB).



## ***Gap Between Refugees Interested in Study and Those Succeeding to Enrol as Students***

Several interview participants in Series A reported that the number of enrolled, degree-seeking refugee students at their institutions in 2017 was lower than they had anticipated. Some interview participants went further, indicating that education officials had underestimated how difficult it would be for refugee students—even those with strong academic backgrounds—to access public higher education in Germany. One staffer noted that there are “large groups” of people who fulfil the “basic requirements” to get into university but don’t attend “because there are so many barriers to get into the university” and that this gap between “formal” and “actual” access didn’t allow for a “diverse student body.” Indeed, another interview participant noted that he believed that in medicine, about 600 people applied for study places each year, though only about 15 places were available. One faculty member in Series B interviews spoke at length about having to temper refugees’ expectations (*Erwartungsmanagement*). She noted that not only do universities need to provide information to interested refugees about possible pathways into the institution but must also be sensitive to the natural disappointment or even anger some are bound to feel if they are unable to access higher education.

While degree-seeking student numbers stemming from the refugee influx are low, enrolment in so-called pathway programs (which are housed at various so-called *Studienkolleg* locations and other sites) is relatively strong, with some universities serving several hundred students in this capacity. While pathway programs differ by site, all of those surveyed offer language instruction, as well as some version of orientation programming, which may include: introduction to library services, access to sports offerings, and research and writing tutorials specific to the German context. One interview participant in Series A noted that, while the pathway program located on the university campus itself was the most popular program in the (relatively rural) region, that program’s enrolment was capped and, therefore, prospective students were often forced to enrol in pathway programs at different sites in the region—it would be interesting indeed to compare the university enrolment ratios of graduates of the on-campus and off-campus programs.

During another interview in Series A, a staff member at a second relatively rural university noted that in the previous year, there had been 120 applications for the university’s pathway program and that 40 applicants had been accepted. The same interview participant noted their concern that pathway program students would enrol at other universities when qualified for admittance; there appeared to be a concern for return on investment, as well as perhaps an awareness that certain cities or regions within Germany are perceived as more welcoming to the refugee community. This also indicates a possible roadblock for students: a desire to move to a more welcoming area without the resources to do so. Indeed, in Germany’s response to the current refugee influx (previous crises having been in the early 1990s during the Balkan crisis, before that a variety of less dramatic population

spikes through the post-war guest worker programs, and most dramatically in 1945 as millions of expelled ethnic Germans retreated from Eastern Europe toward Germany), Merkel's government has instituted a program that works to distribute refugees throughout the country in an effort to avoid them congregating in cities and creating what has been referred to as "parallel societies" or "ethnic enclaves" for lack of a better term.

Several staffers in Series A indicated that students enrolled in pathway programs or individual workshops were side-tracked from pursuing a credit-bearing study at university due to mental trauma, health issues, and family crises caused by war, flight and displacement. One interview participant noted that a refugee student from North Africa had had ten family members die during an attempted Mediterranean crossing—indeed, it is not only maintaining mental health which may be a "distraction" from study, but also life outside the classroom which moves forward in sometimes unexpected and difficult ways. This is an area widely studied among first-generation college students in the United States as well as among ethnic minority students in Germany. Claudia Diehl and co-contributors in their research highlight the difficulties encountered in student housing for Turkish students (Diehl et al. 2013). Along similar lines, in the Series B interviews an administrator cautioned that since "Syrians will be here for years to come, we need to treat them as *Bildungsinlaender*, not *Bildungsauslaender*," or those who earned their university entrance qualification in Germany versus international students. In this, she implied that Germany has an obligation to successfully integrate refugees, dealing with a wide range of challenges including mental health, on the assumption that they will remain for many years or perhaps permanently.

## Conclusion

While current refugee flows to Germany have abated significantly given current efforts at the federal level to curtail entry by creating "reception centres" in Africa (and elsewhere) and the EU agreement with Turkey alluded to above, refugees will continue to seek entry to higher education in the country, particularly as more and more attain C1 German language proficiency. This paper has outlined initial findings from two closely related interview series with university staff and faculty at twelve institutions in Germany. We find continued evidence that the C1 language proficiency requirement for entry to a degree program represents the most significant barrier to refugee students; that a wide range of diverse and uncoordinated programmatic offerings exist in distinct university contexts; that "success" in the context of refugee support programs is ill defined and poorly communicated so that it is difficult to assess how well program implementation has gone; that women are underrepresented in refugee support programs; and that a troubling gap persists between students interested in study and those enrolling as degree seeking students (as well as the related challenge of the transition from interest to actual enrolment in the face of stiff competition for few spots).

Moving forward, as students from refugee backgrounds continue in pathway programs and enrol as degree-seeking students in larger numbers, it will be important to observe whether there are differences in student persistence rates at different universities. Several interview participants at one of the “new” universities founded in the 1960s noted in Series A that their campus already had a high degree of diversity in terms of socio-economic status and non-traditional student backgrounds, and indicated that they felt that this environment was relatively welcoming to those from a refugee background. Interviewees in Series B also expressed pride in the openness of their institutions to helping refugees. Campus diversity, among many other factors including state social supports; diversity of the community at large; cost of living, etc., will likely impact persistence for this vulnerable student population. One interview participant in Series A noted that he felt that the university at which he worked ought to “embrace diversity” and that it was “symbolic what we do here.” Indeed, post-secondary education plays (most critically) a practical role in the integration of refugees, but also a symbolic one.

It is also important to note that Series A and Series B focused on research universities and *Fachhochschulen*, respectively. These two types of institutions have different structures, different student populations, and a plethora of other distinctions that should not be ignored. That is to say, while we seek to provide an outline of our combined findings—areas of overlap—in this paper, future research might productively probe support structures at each of these institutional types.

Lastly, we would like to emphasize the problematic lack of information sharing among the institutions surveyed in the research discussed here. Given that staff time and other resources are required in order for an effective exchange of best practices to take place, we urge that German post-secondary institutions explicitly support these practitioners. Further, we urge both state government actors and the DAAD to support this improved communication wherever possible. After all, when services to refugee students at one institution work well, sharing that success more widely may improve services for all, surely a worthwhile endeavour.

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**Part III**  
**Twenty Years of Bologna and a Decade**  
**of EHEA: What is Next? (Coordinated**  
**by Sjur Bergan and Ligia Deca)**

# Twenty Years of Bologna and a Decade of EHEA: What Is Next?



Sjur Bergan and Ligia Deca

## A Brief History of Considering the Future

Considering or raising critical questions about the future of the European Higher Education Area is hardly an original endeavor. In one sense, considerations of the future have been present since the outset. In the Bologna Declaration (Bologna Process 1999),<sup>1</sup> the Ministers of the then 29 “Bologna countries” referred to consolidating a European area of higher education by the end of the “first decade of the third millennium” by coordinating their policies to reach specified objectives and indicated their intention to meet two years later to assess progress and “the new steps to be taken”. The first new countries acceded to the Bologna Process already two years later, at the first Ministerial conference after the adoption of the Bologna Declaration (Bologna Process 2001), and in 2007 the Ministerial communiqué included a section on “Looking forward to 2010 and beyond” as well as a mandate to the BFUG to “consider further how the EHEA might develop after 2010 and to report back to the next ministerial meeting in 2009” (Bologna Process 2007a, paragraph 4).

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<sup>1</sup>All Declarations and Communiqués of the Bologna Process as well as the web sites of the successive Ministerial conferences are accessible through <http://www.ehea.info/pid34363/ministerial-declarations-and-communications.html>, accessed on November 2, 2017.

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## *Horizon 2010*

To our knowledge, the first organized consideration of the future of the European Higher Education Area beyond its initial phase<sup>2</sup> came with the 2007–2009 Bologna work program. The Flemish Community of Belgium and Luxembourg, with Noel Vercruyse and Germain Dondelinger as the prime movers, organized a seminar on “Bologna 2020: Unlocking Europe’s Potential - Contributing to a Better World”<sup>3</sup> in Ghent on May 19–20, 2008. The seminar included a broad range of presentations by well known “Bologna actors” and was based on a survey of stakeholders carried out by the Academic Cooperation Association as well as a research project coordinated by INCHER, the International Center for Higher Education Research at Kassel University (Kehm et al. 2009). The topics of the research papers that informed the seminar ranged from “European higher education in search of a new legal order” and “student mobility and staff mobility in the EHEA beyond 2010” through “market governance in higher education” and “quality, equity, and the social dimension” to “the Bologna Process toward 2020”, “the relevance of higher education”, and “European higher education in search of a new institutional order”.<sup>4</sup>

A month later—on June 24–25, 2008—the BFUG held an extraordinary meeting in Sarajevo on the same topic. The meeting was unusual in more ways than one: it was held outside of the ordinary series of BFUG meetings, it was the first BFUG meeting that focused on a single topic, with parallel sessions and not just plenaries, and it was the first held outside of the country holding the rotating BFUG Chairmanship as well as the first to be held in a non-EU country. In this sense, this extraordinary meeting anticipated the new governance arrangement adopted by Ministers in 2009, whereby the BFUG would no longer be chaired exclusively by the country holding the EU Presidency but co-chaired by this country and a non-EU country (Bologna Process 2009). The paper presented to this meeting (Bologna Process 2008) reviews all Bologna policy areas and action lines with a view to finalizing the agenda, on the safe underlying assumption that “not all the action lines will have been completed by 2010” (*op. cit.*: 1). The paper also considers further possible issues for the Bologna Process, phrased as having to provide “relevant, concrete and operational answers to issues affecting higher education in

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<sup>2</sup>The term “the end of the first decade of the third millennium” has generally been interpreted as meaning 2010.

<sup>3</sup><http://www.ehea.info/cid103198/seminar-on-bologna-beyond-2010.html>, accessed on November 2, 2017. Unfortunately, most of the documents for the seminar are no longer available through this link. The background note and provisional program are available at [https://media.ehea.info/file/20080313-14-Brdo/27/1/BFUG\(SI\)13\\_5b\\_Ghent\\_Bologna\\_Seminar\\_592271.pdf](https://media.ehea.info/file/20080313-14-Brdo/27/1/BFUG(SI)13_5b_Ghent_Bologna_Seminar_592271.pdf), accessed on November 2, 2017.

<sup>4</sup>The research papers were published as Kehm et al. (2009). The INCHER link to the publication through <https://www.uni-kassel.de/einrichtungen/en/incher/research/projects-completed-up-to-2010/the-european-higher-education-area-2010-to-2020.html> no longer seems operational (accessed on November 2, 2017).



the second decade of the 21st century” (*op. cit.*: 1) and underlines that while these challenges tend to be global, the Bologna Process needed to identify a specifically European response. The third part of the document discussed the follow-up structure.

In the paper and the discussion, we can already identify elements that have been a staple of discussions about “the future of Bologna” since then. The tension between focusing on implementation of goals already defined and developing new policies and policy areas, concerns about a “two speed Bologna Process” and the search for viable governance of a loosely organized European process that reconciles all these elements are reflected in the paper. Among the possible new policy areas identified (Bologna Process 2008: 9–14), some have been taken up in subsequent discussions, whereas other have not, and not always for good reason. Globalization, public responsibility, and cultural diversity have all been addressed to some extent. The financing of higher education was a hotly debated topic at the Bucharest Ministerial Conference before Ministers agreed on a formulation (Bologna Process 2012a) and was also the topic of a conference organized by Armenia in September 2011 as part of its co-chairmanship of the BFUG,<sup>5</sup> but has not been a topic of sustained debate. Issues like institutional diversity and demography have not been pursued, even if both have been important in at least some national contexts.

### ***A Boost at Mid-term***

The next significant debate on the future of the EHEA was, in our judgment, the one held at and leading up to the Yerevan Ministerial conference in 2015. The timing is not surprising, since the Yerevan conference was held at equidistance between the formal launching of the European Higher Education Area in 2010 and the next milestone of 2020.

At the same time, there was a fairly widespread feeling that the EHEA was losing steam and political interest. The first Ministerial conference after the formal launch of the EHEA was held in Bucharest in April 2012.<sup>6</sup> Even if the preparations were excellent and the program very interesting, and even if there was considerable discussion at the conference, in particular around the issue of financing, the number of countries that attended at political level<sup>7</sup> dropped markedly but not dramatically. The list of participants at the Ministerial conferences and hence the exact figures are

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<sup>5</sup><https://www.ehea.info/cid104241/funding-of-higher-education-international-conference.html>, accessed on November 2, 2017.

<sup>6</sup>The authors should declare an interest here: Ligia Deca was Head of the Bologna Secretariat 2010–12 and one of the main organizers of the Bucharest Ministerial Conference. Sjur Bergan was an active participant, representing the Council of Europe.

<sup>7</sup>Understood as being represented by either a Minister or a Deputy Minister/State Secretary or similar.

not readily available.<sup>8</sup> Based on the lists of participants we have been able to obtain, which include all conferences except those held in 2001 and 2005, some tendencies may be identified:

- The percentage of countries represented at political level (defined as either Ministers or Deputy Ministers or equivalent<sup>9</sup>) has remained at or, for the most part, well over two thirds, ranging from highs of 92.5% in 2003, 89.7% in 1999 and 89.1% in 2007 to lows of 72.3% in 2012 and 66.7% in 2015.
- The percentage of countries represented by either their Minister or their Deputy Minister (or equivalent) remained above 85 through 2010 and then dropped as indicated above in 2012 and 2015.
- The percentage of countries represented by their (full) Ministers has evolved somewhat differently. From 69% in Bologna in 1999, the percentage rose to around 82.5 in 2003 and 2007 and then showed two marked drops: a first, to the 61–63% range in 2009 and 2010, and then a further marked drop to 38.2% in 2012 and even further to 31.3% in 2015. It is worth noting that the level of Ministerial—or for that matter overall political—representation was not significantly different in 2010 than in 2009 in spite of the symbolic importance of the 2010 conference, which formally launched the European Higher Education Area.

Our findings are summarized in Table 1.

We would make one additional remark on participation. The lists of participants are difficult to obtain and in some cases require further work to identify the position of the Heads of Delegation. Even with a long record of direct involvement with the BFUG, we faced challenges; it seems reasonable to assume that future researchers who have not been directly involved will face even greater challenges. It would seem important that the BFUG take measures to make reliable overviews and statistics available to future researchers.

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<sup>8</sup>Only the lists for the 2003 and 2007 conferences are accessible through the EHEA web site. In addition, the list for the 1999 Bologna conference is available indirectly because all Heads of Delegation signed the Bologna Communiqué, with their titles.

<sup>9</sup>Some of the decisions on which positions to consider as “equivalent” can, of course, be open to discussion. As examples, the Prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education (Holy See) and the Swiss Federal Counselor responsible for education have been considered as equivalent to Ministers. Assistant Ministers have been considered equivalent to Deputy Minister even if, in some countries, this is not considered a political function. All countries are for the purposes of the statistics considered as a single delegation even if some countries (Belgium, Germany, the United Kingdom) have during the whole or part of the period had double delegations (*in casu*, Flemish and French Communities, later also the German community; Federal and *Land* levels; England/Wales/Northern Ireland and a separate delegation for Scotland). In cases where a single Head of Delegation was indicated in the list of participants, we considered the level of the Head. In other cases, we considered the highest ranking member—thus if at least one Minister participated, this is counted as Ministerial representation. There may well be slight errors in our judgments but the figures clearly indicate an order of magnitude.

**Table 1** Political representation at Ministerial conferences of the Bologna Process/European Higher Education Area

Conference	Member countries <sup>a</sup>	Ministers	Deputy Ministers	Political representation (%)	Ministerial representation (%)	Uncertain
Bologna 1999	29	20	6	89.7	69.0	
Praha 2001	33	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Berlin 2003	40	33	4	92.5	82.5	
Bergen 2005	45	33	7	88.9	73.3	1 <sup>b</sup>
London 2007	46	38	3	89.1	82.6	2 <sup>c</sup>
Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve 2009	46	29	11	87.0	63.0	
Budapest/Wien 2010	47	29	12	87.2	61.7	
Bucureşti 2012	47	18	16	72.3	38.3	
Yerevan 2015	48	15	17	66.7	31.3	

<sup>a</sup>Countries that attended at the conference are counted as members since the accession was generally decided in the first part of the conference, with the possible exception of 2001. We have counted all members rather than those that actually attended for two reasons: firstly, the lists available are those of registered delegates rather than actual participation. Secondly, since our purpose is to establish the degree of political commitment through the position of Heads of Delegation, non-participation is not an indication of stronger political commitment than being represented at civil servant level

<sup>b</sup>The list of participants indicates that the French delegation was headed by the Minister. However, we are reasonably sure that this was not the case. In the absence of a list of those who actually attended, we have indicated the head of this delegation as "uncertain"

<sup>c</sup>The list of participants does not indicate the position of the Heads of Delegation. We have established the positions on the basis of web searches, but in two cases we were unable to reach a firm conclusion

The feeling of loss of political relevance and also loss of a clear sense of direction was strengthened in the following period of the EHEA work program and in the preparation of the 2015 Ministerial conference in Yerevan. This was reflected in the inclusion of a session on the impact of the Bologna Process on the EHEA and beyond at the 2014 Bologna Researchers' Conference,<sup>10</sup> for which two contributions in particular considered options for the future (Harmsen 2015; Bergan 2015). After some initial challenges, the drafting of the Yerevan Communiqué (Bologna Process 2015a) turned into a discussion that was largely focused on the further development of the EHEA.<sup>11</sup> The drafters sought to give the Yerevan Communiqué a clearer focus and to identify challenges and policy measures rather than seek to provide an extensive overview of achievements and policy measures; an overview of policy measures adopted and commitments undertaken by Ministers in Yerevan will be found in the Appendix to the Communiqué. The Communiqué identifies four equally important goals as the Ministers' "collective ambition":

- Enhancing the quality and relevance of learning and teaching;
- Fostering the employability of graduates throughout their working lives in rapidly changing labor markets;
- Making our systems more inclusive;
- Implementing agreed structural reforms.

The Communiqué also makes it clear that "[t]he governance and working methods of the EHEA must develop to meet these challenges" (*ibid.*: 3).

The intensive work on the Communiqué, which involved several exchanges in the BFUG and the Board, was reflected in vivid discussions at the Yerevan Ministerial Conference itself. In our experience, which in one way or another spans all the Bologna Ministerial conferences since 1999, the discussions around the draft communiqué have never been as lively, and the number of amendments proposed and considered has never been as great, with the possible exception of the preparation of the Bologna Declaration. The evaluation report presented to the first BFUG meeting after the Yerevan Conference (Bologna Process 2015d), as well as informal feedback from delegations, also indicated they found the discussion stimulating and worthwhile.

### ***Running Out of Steam?***

The Yerevan Ministerial Conference therefore gave many participants a sense of optimism and achievement. The challenge would be to translate this renewed vigor into the new work program. In spite of the best efforts by the first BFUG Co-Chairs

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<sup>10</sup><http://fohe-bprc.forhe.ro/2014/>, accessed on November 19, 2017.

<sup>11</sup>The authors should again declare an interest: Sjur Bergan was one of the four main drafters of the Yerevan Communiqué.

after the Ministerial conference—Liechtenstein and Luxembourg—and early meetings of both the Board and the BFUG, it soon became clear to many BFUG members that it would be difficult to maintain “the spirit of Yerevan”. The vision displayed in the discussions of the Yerevan Communiqué was largely absent from those of the work program in the BFUG,<sup>12</sup> and the focus was partly on organizational details. An attempt to reduce the number of thematic working groups led to three Working Groups—on Monitoring, Fostering implementation of agreed commitments, and Policy development of new EHEA goals—being supplemented by four Advisory Groups: International cooperation, Support for the Belarus Roadmap, Dealing with non-implementation, and Diploma Supplement revision.<sup>13</sup>

There were good reasons for establishing each and every working and advisory group, and these groups provide an opportunity to involve many representatives of countries and organizations to contribute to the implementation and development of the EHEA. It is, however, not evident that this potential has been realized. There may also be confusion about the remit of some of the groups in relation to other groups, in particular, those that have to do with monitoring, implementation, and non-implementation, even if the terms of reference per se do not overlap to a great extent.

Even more, however, some of the groups have faced considerable challenges in their work. They submitted their first reports to the BFUG in Tartu on November 9–10,<sup>14</sup> shortly before the Bologna Researchers’ Conference, and several of the groups will review their reports in the light of the discussion and submit their final reports in early 2018. It is therefore too early to pass definitive judgment. Feedback to the BFUG as well as informal feedback from the groups would, however, indicate that it would be challenging to reestablish the relative optimism that marked the Yerevan Conference and the run-up to it. The BFUG has had difficult discussions on the basis of preliminary reports by the Advisory Group on non-implementation that indicate considerable divergence in how the EHEA is viewed. The Advisory Group supporting the Roadmap accompanying Belarus’ accession to the EHEA in 2015 faces difficulties in establishing the degree to which the Roadmap is being implemented, as well as in deciding what to recommend if it is not, even if some form of specific follow-up of higher education reforms in Belarus in the 2018–20 period seems likely. The Advisory Group on internationalization has struggled to devise a clear topic and format for the Bologna Policy Forum (BPF) and hence a clear rationale for holding it, even if a solution is now

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<sup>12</sup>This is admittedly a subjective judgement but one based on participation in the discussions in both fora.

<sup>13</sup>For an overview, see <http://www.ehea.info/pid35146/work-programme-2015-2018.html>, accessed on November 2, 2017.

<sup>14</sup><http://www.ehea.info/cid115326/bfug-meeting-56.html>, accessed on December 8, 2017.

being devised.<sup>15</sup> This is also due to the multiple views on what the BPF should represent, which vary according to the host country and to the predominant voices in the BFUG—a platform for policy exchange, a forum for agreeing on common cooperation goals with countries interested in the EHEA model, or a way to enhance inter-regional cooperation. Perhaps even more seriously, the Working Group on “new goals” seems to have faced serious difficulties in defining clear policy measures of interest to a majority of EHEA members and that lend themselves to the particular context of the EHEA.

## Challenges Beyond 2020

From the relative optimism of Yerevan, the EHEA is therefore again faced with serious challenges that will determine its future orientation and perhaps even whether the EHEA will have a meaningful role beyond 2020. Without pretending to be exhaustive, we will seek to examine some of the main challenges.

### *Reforming Education Systems*

The EHEA is an intergovernmental process. Its decision makers are the Ministers responsible for higher education of its 48 member states. This, of course, colors the process. Even if both international institutions and stakeholder organizations representing higher education institutions, students, staff, and employers are consultative members of the BFUG—and the European Commission even a full member—Ministers and their representatives make decisions, and they make decisions in areas that fall under their competence. Ministers are responsible for their countries’ education systems (Bergan 2005, Council of Europe 2007). They are not directly responsible for the ways in which institutions teach, researchers work, students learn, or employers recruit, even if they may have a measure of political responsibility, and even if public authorities may take measures to encourage other actors to behave in certain ways. Vukasovic et al. (present volume) make a solid argument regarding how the complexity of EHEA governance can be better understood utilizing the “three multi-s” framework (multi-level, multi-actor and multi-issue).

It is therefore perhaps not surprising that the reform of education systems, and in particular of their structures, has been the hallmark of the Bologna Process and the EHEA. The three-tier degree system, qualifications frameworks, the recognition of qualifications, and quality assurance have been key topics either since the launch of

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<sup>15</sup>The Bologna Policy Forum has been held in conjunction with every Ministerial Conference since 2009. It is intended to provide a platform for policy debate between EHEA Ministers and Ministers from other parts of the world with an interest in the development of the EHEA. In our judgement, the Forum has yet to find a convincing format, even if several options have been tested.

the Bologna Process or shortly thereafter.<sup>16</sup> The main standards, texts, and decisions of the EHEA concern structural reforms: the Overarching Framework of Qualifications of the EHEA (QF-EHEA)<sup>17</sup> as well as the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)<sup>18</sup> were adopted by the Bergen Ministerial Conference (Bologna Process 2005). The Lisbon Recognition Convention (Council of Europe/UNESCO 1997) was included already in the Sorbonne Declaration (Bologna Process 1998), followed by later calls to ratify it (e.g. Bologna Process 2005), something that has now been done by all EHEA members, except Greece.<sup>19</sup> The Diploma Supplement and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) have also been the subject of Ministerial attention and commitments (e.g. Bologna Process 2003). Structural reforms have also been the topic of several working groups, including one that reviewed the full range of structural reforms (Bologna Process 2014).

Structural reforms lend themselves to the loose organization of the EHEA, in which overall policies are decided by Ministers at European level and implemented nationally and within higher education institutions. As an example, the QF-EHEA sets the frame or “outer limits” within which countries develop their national qualifications frameworks. They have considerable leeway in doing so, as demonstrated by the fact that in some countries the first degree assumes a workload of 180 ECTS credits and in others up to 240. There are, nevertheless, limits to national discretion: no country could develop a framework in which the first degree would require, for example, 360 ECTS credits and make a credible claim to compatibility with the QF-EHEA.

The succession of stocktaking and monitoring reports<sup>20</sup> show, however, that implementation is uneven and that some countries are far from fulfilling their commitments in one or more areas of structural reforms. Other countries are even tempted to go back on some of the implemented reforms, in particular, the three cycle degree system. This diminishes the credibility of the EHEA as a framework within which national qualifications are compatible, are issued within comparable qualifications structures, are quality assured according to agreed standards and guidelines and are described in easily understandable formats. It is worth noting that

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<sup>16</sup>The Bologna Declaration refers to a two-tier degree system; the third tier, doctoral qualifications, as well as a reference to qualifications frameworks were first included in the Berlin Communiqué (Bologna Process 2003). Quality assurance was firmly established as a “Bologna topic” through the Prague Communiqué (Bologna Process 2001).

<sup>17</sup>See <http://www.ehea.info/pid34779/qualifications-frameworks-three-cycle-system-2007-2009.html>, accessed on November 2, 2017.

<sup>18</sup>The ESG were revised by Ministers in Yerevan (Bologna Process 2015a). The current version will be found at [https://media.ehea.info/file/2015\\_Yerevan/72/7/European\\_Standards\\_and\\_Guidelines\\_for\\_Quality\\_Assurance\\_in\\_the\\_EHEA\\_2015\\_MC\\_613727.pdf](https://media.ehea.info/file/2015_Yerevan/72/7/European_Standards_and_Guidelines_for_Quality_Assurance_in_the_EHEA_2015_MC_613727.pdf), accessed on November 2, 2017.

<sup>19</sup>An updated overview of signatures and ratifications will be found at <http://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/165/signatures>, accessed on November 2, 2017.

<sup>20</sup>For an overview, see <http://www.ehea.info/pid34367/implementation-and-national-reports.html>, accessed on November 2, 2017.

the seemingly straightforward commitment of issuing the Diploma Supplement automatically, free of charge and in a widely spoken language by 2005, undertaken in Berlin (Bologna Process 2003) was only partly fulfilled 10 years later (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2015: 74–76).

The relative lack of implementation of some structural reforms led to the setting-up of the Advisory Group on non-implementation in the 2015–18 EHEA work program, as discussed by Strand Viðarsdóttir in this volume. As non-implementation has to do with the broader discussion of the governance of the EHEA, it will be considered below. Dang (present volume) offers an interesting comparison of challenges of implementation in the contexts of the EHEA and the ASEAN Common Space for Higher Education and introduces the concept of “façade conformity”.

### *Teaching and Learning*

Teaching and learning are, together with research, at the core of higher education, and even more so in the EHEA which has not focused extensively on research policy beyond issues related to doctoral education. At the same time, teaching and learning are not primarily Ministry activities. Ministries may learn, of course, but teaching and learning are done by teachers and students at higher education institutions, albeit within an overall framework established by public authorities.

The culture and style of teaching vary very considerably between countries, institutions, and even individual teachers and students throughout the EHEA. Some see teaching as a one-way communication—or perhaps rather transmission—from teachers to students, whereas others emphasize interaction. Auditorium lectures are often supplemented by seminar groups, discussion groups, tutoring, or other forms of more interactive teaching, but sometimes one-way communication from teachers to students is predominant. The concept of student centered learning is by now firmly established in the EHEA starting with the Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué (Bologna Process 2009: 3) and has been the subject of studies European Students’ Union (2015) and projects (T4SCL<sup>21</sup> and EFFECT<sup>22</sup>). Student centered learning emphasizes, among other things, innovative teaching methods, digital technologies, and pedagogical innovation. In many institutions, these goals are still aspirational at best. Nevertheless, the fact that student centered learning is

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<sup>21</sup><https://www.esu-online.org/?project=time-student-centred-learning>, accessed on November 2, 2017.

<sup>22</sup><https://www.esu-online.org/?project=european-forum-enhanced-collaboration-teaching-effect>, accessed on November 2, 2017.



now among the topics warranting a separate sub-site within the EHEA website<sup>23</sup> gives hope that teaching and learning will evolve considerably throughout the EHEA.

Self-study and the ability to search and assess information are also an important part of higher education learning. Classical libraries, which incidentally suffer from the high price of many academic publications and journals at a time when higher education institutions feel the impact of economic constraints, are supplemented by other sources of information, notably web-based (and often open source). With the almost explosive increase in the information available, developing the ability to identify and assess information is becoming even more critical.

One of the main challenges in teaching and learning will be to blend and make good use of the many different methods and modes of delivery that are available now and will continue to develop over the coming years. It is our assertion that no single mode will be adequate to provide quality teaching and learning. Rather, any teaching method, to be effective, will need to be used in combination with other methods. Digitalized and web based education is set to change teaching and learning in ways we can still not foresee, but it is our assertion that they will not be able to replace face to face teaching and learning in all circumstances and for all purposes. MOOCs will remain but they are unlikely to reign uncontested. Universities will need to change profoundly to benefit from new technologies and methods as well as to avoid their pitfalls, but if they do, the announcement of the “death of the university” will not only have been premature but a false alarm. On the contrary, we believe that one of the hallmarks of high quality institutions in the future will be their ability to use the full range of teaching and learning methods, from auditorium lectures through face to face interaction between teachers and students as well as among students to digital learning and teaching.

It would make sense for the European Higher Education Area to make teaching and learning the focus of its further development, as outlined in the final reports of the 2nd edition of the Bologna Process Researchers’ Conference.<sup>24</sup>

### ***Technical Reforms or Commitment to Fundamental Values?***

Structural reforms have been the most successful policy area of the EHEA. Even if implementation is uneven, the EHEA has developed standards for qualifications frameworks and quality assurance, established a European Quality Assurance Register for higher education (EQAR),<sup>25</sup> adopted the principle of a three-tier degree

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<sup>23</sup>See <http://www.ehea.info/pid34437/student-centred-learning.html>, accessed on November 2, 2017.

<sup>24</sup>[https://media.ehea.info/file/2015\\_Yerevan/73/5/06052015\\_FOHE-BPRC2\\_Final\\_report\\_613735.pdf](https://media.ehea.info/file/2015_Yerevan/73/5/06052015_FOHE-BPRC2_Final_report_613735.pdf), page 8, accessed on November 2, 2017.

<sup>25</sup><https://www.eqar.eu/>, accessed on November 2, 2017.

system, incorporated the Lisbon Recognition Convention as the basis for the recognition of qualifications, and made good use of the Diploma Supplement and the ECTS as transparency instruments, even to the extent of establishing an Advisory Group to review the former and adopting the revised ECTS User's Guide as an official EHEA document (Bologna Process 2015a: 4).

In spite of the uneven implementation of structural reforms throughout the EHEA, we would therefore argue that the EHEA has been successful in devising and reasonably successful in implementing reforms of education systems. We would equally argue that Ministers and the BFUG have been less good in outlining and explaining the main principles behind these reforms as well as the values on which the EHEA builds.

A consideration of values has certainly not been absent from the EHEA. The Bologna Declaration refers to the "importance of education and educational co-operation in the development and strengthening of stable, peaceful and democratic societies" (Bologna Process 1999: 1) as well as "the fundamental principles laid down in the Bologna Magna Charta Universitatum of 1988" (*ibid.*: 2). The latest communiqué refers to "public responsibility for higher education, academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and commitment to integrity" (Bologna Process 2015a: 1) and includes, as we have seen, making education systems more inclusive among the four priorities defined for the 2015–18 work program. In this context, Ministers state: "We will enhance the social dimension of higher education, improve gender balance and widen opportunities for access and completion, including international mobility, for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. We will provide mobility opportunities for students and staff from conflict areas, while working to make it possible for them to return home once conditions allow" (*ibid.*: 2–3). The Roadmap accompanying Belarus' accession to the EHEA, also adopted by Ministers in Yerevan, includes the fundamental values of the EHEA as one of the areas in which Belarus needs to demonstrate adherence to adopted EHEA principles and policies, with reference to the Yerevan Communiqué, the Magna Charta Universitatum,<sup>26</sup> and Council of Europe recommendation Rec/CM(2012)7 on the public responsibility for academic freedom and institutional autonomy<sup>27</sup> (Bologna Process 2015b: 2–3).

Nevertheless, it seems fair to say that the fundamental values on which the EHEA builds—in particular academic freedom, institutional autonomy, student participation in higher education governance, and public responsibility for higher education (Bologna Process 2004)—have not received the attention they would deserve in the BFUG or in public EHEA statements and policies. The reasons for this are of course not stated, but it seems safe to surmise that at least two factors have played a considerable role.

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<sup>26</sup>Available at <http://www.magna-charta.org/magna-charta-universitatum>, accessed on November 2, 2017.

<sup>27</sup>Available at [https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result\\_details.aspx?ObjectId=09000016805ca6f8](https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectId=09000016805ca6f8), accessed on November 2, 2017.

The EHEA is a political process with regular milestones in the form of Ministerial conferences held every two or three years. Ministers reasonably wish to demonstrate commitment to clear goals as well as progress in achieving these goals. Qualifications frameworks and quality assurance standards lend themselves to such a schedule: they can be adopted by Ministers and progress in implementation can be measured. Ministers can “tick the box” as far as their countries are concerned when the stated goals have been met. The fundamental values are less easily measured and their implementation perhaps more prone to fluctuate with shifting governments and political circumstances. In this case, the EHEA may be seen as giving importance to what can be measured, rather than measuring everything that is important—but this statement should of course not be taken to imply that structural reforms are unimportant.

More importantly, the fundamental values are closely linked to the overall situation of democracy and human rights in EHEA countries, and the EHEA is not an area of democratic perfection. Several members have issues with democracy and human rights. Not only are these highly sensitive issues where few countries would admit to fundamental problems but they are generally considered as pertaining to the domain of Ministries of Foreign Affairs or even Heads of State or Government. Facing challenges in implementing one’s national qualifications framework is one thing, and the responsibility lies squarely with the public authority responsible for education. Facing challenges in implementing democracy and human rights is quite another story, and it is not one that primarily falls within the remit of the Minister of Education. Formally, regulations concerning student participation in higher education governance or institutional autonomy do, but no Minister of Education can promote democratic governance of universities if democratic governance faces serious challenges overall in the country.

It is politically difficult for governments to advocate measures against other governments for breach of fundamental EHEA principles. Such measures are likely to be taken only in extreme cases. An important consideration is also whether one is more effective in assisting those who work for higher education reform and/or democracy by engaging with a country or by keeping it out of the EHEA. Most would agree that at some point the balance between engagement and a clear public statement of fundamental principles will tip but the point is not easy to identify, and agreement on where it may be located has proved elusive.

The partial exception has been Belarus, where an interest in accession was rejected twice for political reasons. In the run-up to the Bergen conference in 2005, it was communicated unofficially to Belarus that a formal accession application was very likely to be rejected,<sup>28</sup> and the authorities chose not to apply. In the run-up to the Bucharest conference, Belarus did submit a formal application that was given due consideration by the BFUG. However, the arrests of faculty members and students during the widespread protests against the presidential election in

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<sup>28</sup>By the nature of things, documentation of this is difficult to produce, but one of us (Sjur Bergan) was involved in the discussions.

December 2010, which was widely perceived as unfair,<sup>29</sup> made it impossible for the BFUG to recommend to Ministers that they welcome Belarus as an EHEA member (Bologna Process 2012b: 24–25). When Belarus was admitted in 2015, these discussions were part of the reason why the accession was accompanied by a Roadmap (Bologna Process 2012b), in addition to the fact that Belarus was the first country to accede after the formal establishment of the EHEA in 2010.

Recently, the BFUG has again placed academic freedom and institutional autonomy on its agenda, through a thematic debate at its meeting in Bratislava in December 2016 (Bergan et al. 2016). The purpose of the discussion was to discern issues of principles and to arrive at a more nuanced view of academic freedom and institutional autonomy than the one that simply views them in terms of the legal relationship between public authorities (often referred to as “the State”) and the academic community. Even though several EHEA countries can reasonably be considered to be in breach of one or more fundamental principles, the debate did not aim to identify specific cases, and EHEA members have been reluctant to do so. In the immediate aftermath of the failed coup in Turkey in July 2015, when members of the academic community were barred from traveling abroad on business and deans at all Turkish universities were temporarily suspended, several EHEA members informally questioned Turkey’s status within the EHEA.<sup>30</sup> However, these countries later softened their stance, partly because some of the measures were eased—even if many members of the academic community were still hit by measures—and partly because most European countries found it more fruitful to work within Turkey to try to help nudge developments in the direction of greater democracy or at least avoiding the worst excesses rather than seek to isolate the country. Higher education policy was therefore aligned with foreign policy, despite being in a situation similar to the Belarus accession application in 2012.

The BFUG has so far not addressed the changes to the Hungarian higher education law that put the viability of the Central European University as a Budapest-based institution in doubt. It will be interesting to see how the BFUG and then Ministers would handle this sensitive issue if the crisis persists. Matei and Iwinska (present volume) introduce the notion that institutional autonomy has gained a European conceptual understanding, while academic freedom benefited from less attention in the EHEA discussions. The Hungarian situation is presented as a clear example of how these two basic EHEA values—institutional autonomy and academic freedom—are dependent on each other, but should not be considered as intrinsically linked.

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<sup>29</sup>See for example the joint statement by the Foreign Ministers of the Czech Republic, Germany, Poland, and Sweden published in the *New York Times* on December 23, 2010, available at [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/24/opinion/24iht-edbildt24.html?\\_r=1&scp=2&sq=Carl%20Bildt&st=cse](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/24/opinion/24iht-edbildt24.html?_r=1&scp=2&sq=Carl%20Bildt&st=cse), accessed on November 2, 2017.

<sup>30</sup>Personal communications that for obvious reasons will remain anonymous. Some higher education NGOs, including the European Students’ Union and the European University Association, did issue critical statements.

More broadly, as discussed by Tony Gallagher in this volume, the civic and democratic role of higher education could and should be one of the main challenges of the EHEA. Higher education has an important role in developing the democratic culture without which democratic laws and democratic institutions will not function.<sup>31</sup>

### *Commitments and Governance*

The difficulties governments face in criticizing other governments over issues with fundamental values have also been found in other and a priori less controversial policy areas. Through the Bologna Declaration and successive Ministerial communiqués, EHEA members have committed to principles and policies that need to be implemented in each country. The stocktaking and monitoring reports show that successful implementation is less than universal, which leads to the question of how to address non-implementation.

This is not a new issue in the Bologna Process. As 2010 and the formal establishment of the EHEA approached, there was discussion of how the transition from the Bologna Process to the EHEA could best be organized and of whether any member of the Bologna Process would automatically become a member of the EHEA, regardless of the country's record in implementing key policies and priorities. The option of establishing the EHEA through an international convention to which countries would accede and that would outline their obligations as well as mechanisms for addressing non-implementation was raised and discarded in the run-up to the Bergen conference in 2005.<sup>32</sup> The discussions in the BFUG in the mid- to late 2000's are well summarized in an excerpt from the minutes of the BFUG meeting in October 2006:

There was a need to consider how the transition from the Bologna Process to the European Higher Education Area could best be made. This would include deciding how to react if stocktaking for 2010 showed that a number of countries had yet to implement or achieve key goals of the Process. Options could range from deciding that all countries of the Bologna Process would automatically become members of the EHEA; deciding that all countries would become members but that assistance would be offered to those that had not yet achieved all the key goals; or deciding that only those who had achieved the key goals could become members of the EHEA in the first instance. It would be important to consider the range of possible options prior to 2010.

There was widespread recognition that current informal, flexible approach had served the Process very well. (Bologna Process 2006: 11).

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<sup>31</sup>Several volumes in the Council of Europe Higher Education Series explore the democratic mission of higher education. See e.g. Klemenčič et al. (2015), Bergan et al. (2015), Bergan et al. (2014), and Bergan (2011).

<sup>32</sup>Personal recollection (Sjur Bergan).

The discussion on how to address non-implementation has always been difficult, and it has never completely disappeared, but it resurfaced more explicitly through the Yerevan Communiqué. Ministers ask the BFUG “to review and simplify its governance and working methods, to involve higher education practitioners in its work programme” and at the same time “to submit proposals for addressing the issue of non-implementation of key commitments in time for our next meeting” (Bologna Process 2015a: 3).

Some researchers also pointed to a more legally binding format for the EHEA commitments as a possible way to enhance accountability and bring the Bologna Process closer to EU instruments (see Garben 2011).

The Yerevan Communiqué thus links governance and non-implementation. The view we take of whether and how non-implementation need to be addressed is linked to how the EHEA is viewed. In one view (see e.g. Harmsen 2015), the EHEA is essentially an area of peer learning, where countries develop good practice by learning from each other but where it is either not desirable or not possible—or neither desirable nor possible—to take measures to address cases where countries do not implement commitments. Another view (see e.g. Bergan 2015) recognizes the importance of peer learning in developing the EHEA but emphasizes that to be credible as an area in which qualifications are broadly and automatically recognized based on qualification frameworks and standards for quality assurance as well as commitment to common fundamental values, the EHEA needs a mechanism for addressing serious cases of non-compliance.

To meet the Ministers’ request, the BFUG appointed an Advisory Group on non-implementation in the 2015–18 work program, co-chaired by Iceland and Liechtenstein. Its remit is to “submit proposals for addressing the issue of non-implementation and incorrect implementation of key commitments (how to implement them best by respecting and reflecting the EHEA instruments and the EHEA culture)” (Bologna Process 2015c: 1). Preliminary reports from this Advisory Group were the subject of difficult discussions in the BFUG in December 2016 and May 2017 when the group put forward proposals for a system of cyclic reviews of key commitments, in the first instance linked to structural reforms. Under this model, the BFUG Co-Chairs would initiate dialogue with and offer assistance to EHEA members for which the previous monitoring report would demonstrate serious concerns about implementation. Countries themselves could also request advice and assistance. On both occasions, a clear majority of delegations that took the floor spoke in favor of the proposal by the Advisory Group, but a minority of delegations were outspoken proponents of the view that the EHEA should be an area of peer learning without any “constraints” on members. The further discussions at the BFUG meetings in Tartu in November 2017 and Sofia in February 2018 confirmed this orientation, and the Advisory Group has now submitted a revised proposal that moves quite far in the direction of countries requesting peer learning if they themselves feel they have issues with implementation. There is no longer a reference to the possibility of the BFUG Co-Chairs or a BFUG-appointed body approaching countries to suggest that in view of their score in the implementation report, they may benefit from cooperation in implementing

specific commitments. In our view, these developments weaken the view that that while membership of the EHEA is voluntary, implementing the commitments members undertake on joining is not. Reference is again made to Strand Viðarsdóttir's article in this volume.

At the time of writing, the debate on non-implementation overshadows other issues of governance. There is nevertheless concern that BFUG delegations carry insufficient political weight in their own Ministries and are therefore not always able to speak on behalf of their authorities. This is clearly not the case of all delegations, but the concern is serious enough to be raised from time to time, at least informally. There has been no substantial discussion of voting arrangements, and one application from an NGO for observer status was turned down. Despite this situation, a substantial change in the governance structures seems unlikely in the near future, as it would have to be agreed by the same delegations that are considered to have less political weight than the process would need.

A change in Secretariat arrangements also seems unlikely. At present, the country hosting the upcoming Ministerial conference also provides the Bologna Secretariat. The Secretariats have typically been staffed by nationals of the same country<sup>33</sup> and have operated under the laws of this country. France, while providing the Secretariat under French law and within French structures for the 2015–18 period, has associated some non-French experts with the Secretariat, as well as one full-time staff member provided by Germany. Many BFUG members have expressed a desire for a more international Secretariat with a longer mandate than from one Ministerial conference until the next. This model has often been labeled a “permanent Secretariat”. The practical, financial, and legal issues<sup>34</sup> involved in establishing a Secretariat that would de facto be a new international NGO serving an intergovernmental process are, however, so complex that the BFUG decided not to pursue this option further, at least in the current period (Bologna Process 2017: 7–8). Secretariat arrangements may become a part of the discussion on the EHEA beyond 2020 leading up to the 2020 Ministerial conference, but the challenges in identifying alternative arrangements will remain formidable, especially in light of the previous attempt to establish a more permanent Secretariat structure (put forward by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE 2009); it should be noted that the latter did not have the support of the Council of Europe Secretariat or the Council's (then) Steering Committee on Higher Education and Research).

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<sup>33</sup>With the exception of the period 2007–10, when Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands were joint hosts of the Louvain-la-Neuve conference and provided a joint Secretariat, which continued to operate through the 2010 Ministerial conference in Budapest and Wien, reinforced by one Austrian and one Hungarian staff member.

<sup>34</sup>For a somewhat more detailed consideration, see Bergan 2015: 746–748.

## ***Two Speeds or Development Adapted to Local Circumstances?***

The challenges in implementing policies and commitments undertaken through the Bologna Declaration and communiqués could be read as indicating an uneven commitment to the EHEA. To an extent, this is undoubtedly true, and even within countries, different governments have demonstrated different levels of enthusiasm in implementing “Bologna reforms”. One example among several is Georgia which was well engaged in reforms up until around 2007 or 2008. A period of relative inactivity both in the BFUG and in internal reforms then followed, but Georgia has again been an active contributor to the BFUG and also launched national reforms since around 2013.

Uneven implementation is not solely a question of a north/south or east/west divide or a divide between countries that joined the Bologna Process in the early years and those that joined later and therefore had less time to implement the reforms since the expectation was—at least officially—that all EHEA members would have met the same goals by 2010.

At the same time, not only have countries joined the EHEA at different times, they have also had different starting points when doing so. The Bologna Process was launched less than 10 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, a symbolic but very real moment that more broadly indicates regime change in many European countries. As a result of these changes, the membership of the Council of Europe doubled between 1989 and today, the Bologna Declaration was signed by Ministers from 29 countries, including several that had been part of the Warsaw Pact and three that had even been part of the Soviet Union. Academic mobility was extended to all parts of Europe on a much larger scale and with fewer restrictions that had previously been imaginable.

Even if the EHEA looks toward the future in setting goals for common principles and policies, national education systems are also inheritors of the past. Europe can be seen as a unique balance of what we have in common and what is specific to individual countries, cultures, or regions. Six EHEA members shared the education system and traditions of former Yugoslavia until the early 1990s. Even if Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia, Slovenia and “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” have developed their education systems at different speeds and partly in different directions, and even if the break-up of former Yugoslavia had a different impact on each of the countries, they share a recent past that in some aspects sets them apart from the experience of other EHEA members. The same is true for countries that were a part of the former Soviet Union, where the differences in the development trajectories after independence are greater but a shared past nevertheless colors the present to some extent.

The weight of the past is of course not specific to countries that have undergone dramatic upheavals over the past generation. To some extent, all EHEA members are marked by their past. Some differences that come to mind include centralized



versus decentralized systems, the differences between larger and smaller systems, and the degree to which systems differentiate between different kinds and profiles of higher education institutions (Deca 2016). Armağan Erdoğan describes developments and prospects in the case of Turkey (Erdoğan 2015).

One of the challenges in the further development of the EHEA will therefore be to reconcile the need to ensure implementation of common principles and goals with the need to recognize that EHEA members have different traditions as well as recent pasts. Different traditions may offer an explanation of why certain reforms are particularly challenging or why they may take a long time to implement, but they should not provide reasons why EHEA would not see a need to launch the reforms they have committed to when joining the Bologna Process.

### *An EHEA Gazing Inward or Looking Out?*

The EHEA has been followed with great interest in other parts of the world. Examples include academic publishing in the United States (Adelman 2009; Gaston 2010), as well as policy initiatives in Asia (Dang 2015 and in the present volume). The development of qualifications frameworks was not a European invention, with Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa as pioneers, but the current interest in qualifications framework would most likely not have come about without the decision by EHEA Ministers to adopt an overarching framework and to develop national frameworks compatible with the QF-EHEA. To our knowledge, the notion of a regional qualifications framework was pioneered by the EHEA. Later, the European Training Foundation has played an important role in promoting the development of qualifications frameworks in different parts of the world and for all levels and strands of education.

In spite of the strong interest in the EHEA from countries outside of Europe, and in spite of the equally strong interest among many EHEA members in developing global or at least inter-regional dialogue and cooperation on higher education reform, attempts to do so in the framework of the EHEA have so far been unsuccessful. The EHEA interest was manifested through a report on the “Bologna Process in a global setting” as early as 2007 (Zgaga 2007), as well as the adoption of a “global dimension” strategy (Bologna Process 2007b).

The first Bologna Policy Forum was held in 2009, a forum for exchange and debate at political level between EHEA Ministers and Ministers from selected countries in other parts of the world. Since then, the Policy Forum has been held in conjunction with every Ministerial conference, but it has proven difficult to move beyond relatively superficial discussions or to maintain political interest. Different formats have been tried, ranging from plenary debates to thematic discussion groups within the Forum, and with targets ranging from all regions of the world to a modified format with a stronger regional focus in 2015.

The reasons for this lack of success have not been fully explored, but it seems reasonable to assume that they may have to do with the format of the Forum as well as the lack of follow up between high level meetings with a political focus. Including a half day or one day session with non-EHEA ministers in the regular EHEA Ministerial meetings is unsatisfactory to the non-EHEA Ministers who would need to travel long distances for a short conference. At the same time, BFUG delegations have expressed strong and consistent concerns that their Ministers would not be prepared to add a day and a half or two days to the Ministerial conference. There has also so far been no effective follow-up work under the auspices of the BFUG in the periods between Ministerial conferences and Bologna Policy Forum, so that there have been no Policy Forum dialogues with regions outside of Europe on EHEA topics like structural reforms, the social dimension of higher education, or fundamental values like academic freedom and institutional autonomy. This may at least in part be due to the fact that there is no specific budget for the EHEA beyond what each member invests in its own participation and activities and the host country invests in the Secretariat. One consequence of this is also that non-EHEA countries play a very limited role in preparing the Bologna Policy Fora and could understandably see them as an invitation to dialogue with agendas set entirely by the EHEA.

The fact that the specific EHEA attempts to establish a forum for cooperation have largely failed does not mean there is little cooperation between European actors and public authorities and higher education communities outside of Europe. The European Commission, NGOs like the International Association of Universities, the European University Association, and the European Students' Union as well as individual countries are engaged in extensive cooperation and much of it focuses on policy areas inspired by the EHEA. A particularly interesting example is the Asia—Europe cooperation, as described by Dang (2015, 2017). This cooperation includes regular meetings of higher education leaders as well as of Ministers, and attendance at the Ministerial meetings tends to surpass political level participation at the Bologna Policy Fora. A comparative study of the involvement of relatively peripheral countries in the EHEA and the ASEAN Common Space for Higher Education will be found in QueAnh Dang's contribution to the present volume.

Challenges in the further development of the EHEA include finding an attractive format for organized cooperation between the EHEA and other parts of the world, through the BFUG and not only through individual actors, as well as defining attractive priorities for that cooperation. However, the challenges also relate to the internal development of the EHEA: will the EHEA develop in ways that will make it credible as a higher education area and not just as an area of more or less organized peer learning? An EHEA that were only to gaze inward would be neither an attractive cooperation partner nor a model for emulation, but neither would an EHEA that were unable to identify credible goals, ensure credible implementation, or develop credible governance.

## ***Professional Higher Education***

Even if preparation for the labor market is an important purpose of higher education in all 48 EHEA members, their traditions vary greatly. In particular, the extent to which the traditional university is supplemented by institutions and programs providing shorter and more specifically employment oriented qualifications varies considerably. The proposed QF-EHEA as submitted to the Ministers in Bergen in 2005 included provision for short cycle qualifications within the first cycle. This was, however, rejected by the Ministers, who could accept this only as an option within national frameworks, but not as a feature of the QF-EHEA (Bologna Process 2005: 2). In part, Ministers found it difficult to accept that the QF-EHEA might include a qualification they did not intend to develop in their own country. In part, some Ministers seem to have found it difficult to accept short cycle qualifications as higher education. In the debate, one Minister, who shall remain unidentified, even maintained that nothing short of three years could be considered higher education.<sup>35</sup>

## **Demographics**

The influence of demographic developments on the number of students and, more broadly, on the development of higher education, has been curiously absent from discussion on the development of the EHEA. Roderick Floud's statement to the London Ministerial Conference to the effect that "I did not hear a single reference in either the plenary sessions or in the panel discussions, to demography, either of our populations in general or in relation to higher education staff and students. Yet the challenges here for us are immense" (Bologna Process 2007c: 9) remains valid today.

In the present volume, Robert Santa illustrates the importance of demographic developments to higher education through a case study of Poland, Russia, and Romania.

## **The EHEA: A Framework Fit for Purpose?**

The EHEA was devised to address a set of issues of concern to European Ministers in the late 1990s. The challenges had to do with the extent to which European higher education was seen as credible and attractive to European actors like students, employers and policymakers as well as to actors—not least students—from other parts of the world. They also had to do with the extent to which students in Europe completed their studies with success and within reasonable time as well as the extent to which European study programs were seen as "fit for purpose".

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<sup>35</sup>Personal recollection.

To a large extent, the response to the challenge lay in reforming education structures and systems. But the originality of the Bologna Process was perhaps less to be found in the topics chosen than in the proposition that the challenges could be met only through European cooperation, as well as in the proposition that an intergovernmental process needed to include higher education institutions, students, faculty, international institutions and other stakeholders to be successful.

In our view, the EHEA *has* been successful, in spite of the criticism contained in these pages. Its success is demonstrated by the fact that it is exceedingly difficult to imagine what higher education in Europe would have been like today had there *not* been a broad, if fairly loosely organized, cooperation that included not only public authorities but also higher education stakeholders and civil society, and had that process not been flexible enough to admit new members. The fact that it has grown from the original 29 countries to the 48 EHEA members of today is also a witness to its success. The EHEA is not a forum from which many European countries feel they can afford to remain aloof.

The EHEA was a structure and a cooperation fit for the challenges facing Education Ministers and the higher education community some 20 years ago. An important part of the challenge to “the future of Bologna” is to identify challenges that are of political importance and that can be addressed within the loose and extensive structure that is the EHEA. Or failing that, to redefine those structures so that a different EHEA can meet new challenges.

The rather optimistic assertion in the BFUG discussion paper on “Bologna 2020” to the effect that “it is, therefore, necessary that the Bologna Process should continue after 2010 so that its implementation can be finalized” (Bologna Process 2008: 3) is therefore still valid if one substitutes 2010 for 2020. We fear it will be valid even longer.

That, however, is positive. The assertion raises the question of whether the implementation of the Bologna Process can be meaningfully “finalized”. It may be akin to our private definition of lifelong learning as the kind of learning about which nobody can speak from the point of view of a fully accomplished learner since by definition a fully accomplished lifelong learner is no longer alive.

The European Higher Education Area faces formidable challenges in staying relevant and in improving the daily lives of students and staff. It is our belief that in spite of the difficulties, these challenges can be met provided there is both political and practical will to do so, and that includes the will and ability to finance the endeavor.

A European Higher Education Area that considered itself “fully implemented”, on the other hand, would not only be increasingly irrelevant. It would be dead.

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# Multi-level, Multi-actor and Multi-issue Dimensions of Governance of the European Higher Education Area, and Beyond



Martina Vukasovic, Jens Jungblut, Meng-Hsuan Chou, Mari Elken and Pauline Ravinet

## Introduction

With massification and increasing focus on knowledge as the foundation for inclusive and sustainable social, cultural, political as well as economic development, higher education has become more salient and politicized (Busemeyer et al. 2013; Gornitzka and Maassen 2014; Jungblut 2015). In this chapter, we employ a novel framework (Chou et al. 2017) that provides the analytical precision required to dissect and examine these developments and unpack their implications for the future development of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

To start with, the centrality of knowledge implies that decisions (planned as well as those already taken) concerning higher education are more connected to policy developments in many other sectors, such as research, welfare, environment,

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employment, trade, migration, or security. This means that, in higher education policy processes, *multiple issues* concerning a variety of sectors need to be considered, including horizontal tensions about jurisdiction and ownership. Coupled with this development are also upward and downward shifts in governance arrangements that characterize contemporary public policy making (Maassen 2003). The former concerns the institutionalization of governance arenas beyond the national level, e.g. through the Bologna Process, EU initiatives in higher education or similar macro-regional integration efforts in South-East Asia, Latin America, or sub-Saharan Africa (Chou and Ravinet 2015, 2017; Maassen and Olsen 2007). The latter reflects the wave of reforms increasing the formal autonomy of higher education institutions (HEIs), which are often coupled with changes in internal governance arrangements strengthening central leadership and administration (Christensen 2011; Maassen et al. 2017). The outcome is that governance takes place across *multiple levels*, potentially leading to vertical tensions concerning the distribution of authority. The third relevant development is the increasing participation and influence of *multiple actors* in higher education governance. This concerns a variety of non-state actors, such as universities, student and staff unions, business associations and other stakeholder organizations, as well as state actors coming from different ministries or agencies. While these actors may focus on similar issues, they are likely to have different policy preferences that may be difficult to reconcile (Vukasovic 2017). Moreover, they will also differ with regard to access as well as organizational and political capacity to influence decision-making, implying that tensions with regards to power and preferences are also present in higher education governance.

Each of these developments—*multi-issue*, *multi-level* and *multi-actor*—has been the focus of much research, albeit often in isolation from each other. In this chapter, we employ a novel conceptual framework for analysing these three “multi-s” and their interactions, and we demonstrate how such a framework enables a more nuanced analysis of policy dynamics in European higher education, by focusing on three interrelated topics: (1) political salience of the Bologna Process, (2) the role and impact of European stakeholder organizations and their members across governance levels, and (3) relationship between European and regional policy coordination and convergence. These three examples provide a basis for the reflections on possible future developments of the Bologna Process and the analytical toolbox that could be employed to study these developments.

## Conceptualizing the Three “Multi-S”

Of the three “multi-s” highlighted here, most of the research in higher education, as well as more generally in social sciences, has focused on the multi-level aspect. In this respect, the concept of multi-level governance (MLG) has become a taken-for-granted perspective to describe policy coordination across different governance levels, in particular in the European context. According to one of the most cited contributions on MLG—“Unravelling the Central State, but How” by

Hooghe and Marks (2003)—two distinct types of multi-level governance can be identified: one in which different levels of authority are neatly nested within each other and which is designed to comprise an entire fixed system of governance (Type I, e.g. typical federalist structure), and the other in which the focus is on task jurisdictions which may change should the need arise and where jurisdictions may overlap (Type II). While often used, the challenge with this dichotomous categorization is that multiple Type II governance arrangements are in place for achieving an overarching common objective of European Higher Education and Research Areas, and the typology does not allow for exploring the implications of such multiplicity. For example, efforts to construct a common area of knowledge in Europe (see “Europe of Knowledge” in Chou and Gornitzka 2014) encompass developments in the higher education policy sector (i.e. EHEA), in the research policy sector (European Research Area, ERA), and in the innovation policy sector (now the Innovation Union, which also incorporates the ERA). What is notable about these developments is that each set of sectoral governance arrangements follows a distinct method of coordination and upholds their individual sectoral rationales, even though policy reforms have been introduced to promote coherent coordination across these sectors. Thus, it is necessary to look beyond this typology.

The popularity of MLG as a concept also means that it has been a subject to concept stretching. Trying to redress this issue, Piattoni (2010) focused on its conceptual, empirical, and normative aspects and proposed three MLG dimensions: (1) domestic-international, reflecting the emergence of governance layers beyond the nation state, (2) centre-periphery concerning the devolution of authority to local actors and key organizations (in this case higher education institutions), and (3) state-society referring to the involvement of both state and non-state actors. This means that the involvement of multiple actors is, according to Piattoni, just one dimension of MLG. This is, in our view, problematic because the reference to “levels” effectively conflates at least two distinct developments: distribution of authority across governance levels which we refer to as the *multi-level* aspect, as well as participation and influence of both state and non-state actors—which we term the *multi-actor* aspect. These two aspects need to be conceptually distinct in order to allow for both nuance and robustness in analysis.

However, policy-making in higher education, regardless of levels or actors, does not concern higher education only. The fact that higher education is “exported” as a policy solution to other sectors, and that issues from these sectors are sometimes “imported” into the higher education sector as policy problems to be solved (e.g. finding a solution for global warming and society’s energy needs) implies significant coordination challenges (Braun 2008; Chou and Gornitzka 2014). This in particular concerns what can be termed *multi-issue* aspects of governance, which can be illustrated through the following questions: (1) which issues should be dealt with exclusively within the higher education sector?, (2) in which issues should actors from other sectors be involved?, and (3) which issues are better addressed in another sector? These questions are not a purely technical matter but are also underlined by differences in perceived importance between sectors (e.g. finance

usually trumps education), as well as a reconciliation of policy preferences between different actors. It is thus essential to also make explicit the multi-issue feature in addition to the two other “multi-s”—multi-level and multi-actor—because this characteristic often masks the hidden strategies that policy actors apply to achieve their sectoral goals and objectives in another policy domain (Chou 2012).

To sum up, we posit three conceptually distinct characteristics of higher education governance (see also Chou et al. 2017) that also have implications for the analyses of dynamics within the EHEA:

1. Multi-level characteristic—the focus is on the processes leading to distribution or concentration of authority at different governance levels and the subsequent consequences of these processes. The key is to identify governance levels based on the existence of institutionalized governing structures, regardless of their formal regulative competence. Apart from the “usual suspect”—the national level—which in some cases actually needs to be split into two levels (federal and state), in the European context there are also institutionalized governing structures at the European level, e.g. the Bologna Follow Up Group (BFUG), which has a broader membership than only members of the EU, or the Culture and Education Committee of the European Parliament. Moreover, there are regional initiatives between different countries (i.e. the Nordics or Benelux) that in some policy areas have developed distinct regional approaches. The multi-level aspect also recognizes that there may be differences in how authority is distributed across levels and does not consider distribution of authority as a zero-sum game—e.g. most authority remains at the national level, but more and more decisions are taken at other levels as well.
2. Multi-actor characteristic—it is necessary to acknowledge both the heterogeneity of the “state” and its many composite institutions, as well as the involvement of non-state actors (e.g. stakeholder organizations, businesses, consumers) in a policy domain. Here, one should first identify the actors who are formally recognized as “insiders” in decision-making (Dür and Mateo 2016)—e.g. the European Commission (a full member of the BFUG) or the six European stakeholder organizations,<sup>1</sup> UNESCO and the Council of Europe that have consultative status in the BFUG. However, a wider net should be cast so that actors which vie for influence but may not have a formal position in the different governing structures (i.e. “outsiders”) can also be included, e.g. a student union in a country in which students do not take part in the governing process and are not systematically consulted.
3. Multi-issue characteristic—one should identify how clashes as well as complementarities between policy sectors move into and away from the policy domain of interest. This requires a detailed analysis of the policy development

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<sup>1</sup>They are: BUSINESSEUROPE, Education International (EI), the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the European Students’ Union (ESU), the European University Association (EUA), and the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE).

process in the focal higher education sector, monitoring which issues are put on the agenda, and whether they actually are core higher education issues or are spillovers from other sectors. It can also be done through monitoring whether actors linked to other policy sectors (e.g. ministries of finance, migration agencies, unemployment offices) take part in higher education policy development, and whether actors from higher education take part in policy development in other sectors, e.g. EHEA stakeholder organizations taking part in discussions on European migration. In this, the identification of multiple actors facilitates the identification of multiple issues.

It should be stressed that these three “multi characteristics” can be conducive to policy dynamics—e.g. the fact that actors can choose at which level or within which sector to push for a specific policy development can lead to policy changes despite formal obstacles or a lack of explicit jurisdiction (Elken 2015). However, each of the characteristics can also lead to deadlocks, standstills and similar coordination challenges (Peters 2015), in cases in which the actors cannot agree on the route to take, at what level a specific development should be discussed or which sector should take the lead.

In our view, analyses of European higher education governance, processes leading to particular arrangements and consequences thereof require unpacking three distinct characteristics of this very coordination—multi-level, multi-actor, and multi-issue—and addressing them separately from one another as an independent perspective, and recognizing their interaction as likely to be responsible for the outcomes observed. This means that, in total, there are seven potential variations of “multi” features that are of interest when examining governance of EHEA: (1) multi-level, (2) multi-actor, (3) multi-issue, (4) multi-actor and multi-issue, (5) multi-actor and multi-level, (6) multi-issue and multi-level, and (7) multi-actor, multi-issue, and multi-level.

Three of these interactions in the context of the EHEA—(a) multi-actor and multi-issue, (b) multi-actor and multi-level, (c) multi-issue and multi-level—will be illustrated with empirical examples in the remainder of the chapter. The illustrations show how the three multi-s can be the basis for novel avenues of research that have not yet received sufficient attention.

## **The Three “Multi-S” in Action**

### ***Multi-actor and Multi-issue: Political Saliency of the EHEA***

The first aspect of governance in the EHEA that will be discussed concerns its political saliency for national level policy actors, i.e. ministries responsible for higher education, as well as transnational non-state actors, i.e. European stakeholder organizations. As argued by Vukasovic et al. (2017), one of the ways in which the political saliency of the EHEA can be assessed is to analyse who is representing the

different actors at the key decision-making meetings—in this case, the ministerial conferences—and how this has changed over time. This approach reflects more general studies of political salience of European level policy developments (see e.g. Grøn and Salomonsen 2015), in which the basic premise is that the political rank of those “sitting at the table” matters, as well as that for successful lobbying it is often important to show both “strength in rank” as well as “strength in numbers”.

Taking this as the starting point, Vukasovic et al. (2017) argued that political salience of the EHEA is comprised of two distinct dimensions: (a) a substantive and (b) a symbolic one. The substantive dimension reflects the fact that policies developed at the European level have an impact on both higher education systems and institutions, and thus both national and transnational actors are interested in shaping this process. The symbolic dimension highlights that participation and influence in the process send strong normative signals concerning (1) the importance of European level coordination of higher education policies for national and institutional level changes, and (2) the relevance of and rationale for policy activities (and therefore existence) of European stakeholder organizations. These two aspects combined also provide opportunities that participation and recognition of European stakeholder organizations on the European level are used as a symbolic resource by domestic stakeholder organizations to boost their own legitimacy and standing in their own domestic policy arenas.<sup>2</sup>

However, variance in both dimensions of salience is expected across:

- *time*, due to gradual consolidation of EHEA governance structures, but more importantly for this discussion, continuous elaboration of policy issues and preferences developed by these structures as well as EU institutions;
- *space*, because for EU Member States, the pan-European EHEA governing structure is not the only platform available for European level coordination, while this is not the case for countries that are not likely to become part of the EU (e.g. Russia or the South Caucasus countries);
- *types of policy actors*, as national level actors and transnational non-state actors have different rationales for participation in the process.

Thus, Vukasovic et al. (2017) focused on several patterns of interest, including: (1) changes in average size and rank of national delegations over time, (2) comparison between rank and size of national delegations of EU members, candidate countries and potential members, and (3) changes in size of delegation of European stakeholder organizations. Analysing participation at the ministerial conferences between 1999 and 2015, they found that average size and rank of national delegations did indeed decrease over time, that in recent years unlikely EU members and potential EU candidates have been sending higher-ranking delegations to ministerial summits than candidates or EU members, and that the size of delegations of European stakeholder organizations have been relatively stable since 2007.

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<sup>2</sup>See Chou et al. (2016) for analytic similarities regarding policy failures.

Such variance is indicative of the interaction between multi-actor and multi-issue aspects of the EHEA's governance. Namely, the evolution of the EHEA policy agenda from the initial six, relatively ambiguous, action lines to ten action lines and rather specific preferences concerning various aspects of higher education, including those that are of interest to other policy sectors (e.g. migration, employment) signifies very clearly the multi-issue aspect. Moreover, some of the issues—such as the qualifications frameworks—have been dealt in two separate (somewhat interrelated) arenas, the pan-European EHEA and the policy arena embedded within the EU framework. This means that some of the multiple actors taking part in EHEA governance have a choice in terms of which issue to pursue within which policy arena. As suggested by Vukasovic et al. (2017), this is one possible explanation for the decline in the rank of the delegations of EU Member States. While European stakeholder organizations can theoretically do the same, their choice comes with more constraints. This is because they are officially recognized as legitimate actors in the EHEA arena (as indicated by their formal status as consultative members in the BFUG), while within the EU institutions their access to all relevant decision-makers is not guaranteed (Vukasovic, forthcoming in 2018). This adds a multi-actor aspect, implying that changes in the political salience of the EHEA may be accounted for by the fact that interactions between multi-issue and multi-actor aspects of EHEA governance play out differently across time, across space (for different national-level actors) and across different European stakeholder organizations. While these analyses provide first steps into unpacking the role and behaviour of various actors, there is also a need to further and expand this research agenda.

### ***Multi-level and Multi-actor: European Stakeholder Organizations as Meta-Organizations***

The second aspect concerns six European stakeholder organizations that are consultative members of the BFUG, i.e. BusinessEurope, EI, ENQA, ESU, EUA, and EURASHE. As previously indicated, the involvement of stakeholder organizations as such (regardless of the governance level) is reflective of the multi-actor aspect of governance and highlights the fact that policy development also involves mediation between interests of different stakeholder groups. However, European stakeholder organizations, given that their members are national or local stakeholder organizations or, in the case of EUA and EURASHE, higher education institutions, are actually organizations of other organizations, i.e. they are meta-organizations (Ahrne and Brunsson 2005). This means that they are multi-level organizations themselves and thus their participation and influence in the governance structures of the EHEA reflect the interaction between multi-actor and multi-level aspects of governance.

The key implication of this is that European stakeholder organizations constitute an additional link between different governance levels, thus providing a channel through which interest intermediation at one level can affect interest intermediation at the other. This first concerns the status of stakeholder organizations in their respective policy arenas. For example, in order to become recognized on the European level as a representative of students, ESU had to argue that its members are both representative and recognized in their own national contexts (Elken and Vukasovic, 2014; Klemenčič 2012). Moreover, given that the key struggle to be recognized as an actor took place prior to the Prague Ministerial Summit in 2001, it was important that, *inter alia*, (1) the Czech member of ESU (SKRVS), i.e. the student union from the country organizing the ministerial conference, and (2) the Swedish member of ESU (SFS), i.e. the student union from the country presiding the EU in that period, were at that point recognized as partners in higher education governance in their own national contexts and could use their “insider” position to support ESU’s claim for involvement in the EHEA governing structures. Thus, while at the Bologna Ministerial Summit in 1999, ESU representatives were present only in an unofficial manner, in Prague ESU’s chairperson was one of the keynote speakers and students were recognized as key partners in the process (Bologna Process 2001).<sup>3</sup> This enabled ESU to push for a stronger focus on student participation in governance, and together with some allies—the Council of Europe and some EHEA countries—promote the practice of some of the national delegations to include student representatives as a recommendation for all national delegations. This was in turn used by some ESU members to argue for improvement of their own position in their national policy arenas. Among others, the Student Union of Serbia used its membership in ESU and recognition of ESU as the student representative in the Bologna Process to strengthen its claim for participation in the governance of HE in Serbia (Branković 2010).

Another aspect in which the European stakeholder organizations provided a link between interest intermediation at various governance levels concerns the development of policy positions. Given that the key purpose of these organizations is advocacy and influence, their policy positions constitute their main organizational outputs and act as signalling devices both towards the European decision-makers as well as towards their own membership (Vukasovic 2017). Similar to the relationship between EU institutions and Member States, policy positions of European stakeholder organizations are often the result of some of their members “uploading” their policy preferences to the European level, while other members may be “downloading” the European level policy positions to apply them in their national contexts (for a more general discussion of uploading and downloading, see Börzel 2003). The lack of systematic research regarding the relationship between stakeholder organization policy development at various governance levels has also major

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<sup>3</sup>ESU (then ESIB) pushed for its inclusion in the EHEA governance structures by other means as well, including providing expert advice through its Committee on Prague in 2001 and later the Bologna Process Committee.

consequences. First, this means that there is still a limited systematic understanding and conceptualization of where specific policy ideas come from and how they might be adapted and translated by different actors operating across governance levels. Second, analysis of the democratic legitimacy of European decision-making in this context has not sufficiently taken into account the role of members in developing positions of European stakeholder organizations, as well as comparing positions of European stakeholder organizations and their members. There are great expectations in this respect, and Elken and Vukasovic (2014) argue that this was the reason why most of the stakeholder organizations were granted consultative status in the BFUG in the first place. Yet, research on such organizations implies we should be more cautious. This is because (1) the legitimacy expectation relies on the assumption that the “long chain of delegation” (Kohler-Koch 2010) between grass-roots and Brussels works well and this is not necessarily a given, and that (2) there is actually “*nothing intrinsically democratic*” about such organizations (Binderkrantz 2009: 658). Thus, while enhancement of democratic legitimacy might be a means for gaining access, the consequences of this need to be studied in much more detail. One way of assessing the extent to which European stakeholder organizations contribute to the democratic legitimacy of European decision-making is to study governance arrangements of these organizations, in particular concerning development of policy positions, as well as to assess the congruence between their policy positions and policy positions of their members.

### ***Multi-issue and Multi-level: Policy Coordination and Convergence on Regional and European Levels***

The third aspect of interest is based on the necessity to take a closer look at the different levels of governance of higher education in Europe. While there are studies which focus on commonalities and differences between countries with cultural, economic and political similarities (e.g. Branković et al. 2014; Christensen et al. 2014; Dobbins and Khachatryan 2015; Dobbins and Knill 2009; Vukasovic and Elken 2013; Vukasovic and Huisman 2017; Zgaga et al. 2013), the role of regional arrangements in the European Higher Education has not been systematically studied.

With this in mind, Elken and Vukasovic (forthcoming in 2018) compare (a) policy coordination and convergence at the European level with (b) policy coordination and convergence within four European regions: the Balkans, the Baltic countries, Benelux and the Nordic countries. The four regions exhibit a complex mix of similarities and differences in their policy developments and thus are suitable for exploring policy coordination and policy convergence in a more nuanced way. Two of them—the Balkans and the Baltic countries—belong to what is sometimes still termed as post-Communist Europe and are in general poorer than the other two regions—Benelux and the Nordic countries—which frequently come on top of



various prosperity, human development and democratic stability rankings. Given their geographical proximity, these regions shared historical legacies: Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) for the Balkans, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) for the Baltic countries, Danish or Swedish rule for most of the Nordic countries and, among others, the United Kingdom of the Netherlands for the Benelux. These historical legacies have also contributed to their cooperation following the dissolution of earlier political configurations: for instance, the Benelux is a political and economic union that predates the EU, the Nordic countries have been coordinating their policies through the Nordic Council of Ministers (and a Nordic Passport Union has been in existence since 1952), the Baltic countries have had a similar structure in place since the early 1990s, while in the Balkans the Regional Cooperation Council was set up in 2008 in order to achieve more integration. At the same time, the regions differ with regards to their position towards the EU, with the Benelux countries being some of the founders, while all of the Baltic countries and some of the Balkan and Nordic countries became members (much) later.

Elken and Vukasovic (forthcoming in 2018) complement the analysis of three governance levels with analysis of multi-issue aspects, i.e. similarities and differences of interrelated policies: quality assurance, qualifications frameworks and recognition of qualifications. The study finds that policy development in the Balkans does not go towards increasing similarity within the region, but rather a convergence with European level developments concerning the three issues. For the Baltic countries, the situation is somewhat different, given the close cooperation between QA agencies and the AURBELL<sup>4</sup> project focusing on automatic recognition. Benelux exhibits strong convergence within the region concerning recognition of qualifications (automatic recognition is already in place) and partially quality assurance, given the fact that the Flemish Community of Belgium and the Netherlands have a joint QA agency (NVAO). For the Nordic region, the developments concerning automatic recognition are similar to the Baltics—there is commitment but at the time of writing a decision has not been reached, while NOQA (the Nordic Quality Assurance Network in Higher Education) that has existed since 1992 has been a basis for some convergence.

In light of the fact that studies about the implementation of the Bologna Process continue to report that there is “surface convergence, persistent diversity underneath” (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2015; Westerheijden et al. 2010; Witte 2006, 2008), the lack of systematic analysis of the regional level coordination in relation to national level policy changes and European integration initiatives means that a possible explanation for varied patterns has not been sufficiently analysed. Moreover, the regional level matters in different ways for different policy issues, thus clearly highlighting one of the implications of the interaction between multi-level and multi-issue dimensions of governance in the EHEA.

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<sup>4</sup>Automatic Recognition between Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania project.

## What's Next? Expanding the Analysis of the Bologna Process

Since 1999, the Bologna Process has expanded considerably. Yet, the analytical toolbox to analyse these developments has not followed suit. This chapter argues that, in order to understand the intricacies and nuances of governance of higher education, it is necessary to conceptually distinguish between three dimensions: (1) the multi-level dimension concerning how authority is distributed or concentrated across governance levels, (2) the multi-actor dimension which highlights heterogeneity of state and the involvement of non-state actors (e.g. stakeholder organizations, businesses, consumers), and (3) the multi-issue dimension which concerns clashes as well as complementarities between policy sectors. The potential of the “three multi-s” framework to improve our knowledge of European higher education policy developments has been demonstrated through (a) analysis of changing political salience of the EHEA, (b) exploration of the role of European stakeholder organizations, and (c) consideration of the regional policy coordination and convergence in relation to European level developments. While each of these developments can be analysed on its own, the umbrella framework of the “three multi-s” allows us to see them as interrelated and more general European developments. Moreover, these examples show how the multi-framework also allows for a new focus of analysis.

While the focus of this chapter has been on European developments, the “three multi-s” are not contextually bound and can be employed for analysis of similar integration dynamics in other macro-regions of the world, e.g. South East Asia (as demonstrated by Chou and Ravinet 2017), or for exploring inter-regional interactions. Moreover, analysing EHEA governance in a comparative manner (and not as *sui generis*) can be conducive to a deeper understanding of EHEA, with regard to both its commonalities with other regional integration projects and its specificities. With further studies, we may begin to address emerging questions that are engaging scholars in recent years, such as: Are concepts such as “academic freedom” unique to Europe or the West? What about the institution of the University, to what extent is this a European idea? How can we reconcile deep policy developments in Europe and its centuries-old universities with the rise of Asia, especially its younger universities that have been climbing the international rankings in meteoric ways? By engaging in such comparative research, it is also possible to enhance and nuance our understanding of the developments within EHEA.

Looking into the future, we expect that the governance of EHEA—should it continue—to persistently exhibit complexity with regards to governance structures as well as actor constellations—with sometimes diverging and sometimes converging interests, depending on the issue at hand. The expansion of the process to 48 countries has only added to this complexity, given that with every additional country the complexity increases as different actors, regions or issues are included in the EHEA. Given this increasing complexity and the need for unanimous agreement by all full members of the EHEA to ministerial communiqués, it is very

likely that agreements between the different actors on concrete policies will become harder if their interests remain divergent. Thus, we are most likely going to continue to observe rather ambiguous European policies as well as variations in national and organizational implementation. Moreover, one can also expect that responses on regional level could become a stepping stone in the context of EHEA as a whole. At the same time, it is less likely that the increased number of countries will be able to agree on new comprehensive action lines for the EHEA, but rather focus on technical aspects, for example detailed development of the existing tools in the area of quality assurance or qualification frameworks. EU efforts to consolidate the European Education Area by, among other things, launching the Sorbonne process for mutual recognition is, in this context, an interesting development and emphasizes the necessity of a multi-actor and multi-issue approach to analysing the Bologna Process.

To what extent would the complexity and ambiguity of future EHEA governance contribute to its vulnerability remains to be examined. However, we contend that the conceptualization of the “three multi-s” offered in this chapter and the discussion of their interactions provide a more robust analytical tool for understanding the past, current, and future developments of the EHEA as well as its implications for higher education in and beyond Europe.

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# Promoting the Civic and Democratic Role of Higher Education: The Next Challenge for the EHEA?



Tony Gallagher

## Introduction: The Growth and Development of the EHEA

The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) has developed over a period of almost two decades to develop reforms of higher education on the basis of common key values. These values included freedom of expression, academic freedom and institutional autonomy, independent students' unions, and free movement for students and staff. A total of 46 countries worked towards this achievement until the EHEA was formally launched in 2010 and two more have since joined the process. The years since then have been difficult as the deepening economic crisis not only created challenges for public funding of higher education institutions but also saw pressure towards greater levels of accountability and pressure for institutions to more directly respond to economic and social needs (EUA 2015). The last few years have seen political challenges compound the situation: on one level we have witnessed the growth of anti-establishment populist politics, of the right and left; but more worryingly, there has been a trend towards non-rationalism in political debate, often characterized as the development of "post-truth" politics. What is the role of universities in this emergent environment and does it point to new priorities for the EHEA?

At its origins, the EHEA was focused on the need to increase student and staff mobility, and to facilitate employability. The primary focus of the early years of its development was on structural reforms so that a cohesive and supportive environment existed for mutual exchange and cooperation. Since this was also focused on the enhancement of academic quality and graduate employability, it was rec-

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ognized that it enhanced the attractiveness of European higher education to the non-European world. Linked to this was a growing recognition, by most, of the role of higher education as a public good, although the realisation of this varied across jurisdictions, particularly in relation to funding, where varying balances of public and private funding were adopted. Furthermore, and to varying extents, institutions had to convince governments of the economic and social value of higher education, both in relation to the supply of graduates and the impact of research, in contexts where the competition for resources was becoming more intense (EUA 2003).

As work towards the EHEA developed, two different pressures emerged: while there was growing acknowledgement of the importance of institutional autonomy, there were concerns in the institutions that this might constrain their innovative potential if it was accompanied by mechanistic and uniform monitoring of outputs: everyone agreed that external quality control had an important part to play, but it had to strike the right balance between assurance and control. The second area of concern dealt with the development of more differentiated roles for institutions, or rather that institutions had the degree of autonomy and the level of funding that would allow them to develop distinctive missions in an effective and strategically appropriate manner.

All of this marked an important cultural shift in higher education in EHEA: in the first phase, the pressure for change had been largely top-down, focused on government action and legislation; in the next phase, there was more evidence of a bottom-up pressure, as the institutions sought to enhance their quality mechanisms and develop their own distinctive reform measures (EUA 2003). This increased the importance of institutional leadership and the availability of appropriate levels of resources to effect the changes and reforms underway.

In the period before the formal launch of EHEA therefore, there had already been a significant shift in the educational paradigm across Europe. Higher education had become more student-focused and appeared to be better able to respond to a growing variety of student needs. A greater dialogue had been established between institutions and their stakeholders, not least parents, students and employers. Engagement with employers was important in helping institutions respond to the demands of the lifelong learning agenda. This meant they were better able to respond to the needs of society and the economy. As important, they were also able to respond in an agile manner to the changing needs of society. Finally, internationalization loomed ever larger as a priority, not least as the world became more connected with the growth of the digital economy.

By 2010, in other words, European higher education institutions had created unifying elements shared across 46 different countries, despite their diverse national, cultural and institutional contexts. Employability and mobility had moved to the forefront of concerns, institutions had attracted a more diversified student body, and they were generally more inclusive and responsive to the policies they adopted (EUA 2010).

## Facing Challenges

The years since then have provided significant challenges. The deepening economic crisis constrained levels of public investment in higher education, while at the same time the institutions faced ever-increasing pressure to respond to pressing economic priorities, and enhance existing university-business partnerships. The growing trend towards professional education highlighted the increasing recognition of the importance of the knowledge economy, but at the same time, pressure for marketization carried with it the risk of a narrowing concern with utilitarian priorities. As had always been the case, institutions faced multiple pressures and priorities, and perhaps have been faced recently with navigating increasingly choppy waters. Prior to the development of the EHEA, institutions had had to face such challenges and crises in distinctive ways, but the development of the EHEA created a context within which these challenges could be faced strategically, and in a transnational way, because of the degree of structural cohesion the EHEA had established. In part because of this, the public and civic role of higher education has perhaps never been more important, or more evident.

This is timely because, in the wake of the economic crisis, we are now faced with a political crisis that is not simply European, but has taken on a global dimension. We have witnessed the growth of anti-establishment populist politicians and parties, of the left and right, and this has produced a new level of political volatility. When this is allied with a rhetoric evincing a growing disdain for establishments, of many kinds, some fear we are in the midst of a “post-truth” politics in which appeals are based on raw emotion, and these are, in turn, amplified uncritically through social media. Higher education institutions, from their cloistered origins to their current more public role, have always had knowledge and understanding at their heart. We have already seen how the concept of the knowledge economy becomes shorthand for the new demands of a digital world and highlights the contribution of higher education to economic growth. But the role of knowledge and understanding in higher education may now also have an important civic and democratic role. Higher education should not seek to become the site of a singular truth, as a response to the fractious clamour that has emerged across many societies. Rather, higher education may need to restate and, to some extent, re-imagine the importance of the core principles upon which the EHEA was built: in the face of contemporary challenges, these principles can be seen to encourage dialogue, the sharing of different perspectives, and a constructive approach to disagreement and decision-making.

The common framework established by the EHEA has provided institutions with the opportunity to realize their innovative and entrepreneurial potential. To date, this has been most evident in the positive role higher education has played in promoting economic growth and prosperity, in widening access and participation in post-compulsory education, and in providing opportunities for retraining and renewal in the face of rapidly changing economic circumstances. It has perhaps been less effective in articulating values. If we take this opportunity to restate and



re-imagine the core principles of the EHEA, we might now focus on the importance of the civic and social role of higher education, restating the importance of the free and informed exchange of ideas and knowledge that lie at the heart of democratic culture and society, and shift our gaze towards the third mission of universities.

## The Civic and Social Role of Higher Education

There has been some consideration of these issues in previous discussions and it is perhaps best to begin from this base. Bergan (2015) asked whether the EHEA had achieved all it set out to do and had lost political interest, as its focus was increasingly administrative or bureaucratic: was it, he asked, no longer perceived to be “innovative and politically interesting?” (Bergan 2015: 728). He pointed out that the development of the EHEA had proceeded in stages, from the launch, through development, then stock-taking and consolidation. Initially, there had been a high priority towards agreement on structural reform, which had then been followed by a focus on implementation. This did not mean that other policy areas were unimportant, and Bergan cited issues such as academic freedom institutional autonomy, and student participation, as key underlying values established and promoted by the EHEA. He also suggested that the social dimension had been on the EHEA agenda for a considerable period, even though there were different interpretations on what it meant, and hence problems in identifying clear commitments to take this agenda forward. This was particularly evident in the 2015 implementation report which showed that, while there had been rhetorical commitments to achieving social priorities, only a minority of states had actually set quantified goals as a basis for measuring progress (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2015).

Bergan went on to suggest that the EHEA had two important functions. The first of these was that it provided a formal framework for the establishment of a set of coherent and compatible policies and a set of good practices. Drawing on this, the second function he highlighted was that the EHEA acted as a learning community in that the good practice it developed was available to all. He concluded his chapter with a note of optimism in that he looked forward to the development of a new phase of action in which the EHEA would “develop from adolescence to full maturity” (Bergan 2015: 740), but with the backdrop of the 2008 crash and the subsequent financial challenges facing higher education, he was unclear what form this new direction might take.

He did, however, offer some hints. He linked a future debate on European higher education to a debate on the future vision we had for European societies, a debate that would “need to be philosophical and practical at the same time, since it will need to establish a clear connection between principals, policy and practice” (Bergan 2015: 739). He went further by quoting the Canadian philosopher John Ralston Saul who suggested that a successful and dynamic democracy was one in which citizens were “boisterous, outspoken, cantankerous” (cited by Bergan 2015:

739). A similar intent had animated some US higher education institutions to rediscover the civic role embedded in the land-grant tradition, particularly at a time when the level of voting by young people was very low (Benson et al. 2007; see also Plantan 2002) and the strength of democratic culture was believed to be diminishing.

This essentially political turn for the EHEA could mark an end to the inward gaze which has largely, and probably appropriately, characterized its work to date. It might offer the possibility of a deeper and wider engagement with society as a whole. It might be possible, for example, to take the idea of a learning community and move it beyond the dissemination of good practice, not least because this implicitly assumes that, for any given problem, someone somewhere has already solved it, and the task is simply to “find” it and tell it to everyone. This concept, or approach, may be appropriate for administrative or bureaucratic challenges, but the grander societal challenges we currently face are better thought of as “wicked problems” which are difficult precisely because they offer novel challenges to overcome (Kolko 2012; Hannon 2007). For these “wicked problems”, the concept of best practice is of limited value. Rather than looking over our shoulder at what others have already achieved, “wicked problems” require us to look over the horizon, to imagine and construct new solutions, probably based on knitting together different elements of a new solution held by a diverse network of participants, and amplifying the strongest signals. The appropriate concept for this approach is the idea of “next practice” and its primary value is that it encourages us to think seriously of ways we can create space to encourage innovation.

Some of the wicked problems have been with us for an age, including climate change, social injustice, inequality, healthcare and drug trafficking. These are social or cultural problems that are difficult or impossible because they engage incomplete or contradictory knowledge; involve large numbers of people and opinions; impose large economic burdens; and are not unitary but rather are interconnected with other problems. In our current period, we also face the challenge of social cohesion, as societies cope with massive population movements arising from disasters or wars; the rise of populist political parties; the denigration of expertise; and a new promiscuity in the way too many deal with the concept of truth. Some of these may be a legacy of postmodernist relativism, in which every view is deemed to be authentic, or older notions of multiculturalism which rigidify community identities at a cost to the right of individuals within the communities to assert their own voice. The Council of Europe White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue (2008) offers an alternative view, based on the importance of dialogue and promoting the value of change. Flecha (1999) went even further to argue not just for the value of intercultural dialogue but also for the importance of hybridity as the underlying dynamic for progressive change. Flecha criticised multicultural approaches which, he suggested, tried to protect minorities by reifying and fixing group identities and, unwittingly, fell into a trap set by modern racists who no longer claimed one group was superior to another but rather simply suggested groups were, and should be, entirely separate. Flecha (1999) made the case for intercultural dialogue and the

creation of dialogic space between groups so that sharing and learning could take place, thereby providing the basis for the growth of hybrid identities.

All these concepts—the nature of truth, the role of identity, the place for experts and expertise, the value of dialogue—coalesce around the core business of higher education, which is knowledge and understanding. But the important point lies in the way knowledge and understanding is generated and used, and the way in which universities engage with the wider society within which they are based.

In previous discussions on the EHEA, this issue was perhaps most clearly addressed by Pausits (2015) who asked whether a modern university in a knowledge society had a third mission alongside research and teaching (Ranga and Etzkowitz 2013). There was, he recognized, increasing discussion on the idea of a third mission in which social priorities were manifest, and the university consciously shifted from any remaining vestiges of an “ivory tower” to engage more pro-actively with society. In an echo of Bergan, Pausits suggested that the advocacy of a third mission would take the university from being a “community of scholars”, with all its implied images of cloisters and enclosures, to become a “community of practice”, but one in which practice had a more overt impact on society.

In some contexts, this third mission was quite tightly defined: he points out that in the 1970s the German Education Council defined continuing education as the third mission, or pillar, of universities. Another version was embodied in a more interdisciplinary and application-oriented approach to science, in which the production of knowledge was geared towards socially or economically relevant activities. Pausits does not make the connection, but this echoes the late 19th century land-grant universities of the United States, or the civic universities of early 20th century United Kingdom—in both cases they took on a commitment to regional impact and, often, a commitment to applied science and technology.

More recently, this commitment to local impact has been characterized by the Triple Helix notion in which academic, political and business interests work collaboratively to promote wealth production and economic growth (Ranga and Etzkowitz 2013; Goddard 2009). In this concept, universities have a key role in national innovation and regeneration, through knowledge transfer partnerships, the production of a steady stream of highly qualified graduates, and the commercialisation of knowledge. From one perspective, this is a university response to increased demands for accountability for public investment in higher education. Alternatively, it could be seen as an enhancement of existing commitments to research and teaching while producing new social partnerships and income streams. As Pausits points out, the key underlying principle here lies in the application of knowledge outside the academic environment (Pausits 2015: 272). He goes on to illustrate this development by looking at the examples of the Russell Group of research-intensive universities in the UK and the Prime network among European universities. Interestingly, most of the discussion on this engagement is seen as changing the scientific, economic and social relations between universities and society, although as Goddard and Vallance (2013) have pointed out, the economic focus of this activity has, to date, been more significant and better embedded in comparison with the social agenda.

There have been attempts to better institutionalise the social agenda by using the concept of a Quadruple Helix (European Committee on the Regions 2016), in which “citizens” provide the fourth leg. Goddard and Vallance (2013) suggest that the social agenda has been the weaker leg because the measures to support it have not been as wide-ranging or strong as those developed to support economic initiatives. Furthermore, they are often based on short-term or ad hoc funding; they can be difficult to embed in academic programmes; and they are not as well recognised by government or in policy. Specific initiatives have been put in place, such as the priority attached to widening participation, the development of community-based teaching programmes, the encouragement of outreach measures such as volunteering, and the development of new methodologies for applied research in communities. All this stands in marked contrast with the much larger-scale economic partnerships in which universities and business work with the city or regional authorities on ambitious programmes for economic development or regeneration: such initiatives tend to be larger not just in scale, but also in ambition and longevity.

## **Conclusion: A New Social and Civic Focus for the EHEA?**

Is it possible that the EHEA could take on the task of developing innovation on the social agenda and build new understandings of the civic and social role of higher education, and in so doing take the social agenda from being a miscellany of tactical initiatives to create a constellation of practices united around an ambitious strategic theme?

Brophy and Godsil (2009) offer an example of how this might be achieved when they talk about strategic engagement by universities in their local communities, using the example of the Netter Center in the University of Pennsylvania: “When the entire university is engaged—human, academic, cultural and economic—enormous progress can be made at improving the communities in which they are located” (Brophy and Godsil 2009: 147). Benson et al. (2017) have taken this forward by arguing that the social imperative is far from being a new imaginary but rather it can be seen as a fulfilment of the Baconian commitment to a form of science that sought to engage with real-world problems, and more immediately helped lead to the formation of the Royal Society (Bryson 2010). Ball (2010) showed how Bacon criticised both the “cloistered philosophers” whom he compared to spiders weaving tenuous philosophical webs and the “blind fumbings of uninformed practical technologies” which he compared to the “mindless task of ants”. By breaking away from the false dichotomy provided by the abstractions of pure science and the immediacy of technologists, Bacon argued that true scientists “should be like bees ... which extract the goodness from nature and use it to make useful things” (Ball 2010: 299).

The formation of the Royal Society was a key moment in the Scientific Revolution of the 17th century. This, in turn, contributed to the Enlightenment, the

American and French Revolutions, the demise of absolutism in Europe and the rise of democratic societies. This argument offers a philosophical and practical lineage at the heart of the purpose of higher education.

More prosaically, a similar commitment to ambition can be seen in recent developments in higher education in the United Kingdom. Since the turn of the millennium, UK universities have been obliged to undergo a research assessment process in which the quality of their research is evaluated and the judgements used as the basis for distributing core research funding to the institutions. Until recently, the main criteria upon which research quality was based reflected traditional research metrics, such as the level of external research grant income attracted, the number of postgraduate research students graduated, and the quality of research publications and other outputs. For the last exercise, carried out in 2014, a new criterion based on research impact was included and has been enhanced for the next exercise in 2021. This criterion was meant to reflect the value gained by society from public investment in research. Research impact, which was clearly delineated from traditional academic impact, comprised a number of elements, including economic and societal impact, and more particularly was linked to a wider initiative on public engagement. The National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE) was established to lead this work and it has promoted a Manifesto for Public Engagement for universities to allow them to commit to the exploration of new forms of engagement with society:

Manifesto for Public Engagement: “We believe that universities and research institutes have a major responsibility to contribute to society through their public engagement, and that they have much to gain in return. We are committed to sharing our knowledge, resources and skills with the public, and to listening to and learning from the expertise and insight of the different communities with which we engage.” (NCCPE 2010).

There has also been an attempt to locate this initiative within the DNA of higher education by exploring how the role of knowledge has been generated, used, and changed over time:

- academic knowledge: knowledge generated by and for the university
- knowledge transfer: knowledge made more accessible to those outside the university
- knowledge exchange: recognize others have valuable knowledge and work in partnership
- knowledge co-creation: universities and publics co-creating knowledge.

The traditional image of the cloistered university, protected from the whims and fashions of the society around it, sits very clearly in the first level of this continuum; the civic universities, with their regional and technical mission, sit within the second level; the modern economic imperative sits somewhere between the second and third levels; but it is in the fourth level that the possibility of transforming the nature of the relationship between universities and societies can be seen.

Following Benson et al. (2017) it takes the social and civic mission of universities to a higher level by linking it to a commitment to democratic action. This

could take the form of a commitment to engage with society to address the persistent wicked problems that limit the life-chances of so many citizens and deny them the fulfilment of a good life. This would imply the promotion of innovative spaces for developing and testing creative solutions. The development of “next practice”, as opposed to “best practice”, further implies the need to tap into new sources of knowledge and experience, including the wisdom of a much wider range of stakeholders and communities outside higher education.

It could also take the form of actively encouraging a democratic culture among our students, as many will go on to take leading positions in society. The challenge of a “post-truth” world suggests a priority should include teaching our students the value of discernment and critical judgement so that they will not simply be consumers of information. Rather they should be encouraged to hone their skills in critical engagement, questioning and challenging what they are told, and developing a commitment to actively testing, and not just accepting, the truth-value of claims. Our “post-truth” world is characterized by the rise of populist politics and the promiscuous claims to truth that have emerged in its wake. It is fuelled by the echo-chamber of social media. The digital age has created an explosion of knowledge which should be liberating, but only if it is accompanied by the ability to use it critically. That is perhaps the biggest wicked problem we currently face, but it is one in which universities should play a central role. It is a challenge which EHEA might take on as its next central purpose.

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# Diverging Paths? Institutional Autonomy and Academic Freedom in the European Higher Education Area



Liviu Matei and Julia Iwinska

It is possible to analyse in a systematic manner the evolution of university autonomy and academic freedom in Europe after 1999–2000, a distinct and remarkable period in the history of European higher education. A consistent, albeit surprising, pattern can be identified: it consists of a combination of diverging paths of development. We define the path of development as a distinguishable, cohesive, interconnected and relatively stable sequence of events or changes taking place over a longer period in a given area, which are characterised by a distinctive combination of speed, direction and substance (content). To illustrate briefly, we propose two examples, which we will analyse in this chapter.

We argue that there is a difference of direction, speed and content, or different paths of development, in the evolution of institutional autonomy compared to academic freedom: this period shows much faster and mainly *progressive* changes in autonomy, as opposed to slower and rather *regressive* changes in academic freedom in Europe, both at the conceptual level and in practice. If we look at autonomy alone, we notice a particular path of development: an accelerating tendency to define, measure and practice it in relation to efficiency, rather than intellectual, moral and legal references, including human rights. We call this the instrumental path of development of autonomy in the EHEA.

In this chapter, we attempt to identify the most important paths of development in academic freedom and university autonomy in the EHEA, analyse their interaction and explore their significance for the broader discussion about the present and future of higher education in Europe.

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The period since the beginning of the Bologna Process in 1999 has been one of the most extraordinary in the history of higher education in Europe and indeed in the world (Matei et al. 2018; Scott 2012; Vögtle and Martens 2014). The magnitude of changes it triggered has been qualified as similar to the “tectonic shifts” in geology (Matei 2012; Matei and Curaj 2014). All areas of higher education have been touched upon in significant ways. Not surprisingly, they include university governance—how universities are organised, operated and controlled—and academic freedom and university autonomy as aspects, or areas of governance.

The Bologna Process aimed at the creation of a new space of policy dialogue and practice in higher education, resulting in the establishment of the European Higher Education Area as of 2010. In this space, new attitudes vis-à-vis governance emerged; new concepts, principles and tools have been experimented with, some of which have attracted attention outside Europe as well (Vögtle and Martens 2014; Gornitzka et al. 2017). University governance in Europe has undergone significant changes since 1990–2000 at the institutional, national and European level. Developments at the European level might appear to be the most salient and important. That is because the very emergence of the EHEA as a continental, *sui generis* and larger-than-life space for higher education generated new, continent-wide models, practices and also challenges in the area of governance, some unprecedented, which had to be dealt with. Because they are new and large, developments and challenges at the European level might be easier to recognise and more interesting to study. One could perhaps even characterise the EHEA in its entirety as a new entity that requires new forms of governance. We could speak of the EHEA as a new space for governance in higher education. Vukasovic et al. consider that the special nature of governance in the EHEA is expressed in a distinctive combination of three characteristics: it is multi-level, multi-stakeholder and multi-issue (Vukasovic et al., this volume).

Not all changes in European higher education during this period are the result of planned, continental “tectonic shifts” like the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area, or the related project of a European Research Area.<sup>1</sup> More or less independent national reforms, policy and regulatory initiatives have also played an important role. Global trends are not to be ignored either. Moreover, for our specific subject in this chapter, aside from a generic plea for institutional

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<sup>1</sup>The Bologna Process, launched with the Bologna Declaration of 1999, is a voluntary intergovernmental process in higher education based on jointly agreed principles, objectives and standards. Currently, there are 48 European states implementing the Bologna Process, which constitute the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The EHEA, as the common European space for higher education, is considered a result of the Bologna Process. A European Research Area (ERA), which emerged at about the same time with the EHEA, developed as a major initiative under the Lisbon Agenda, the EU’s overarching strategy between 2000 and 2010. ERA is defined as a “unified research area open to the world based on the Internal Market, in which researchers, scientific knowledge and technology circulate freely and through which the Union and its Member States strengthen their scientific and technological bases, their competitiveness and their capacity to collectively address grand challenges” (Treaty of Lisbon amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community, signed at Lisbon, 13 December 2007).

autonomy, academic freedom and stakeholder participation, there has been only rare and little explicit focus on governance as part of the Bologna Process. This is reflected in the official programmatic documents of the Process, including the communiqués adopted at the regular gatherings of the ministers in charge of higher education of the participating countries (the highest governance level of the EHEA). The Bucharest Communiqué, for example, calls only generically for more policy dialogue on university governance and reiterates the commitment of the ministers “to autonomous and accountable higher education institutions that embrace academic freedom” (Bucharest Communiqué 2012). A paper on university autonomy and academic freedom as fundamental values of the EHEA (Bergan et al. 2016) was discussed in 2016 at a dedicated thematic session of the Bologna Follow Up Group, a rare effort to explicitly put these topics on the agenda of the Process. It appears that there was no policy or practical follow up from this discussion, in spite of the name of this body.<sup>2</sup> Yet, it can be argued that there are important elements of European specificity in the evolution of university autonomy and academic freedom emerging primarily because of and in relation to the Bologna Process. The involvement of the European Union, whether directly within the Process (the European Commission is a member along with 48 countries) or through related initiatives, is also noticeable.

What are these uniquely European elements? How have the two related concepts and principles, university autonomy and academic freedom, evolved since 1999?

In one of the most authoritative publications of our times on university autonomy, it is stated that “there is no uniform trend towards autonomy in Europe” (Tarrach 2017, p. 5). We concur with this assessment, although it may sound discouraging. It is based on thorough research and abundant evidence. The same could be stated, in fact, about academic freedom. Moreover, we could add to that: not only that there is no uniform trend, but at a closer look we can recognise a number of significantly diverging paths in the evolution of university autonomy and academic freedom in Europe after 1999–2000. What is more important, however, is that we can identify these paths with some degree of precision and observe that, although diverging, they sketch a clear and consistent pattern.

Before scrutinizing individual paths, their significance and that of the overall pattern, we discuss briefly the two concepts under consideration, academic freedom and university (or institutional) autonomy.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>“The Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) is the executive structure supporting the Bologna Process in-between the Ministerial Conferences. It is in place since autumn 1999”. Cf. <https://www.ehea.info/pid34247/how-does-the-bologna-process-work.html>, accessed on 10 January 2018.

<sup>3</sup>Throughout this chapter, we refer to autonomy as an area of governance of all higher education institutions, not just universities, and use the two terms, university autonomy and institutional autonomy, interchangeably.

## University Autonomy and Academic Freedom

Surprisingly, university autonomy and academic freedom are rarely discussed concurrently in the scholarship about the EHEA. Why talk about them together? Because they are intimately related, although different concepts (see Ren and Li 2013; Matei 2017 for comparative discussions of the two concepts). Academic freedom and university autonomy refer in essence to a single constitutive, defining characteristic of the university as an institution: certain freedom, or freedoms, for both the individuals within it and for the institution are needed in order to fulfil its core mission. Simply stated, the mission of the university is the pursuit of, and the contribution to, the production of knowledge (the quest for truth through research and scholarship), as well as the transmission and dissemination of knowledge (primarily through teaching and learning). We may also add a broader educational function, which goes beyond the simple transmission of knowledge. Academic freedom and university autonomy are related to other freedoms, such as freedom of speech, freedom of opinion, freedom of assembly, or freedom of movement (Beiter et al. 2016). Still, academic freedom and university autonomy are different from these other freedoms. They are restricted to the sphere of higher education (research, and teaching and learning, primarily) and are subject to specific limitations and obligations. Importantly, they include the obligation to produce and transmit knowledge as a public good and to observe defined academic (including disciplinary) standards, regulations, and practices.

Academic freedom and university autonomy are concepts that are difficult to define and principles that are difficult to put into practice, let alone in a unified way. This difficulty has multiple sources. One of them has to do with cultural, political, and historical variability: we can think of the definition of academic freedom in medieval versus contemporary Europe, for example, or in China and the U.S. in our days. Another reason has to do with an implication that academic freedom and autonomy make universities exceptional institutions. Universities are “exceptional” because they provide or contribute to the provision of an exceptional public good or service to society: knowledge (Marginson 2016). In turn, in order to be able to provide this good, to fulfil their mission, universities need a certain degree of “exceptional” freedoms (academic freedom and institutional autonomy). They are exceptional freedoms because they are of a type that other institutions or professionals in the society do not benefit from. Scholars of academic freedom and autonomy insist on the fact that the “special” freedoms of the university are needed, justified, and should only be practised in order to fulfil a social function, not for the benefit of the universities themselves or for the private benefit of individuals inside the university. In this way, they are as much rights as they are duties and responsibilities (Ren and Li 2013; Beiter et al. 2016).

The nature of the two concepts is complex, which adds to the difficulty of defining and putting them into practice. Sometimes, it is argued that “freedom” in the concept of academic freedom should be understood in a moral rather than only functional perspective, given that universities are more than just tools for the

delivery of social goods—their work has to do with rights (Beiter et al. 2016). They include human rights, for example the right to education of the citizenry. Some other times, academic freedom and university autonomy are represented rather as instrumental principles having to do with efficiency: it is then argued that universities cannot fulfil their functions, however defined, in an efficient manner under conditions of overwhelming external control (Matei and Iwinska 2014; Pruvot and Estermann 2017). The link between university governance (academic freedom, in particular) and rights is not easy to acknowledge, regulate and practice. One of the few international documents dedicated to academic freedom and university autonomy sheds some light on this matter. It expresses concern “regarding the vulnerability of the academic community to untoward political pressures which could undermine academic freedom” and states that “the right to education, teaching and research can only be fully enjoyed in an atmosphere of academic freedom and autonomy for institutions of higher education and that the open communication of findings, hypotheses and opinions lies at the very heart of higher education and provides the strongest guarantee of the accuracy and objectivity of scholarship and research” (UNESCO 1997, Preamble),

Internal university actors, as well as key external stakeholders often confuse the two concepts. Sometimes, only one of them is used. Often, they are taken to be identical. We argue for the importance of distinguishing between the two concepts in the EHEA. Moreover, not only are they distinguishable but both are important.

The distinction between academic freedom and university autonomy is contested and differently understood in various contexts (Matei 2017; Ren and Li 2013). Most often, academic freedom is understood as the freedom of individual academics and students to teach, study and pursue education and research without undue interference or restriction from law, institutional regulations or public pressure. University autonomy, on the other hand, is of the institution, not the individual. It is about the right of the university to determine its organisation and administrative structures, to decide on priorities, manage its budget, hire personnel and admit students, decide on the content and form of its teaching and research (Matei 2017). It can be stated that institutional autonomy, as a set of freedoms of the institution, is a precondition for academic freedom, as a set of freedoms for individuals in the institution (Kenesei 2017).

Matters of academic freedom are more salient in certain countries; in others, institutional autonomy is more critical. In the U.S., institutional autonomy is often taken for granted, at least in the case of private universities, and what is more debated is academic freedom. In other countries, such as in many parts of contemporary post-Soviet region, Turkey, or Hungary, institutional autonomy is severely restricted, which makes it a more urgent matter to discuss and attend to (Matei 2017).

Academic freedom and institutional autonomy are not binary, yes-or-no variables. They are not one-dimensional either. The European notion of university autonomy developed by the European University Autonomy, discussed below in this chapter, assumes four main dimensions (organisational, financial, staffing, and academic autonomy), with over 20 (Pruvot and Estermann 2017) or 30

sub-dimensions (EUA online autonomy tool<sup>4</sup>). Other models focus on anything between only three main dimensions to up to eight (see Matei and Iwinska 2014 for a comprehensive analysis of various models of autonomy). In a detailed proposal for a definition of academic freedom for the European Union, Karran distinguishes among four main components or dimensions: teaching, research, self-governance and tenure (Karran 2009).

Academic freedom and university autonomy are a matter of degree. There is more or less freedom, but no absolute freedom for the university anywhere (Matei 2017). Autonomy is not a discrete variable that can be reflected in a single index or measure, but rather as a combination or configuration of dimensions and degrees (Matei and Iwinska 2014; Matei 2017). It is possible, in this way, to distinguish specific configurations for specific countries, even country profiles, as illustrated by a recent monitoring study in Europe (European University Association 2017). We suggest that profiles combining actual dimensions of autonomy and academic freedom can be sketched for individual universities as well.

The fact that academic freedom and university autonomy consist of several dimensions helps explain in part the existence of diverging paths of development. It is possible to witness rapid and major positive changes on a certain dimension, for example, managerial autonomy, but negative developments on other dimensions, such as strategic autonomy, as discussed in Sect. 2.b.

A distressful but highly illustrative example of how the two concepts are different but related is the case of Central European University (CEU), which has faced attacks from the Government of Hungary since spring 2017 (Matei and Orosz 2017). These attacks can be interpreted as directed against university autonomy. The Hungarian Government did not act or attempt to act directly against CEU's individual faculty members or students, against their individual freedom to pursue the study of a particular subject or publish a paper on a given topic. This was not about censorship of academic work. Rather, it was an attack against CEU as an institution, its right to decide on how to organise its work, administrative operations and governance structures. This is a painful case of severe restrictions of university autonomy in a European Union/EHEA country, to the point of putting at risk the continuity of operations of this university altogether. Restrictions on autonomy, in turn, do have an impact on academic freedom as the right of individual academics and students to pursue education and research.

The understanding of academic freedom and autonomy differs along temporal and cultural axes, and it is influenced by what we could call situated epistemologies. Ren and Li (2013) review a corpus of literature focusing on the differences between the European, American and Chinese definitions/understandings and practice of academic freedom and university autonomy, as influenced by particular epistemologies. Specifically, they refer to the rationalist tradition in Europe, pragmatism in the U.S. and Confucianism in China. It would be possible to use a similar analytic approach in studying the evolutions in the understanding and practice of

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<sup>4</sup><http://www.university-autonomy.eu> accessed on 3 January 2018.

university autonomy and academic freedom in the EHEA. We could inquire whether the emergence of the EHEA has taken place in a specific epistemological milieu, which, in turn, might have influenced how academic freedom and university autonomy are understood and practised. We do not undertake an extended analysis along these lines in the present chapter but will refer briefly to possible elements of the social and political epistemology in the EHEA in the section on the European notion of university autonomy.

## **Diverging Paths in Academic Freedom and University Autonomy in the European Higher Education Area**

- a. The disjunction between university autonomy and academic freedom in the EHEA.

Diverging paths of development of university autonomy and academic freedom can be traced looking into the existence, behaviours and evolutions of any organisation engaged in the defence, promotion, codification and regulation of the two principles, associated policy discourses and policy initiatives, and of course actual practices.

The first observation is the absence of European-wide or national organisations explicitly and effectively dedicated to the promotion and defence of academic freedom. Various organisations in Europe, for example, university associations and courts, do occasionally play a role in the defence of academic freedom. These organisations, however, are not dedicated to or focused on academic freedom, their role is uncertain (difficult to predict) and they are most often inefficient and rarely significant vis-à-vis academic freedom. This situation in the area of academic freedom in the EHEA is different from the U.S., for example, and also different from the situation of autonomy in Europe.

In the United States, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), established in 1915, remains a powerful organisation until today, looming large over the entire higher education system in the U.S. regarding the definition, promotion, defence and practice of academic freedom. The principles on academic freedom and academic tenure, first put forward in the 1915 AAUP *Declaration of Principles*, modified later and endorsed also by the Association of American Colleges (currently the Association of American Universities and Colleges—AAUC), remain the most important reference for academic freedom in the United States. It is a powerful and influential form of codification of academic freedom, which bears, beyond conceptual and policy references, undeniable legal value, as evidenced by many court cases.

There had been no similar codification of academic freedom in Europe. None has emerged after 1999–2000 as part of the Bologna-stimulated developments either. There had been no organisation in Europe to represent the counterpart of AAUP earlier and none has been created since 1999–2000.

In 1988, the rectors of several European universities adopted the Magna Charta Universitatum, and a Magna Charta Observatory was created,<sup>5</sup> which could have played a role in Europe similar to that of AAUP in the U.S. Started as a European initiative dedicated both to academic freedom and institutional autonomy, Magna Charta has been signed by now by over 800 universities from over 80 countries from all parts of the world. Although Magna Charta Universitatum is a European document, explicitly identified as such in the text, this initiative has acquired a much broader international scope. Even more important for our discussion here are four additional aspects related to Magna Charta Universitatum and Observatory. First, the Magna Charta Observatory, as an institution, is a devoted guardian of the Magna Charta and its principles. However, it lacks the authority to effectively promote, let alone enforce, them. Second, the Magna Charta as a document serves as an important, worldwide by now, but overly general reference to a set of values. As an organisation, the Magna Charta Observatory is not operational in the way the AAUP or AAUC are. It has very limited resources and staff. It does not have a clear mandate to engage operationally in the defence of academic freedom, for example by taking up individual cases. Third, the Magna Charta Observatory has undertaken some good but limited work in promoting these values mainly through conferences and publications. It lacks not only human resources but also the tools to do more. Fourth, it is dedicated primarily to institutional freedoms, focusing almost all its work on university autonomy rather than academic freedom.

Unlike in the case of academic freedom, a very powerful actor has emerged in Europe and it asserts great influence in the definition, operationalisation, measurement and promotion of university autonomy: the European University Association (EUA). Since its establishment in 2001 as the collective voice of European universities, EUA has played a key role, in partnership with other organisations, in the design and implementation of key elements of the European Higher Education Area, such as European standards and guidelines for quality assurance,<sup>6</sup> or the European qualifications framework for higher education,<sup>7</sup> to mention only two. Today, we would argue, EUA is one of the most important actors in European higher education. Like all other major actors in the EHEA, however, EUA has paid little attention to academic freedom. In turn, it has made, possibly, the most important contribution to the definition and operationalisation of institutional autonomy in Europe, to the advent of a European notion of university autonomy as we experience it today, and which is probably here to stay for years to come. Three EUA hallmark reports on university autonomy in Europe published in 2009, 2011, 2017, a related report on autonomy country profiles published in 2017, and an interactive online tool<sup>8</sup> are formally only about monitoring, comparing, and

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<sup>5</sup><http://www.magna-charta.org/>, accessed on 10 January 2018.

<sup>6</sup>[http://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG\\_2015.pdf](http://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf), accessed on 8 January 2018.

<sup>7</sup><http://www.ehea.info/cid102842/qualifications-frameworks-in-the-ehea-2009.html>, accessed on 8 January 2018.

<sup>8</sup>Available at <http://www.university-autonomy.eu/> accessed on 5 January 2018.

measuring different elements of institutional autonomy in around 30 European higher education systems (Estermann and Nokkala 2009; Estermann et al. 2011; Pruvot and Estermann 2017; European University Association 2017). In reality, this series of reports has put forward and codified a new, European conception of university autonomy. As is often the case in public policy, an exercise in measuring has become an exercise in definition and codification. The EUA Autonomy Reports and the conception of university autonomy they foster have become very influential in Europe with individual higher education institutions, the media, national authorities and supra-national European actors. Moreover, this conception has become influential in other parts of the world as well.

We argue that the EHEA has “codified” institutional autonomy. Or, to be more exact, EUA has codified university autonomy in the EHEA, whether it intended to do so or not.

We may ask why it is relevant to expect developments in the EHEA in both areas, university autonomy and academic freedom, and perhaps synchronised, as opposed to diverging, paths. This is an important question for several reasons. First, as discussed above, academic freedom and university autonomy are intimately related concepts. They contribute to defining the university as an institution and represent key conditions allowing its operation as a particular, even exceptional, type of institution. Universities cannot pursue and fulfil their mission in the absence of a certain degree of freedom, or freedoms, both institutional and individual, which need to be codified and supported by regulations. Second, as a new space for dialogue and practice in higher education, the EHEA brought about new remarkable ambitions (e.g. supporting the emergence of a European demos and ethos; Matei 2015), new epistemologies and new regulatory realities for higher education, including the emergence of the EHEA itself as a new entity for higher education governance. All these advances could have been expected to result in, and even require, new developments in both academic freedom and university autonomy. For example, the new role of the state in view of the emergence of a supra-national, European-space for higher education governance could have been expected to result in new codification, regulations, tools and institutions at the European level in defence of the specific responsibilities and freedoms of the university, including academic freedom and institutional autonomy. So far, this has succeeded only for autonomy—which is not to say that no attempts have been made in the area of academic freedom. We can highlight the adoption of the Magna Charta Universitatum and the creation of the Magna Charta Observatory, discussed above, or the proposal to adopt a European Union definition of academic freedom (Karran 2009). The later initiative might be worth revisiting. The Council of Europe, an international organisation (different from the European Union) created in 1949 to uphold human rights, democracy, rule of law in Europe and promote European culture (47 member states at present) has endeavoured systematically to promote and defend both academic freedom and university autonomy. For example, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted a Recommendation in 2006 referring to the Magna Charta Universitatum and addressing a specific situation of restriction of academic freedom emerging at that time in Belarus. The



Recommendation calls on the member states to assume responsibility for the protection of academic freedom and institutional autonomy (Council of Europe 2006). A more recent document from the Council of Europe points even more specifically and forcefully to the responsibility of public authorities for academic freedom and institutional autonomy as being directly linked with democracy, human rights and the rule of law (Council of Europe 2012). The European Union has also tried to promote a European attitude and action with regard to academic freedom. In the case of the attacks against CEU discussed briefly above, the European Commission initiated legal action against the Hungarian Government and deferred the matter to the European Court of Justice for a legal decision (European Commission 2017). One of the main arguments in the motivation of the Commission for turning to the Court was very specifically its assessment that the Hungarian Government, through its actions following the adoption of the so-called “Lex CEU” (the revised Hungarian Higher Education Law of 2017) acted against the European legislation, including European legislation on academic freedom. Interestingly, the Hungarian Government claimed in its responses to the Commission that legislating on higher education is a matter of exclusive national competence and that there is no European legislation on academic freedom anyway<sup>9</sup> (Hungarian Government 2017).

We see in these examples that attempts to develop new definitions, regulations and practice of academic freedom in the EHEA have been made. They represent perhaps a recognition of the need to act in this area. Only that these attempts have been few, not significant and fundamentally unsuccessful.

When discussing the lack of European or EHEA-wide codification in the area of academic freedom, we do not ignore the fact that some elements of codification for both academic freedom and university autonomy do exist (Beiter et al. 2016). They include national constitutions, many of which contain provisions regarding academic freedom (18 European countries) and institutional autonomy (15 countries, Beiter et al., *ibid*). National higher education legislation also occasionally includes provisions about one, the other, or even both areas (Beiter et al., *ibid*). In addition, certain international treaties and other documents include provisions that may apply, often indirectly and without binding legal force, to academic freedom and institutional autonomy at the national level. For Europe, the most important international references are the European Convention on Human Rights (adopted in 1950, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (both of 1966) and the UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel (1997). In a very few cases, national and European courts have passed verdicts on matters touching on autonomy and academic freedom, thus contributing in this way some new form of codification.

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<sup>9</sup>The Hungarian Government had already modified the national legislation (starting with the revision of the Constitution of Hungary in 2010) before Lex CEU to restrict academic freedom and autonomy (Chikan 2017; Kenesei 2017; Tausz 2017).

b. Development of institutional autonomy at the expense of academic freedom?

More diverging paths become visible when we assess whether developments in Europe in these two areas since 1999–2000 constitute progress. We argue that the Bologna Process and the emergence of the EHEA created conditions for the advancement of university autonomy, both conceptually and in practice. This was not the case with academic freedom.

The creation of a transnational, European-wide space for higher education has contributed to reducing the grip of the state on universities in most countries of the continent. The Bologna Process and the EHEA, as well as the ERA, brought about new transnational cooperation possibilities; European—as opposed to only national regulations and organisations (such as with regard to accreditation, for example); and the availability of European funding, directly to higher education institutions, as opposed to only national funding. All this has made possible for universities to take some distance and enjoy new freedom from their governments. The EHEA has indeed created a new space for more autonomous operations of European universities.

In the same period, the European Union also put great emphasis on developing university autonomy. As part of its modernisation agenda for higher education, the European Commission insisted that European universities have insufficient autonomy, mainly because they are “prisoners” in the hands of the state and subject to undue control by the state. The Commission also took issue with the prevalently national principles in the organisation of higher education in Europe. It considered that the lack of autonomy and leaving universities at the hand of national states are counterproductive and must be overcome. This is directly stated in one of the first documents outlining the parameters of the modernisation agenda:

Member States value their universities highly and many have tried to “preserve” them at national level through detailed regulations organising them, controlling them, micro-managing them and, in the end, imposing an undesirable degree of uniformity on them. (European Commission 2006, p. 11)

In line with global trends continuing from the previous periods, many governments in Europe introduced changes to national regulations and practices that brought about more institutional freedom for universities in managing their internal affairs, for example by replacing line budgeting with block grants. This may be interpreted as increased autonomy. In reality, however, the situation is more complex. To understand it, we need to go back to the characterization of autonomy as a multidimensional concept. We will find out in this way that, as documented by existing research, there has been progress on certain dimensions of autonomy, at least in some countries, but not on others and not in all countries (de Boer and Jongbloed 2012; Pruvot and Estermann 2017).

A comparative empiric study of university governance in several European countries (de Boer and Jongbloed 2012) found that many decisional prerogatives have indeed been devolved by the state to universities themselves, which might appear as increased autonomy. In another study, Enders et al. found increased

regulatory autonomy for universities in the Netherlands in concert with increased institutional performance expectations from the state (Enders et al. 2012). At the same time, however, the state has preserved important control functions, in particular with regard to defining the functions and objectives of autonomy itself. The conclusion is that, while universities in the countries studied have indeed acquired “managerial autonomy” or “regulatory autonomy” (de Boer and Jongbloed 2012; Enders et al. 2012), they continue to lack what other authors would call strategic autonomy (Abrami et al. 2014; Zhao and Hayhoe 2014). Universities have more freedom to manage their internal operations than before, but not much freedom to decide what is the purpose of these operations and perhaps simply what universities are for. This remains largely a central government prerogative. We can speak of a new type of diverging path here: progressive developments in certain dimensions of autonomy but no or even regressive developments (new restrictions) in other aspects.

Additional diverging paths become visible when we look at differential developments in institutional autonomy and academic freedom. The new transnational space created by the Bologna Process has indeed contributed to freeing universities from “captivity in the hands of the state”, at least in some dimensions, thus making more freedom for the institutions (autonomy) possible. At the same time, it is not clear whether this process was accompanied by a corresponding progress in terms of freedom for the individuals in universities (academic freedom). It has been argued that rather the contrary has happened: universities as institutions have acquired some more freedom or freedoms, but the freedom or freedoms of academics have been reduced. Beiter et al. (2016) discuss the increased freedom of university with regard to hiring, promoting and retaining academic and administrative staff (staffing autonomy, in the EUA classification). The increased autonomy of universities to hire academic staff on limited and short-term contracts, in particular, made possible by new national regulations is interpreted as a departure from the previous tenure or tenure-like mode of appointment, resulting in limitations to academic freedom, at the same time with the expansion of university autonomy (Beiter et al. 2016).

To give another example, universities in most countries of the former Soviet Union have experienced increased levels of autonomy—academic autonomy in particular (Sagintayev and Kurakbayev 2015), although at a different pace. They were allowed to decide internally on an increasingly larger part of the curriculum, moving away from the previous centralised decision-making reflected in the so-called state-standards of the Soviet times. This meant more freedom for the institution but not necessarily more freedom for individual academics and students.

There are many situations of restriction of academic freedom in the EHEA during this period, by way of regulations and administrative action, and even extreme attacks in individual cases, such as those in Turkey in the wake of the 2016 coup, using as an argument, or pretext, the alleged involvement of students, academic and university administrators (Caglar 2017) in a coup d’état attempt in 2016. Unfortunately, there is no systematic research available on the evolution of academic freedom in the EHEA, not even simple inventories of individual cases of

restrictions or attacks on academic freedom.<sup>10</sup> Existing evidence is more or less anecdotic. Nevertheless, if academic freedom and university autonomy are facets of a necessary principle or condition in higher education (freedoms in and for the university), these examples alone point clearly to divergent paths of developments between academic freedom and university autonomy.

c. Disjunction between instrumental aspects and moral or human rights aspects.

We discussed in the previous section diverging paths in the evolution of academic freedom and university autonomy in the EHEA. We propose a possible explanation for this situation, which has to do with another, broader path in university governance.

There has been a strong tendency during this period to focus on what we propose to call instrumental aspects of governance, at the expense of moral aspects, or related to rights. Research shows that policymakers, other external stakeholders and universities themselves tended to focus on instrumental aspects of governance, in search for increased institutional efficiency, or performance (usually externally defined):

Over the last decades many national reforms have been initiated in Europe with the aim of strengthening the executive capacity of public universities. The reform agendas had a number of items in common, including the enhancement of institutional autonomy, the professionalisation of institutional leadership and administration, and the introduction of more competitive, performance-oriented funding models (Gornitzka et al. 2017, p. 274)

Enders et al. point to the emergence of “autonomy policies for strengthening managerial discretion and internal control of universities that are combined with regulatory policies for external control that steer organisational choices”. They found that “regulatory autonomy (...) aims at aligning universities more closely with governmental goals and improve respective performance” (Enders et al. 2012, p. 5). This trend could explain other significant developments in university autonomy and academic freedom in the EHEA.

First, it could explain the relative disregard for academic freedom. Academic freedom is more directly linked to moral aspects, rights and other freedoms, and its link to institutional performance is subtler and more difficult to grasp and assert. University autonomy, in turn, is more directly prone to be put to the service of performance, in particular as seen from a public policy perspective.

A broader reorientation of the university has taken place in the age of the knowledge society everywhere, not just in the EHEA, leading to its gradual transformation into something more similar to other organisations (thus not that exceptional). Like other organisations, the university needs to “deliver” externally

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<sup>10</sup>The Scholars at Risk Network’s Academic Freedom Monitor is probably the largest inventory of cases of violation of academic freedom worldwide. As of January 2018, the website lists only five cases of violation of academic freedom in Europe in 2017, including the analysed case of CEU but also a case in Belgium, along with cases in Belarus and Russia. Cf. <http://monitoring.academicfreedom.info/map/europe>, accessed on 6 January 2018.

defined products, such as employability, jobs, patents or income, and not generic education, knowledge or truth. This trend has been extensively discussed, whether approvingly or not, in the higher education scholarship. It has been sometimes considered to have resulted in drastic changes with regard to autonomy and academic freedom. The question has been even asked whether, as part of this evolution, universities have sacrificed academic freedom and autonomy on the altar of commercialisation—that is, for money (Forsyth 2014). In studies concentrating on the EHEA, it is implied that, by focusing on efficiency in higher education (on “products”) and ignoring rights, autonomy arrived to be privileged over academic freedom. Beiter et al. criticise the EUA model of autonomy as revealing flows when analysed from a human rights perspective. They even imply that this model sacrifices academic freedom altogether on the altar of autonomy (Beiter et al. 2016).

Second, out of concern for efficiency, not only is autonomy privileged over academic freedom but autonomy itself is conceptualised in a manner that makes it much more, if not exclusively, an instrumental concept or principle that is supposed to serve the capacity of the university to “deliver” better. The EUA model could be considered a good illustration of this trend.

Third, the instrumental focus and the reduced or lack of consideration for aspects having to do with rights might explain the evolutions with regard to codification, in particular legal codification, of academic freedom and university autonomy. When recognised, rights need to be protected through legal regulations, whether national and international. If autonomy and academic freedom are not perceived to be linked to rights, we should not be surprised that there is not much progress with regard to their legal codification in the EHEA. This may also explain, again at least in part, why no organisation has emerged in Europe dedicated to the promotion and legal protection of autonomy and academic freedom. Moreover, even existing legal regulations applicable to these two areas tended to be forgotten and fell into desuetude, as deplored by Beiter et al. (*ibid*) or Karran (2009). Here too, some attempts in the opposite direction have been made, like the inclusion of provisions about academic freedom in the failed project of a European Constitution (Karran, *ibid*). Just that, once again, such attempts have been very few and unsuccessful. Even worse, in some countries, such as Hungary, we have witnessed negative developments: existing constitutional and other legal provisions that were favourable and progressive explicitly referring to academic freedom and autonomy have been replaced with new, restrictive ones for both areas after 2010, as discussed in this chapter. Finally, when important developments did take place with regard to codification, such as in the case of the EUA model of autonomy, the focus was on efficiency and there was no serious attention to rights, generically or from a legal perspective.

We may ask what is wrong with this trend, with the focus on instrumentality and efficiency. We can identify several problematic aspects:

- Moving away from the understanding, codification and practice of academic freedom and university autonomy in terms of, or with reference to, rights makes their defence more difficult. The lack of legal anchoring of the two concepts or

principles makes their practice more difficult and uncertain. How do all the actors involved know what these principles are about, or has the authority to define and regulate them and issue guidelines?

- Ignoring the moral and rights facets of university autonomy and academic freedom leads to a confusing understanding of the two concepts, which might, in turn, have a negative impact on performance or efficiency.
- Finally, ignoring rights considerations is problematic in itself. Even more so as academic freedom and university autonomy are based on, or related to, important democratic rights and moral principles, such as freedom of speech, freedom of association, freedom of movement, or freedom to education.

For these reasons, we would agree with those, very few, who are calling for a reintegration of the moral and rights perspective in the discussion about academic freedom and university autonomy in the EHEA.

- d. Diverging geographies. Scattered geographic picture of university autonomy and academic freedom within the EHEA, in spite of common trends.

As a common space for policy dialogue and action in higher education, the EHEA is not a monolithic area. There are many differences across and within its countries and sub-regions. The same is true for the evolutions of academic freedom and university autonomy, in spite of a certain unifying force of the EHEA and common trends. We can notice diverse and occasionally diverging everyday (informal) understandings of the two notions, as well as differences in their formal codification and practice.

The overall evolution of the understanding of the two concepts appears largely similar for the entire EHEA. As discussed in this chapter, a European notion of autonomy has emerged, at least nominally. As a common reference if not as a legally binding concept. At the same time, just about everywhere in the EHEA attention to academic freedom as a matter of policy reflection has been very limited.

We discussed above the codification of academic freedom and university autonomy in the EHEA. We would like to add an important observation here, which speaks to diverging paths as well, this time with respect to different political geographies.

The transformation of higher education on the continent through the Bologna Process and the involvement of the European Union was inspired and supported by new policy narratives, such as knowledge society and European integration (Matei 2015). These policy narratives have been accompanied by new epistemologies, which have influenced higher education, including in the area of academic freedom and university autonomy. Common European policy narratives and underlying epistemologies, together with a certain degree of coordinated action within the EHEA, have created the conditions for similar evolutions throughout the continent. This explains the common characteristics of university autonomy and academic freedom in the EHEA, as discussed here.

Not all countries, though, have been equally committed to these narratives, which may explain national and regional differences in higher education policy. Moreover, in the last several years, the dominant narratives have lost their extraordinary force (Matei 2015) and new policy narratives, mainly of a populist and nationalist breed, have gained prominence. Democracy is in recession in many parts of the continent, and this affects higher education significantly. European integration is stalled and in some cases even reversed (Brexit is only one example). Some countries, mainly in the East, are now expressing less faith in the virtues of the knowledge society. Previously, the bet on the centrality of knowledge as a source of economic and social development was one of the most important elements of consensus in Europe. Now, this consensus is dissipating. The most relevant case, once again, although not the only one, is Hungary, whose prime minister stated repeatedly that what the country needs is not more knowledge or more students,<sup>11</sup> but rather less higher education (which is somewhat of a “luxury”, in his view and that of his Government) and more reliance on manual labour (Matei 2015).

Recently, changing policy narratives and epistemologies have resulted in changes of attitude towards universities; for example, they are considered less exceptional or exceptionally important. This is reflected in new regulations and practices, including for autonomy and academic freedom. As we have seen above, Hungary adopted a new constitution in 2010 and amended it a few times after that, all but erasing the provisions on academic freedom and university autonomy. In Russia, a different mix of policy narratives (emphasis on the knowledge society, yes, but less focus on Europe and consideration for democracy and human rights) created the condition for a different approach to academic freedom and autonomy throughout this period. In Turkey, an authoritarian regime with a nationalist-Islamic ideology went all the way to closing down entire universities and putting academics, administrators and students in prison (Caglar 2017), on the basis of allegations of connection to the Gülen movement, which appeared to be used as a catch-all shot to strike against uncomfortable political opposition, regardless of its real link to the failed coup attempt.

We could identify restrictions on academic freedom and autonomy in the West as well, but they are far from being comparable in magnitude and degree of salience. There are new lines of fracture in European higher education. One of them appears to be once again between the West and the East, and this is explained by the deeper fracture in terms of types of political regimes and ideologies.

Concepts such as policy narratives and higher education epistemologies, discussed below in more detail, can serve to explain the mechanisms by which the changing landscape of political regimes affects higher education and generates national/regional differences in higher education policies and practices.

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<sup>11</sup>The number of students in Hungary decreased dramatically after 2010/2011 (Chikan 2017) going back to the low levels of 1998/1999 (<https://dailynewshungary.com/number-university-students-hit-rock-bottom-hungary>, accessed on 3 January 2018).

## A European Notion of University Autonomy?

We assert that a European model of university autonomy has emerged with and within the EHEA, and this is one of the most remarkable developments in university governance in the period after 1999–2000. In this section, we will summarise how this model emerged, its substance and characteristics and evidence indicating that it is consequential in Europe and beyond.

This model has been developed by the European University Association (EUA), established in 2001 through the merger of the Association of European Universities (CRE) and the Confederation of European Union Rectors' Conferences. There is no research available as yet to document and evaluate all the important contributions of EUA during this period. From direct experience (in part through direct participation in EUA projects) we feel confident to state that EUA has become rapidly one of the most important, dedicated and influential actors in the EHEA.

Its formal mandate is to be the voice of European universities, support and take forward “the interests of individual institutions and the higher education sector as a whole”.<sup>12</sup> It has made numerous crucial contributions, usually in partnership with other organisations, covering almost all areas of higher education, from the definition of a European model of doctoral education (the so-called Salzburg Principles for Doctoral Education), to the development and adoption of the European standards and guidelines for quality assurance, the European qualifications framework for higher education or, more recently, reorientation of the policy focus within the Bologna Process on teaching and learning. EUA contributions have been made in various forms: effective advocacy at the European level, monitoring policy developments in specific areas (such as funding, governance, graduate education, research, etc.), undertaking applied research projects (usually ending in influential publications), initiation and participation in actual policy projects. The development of a European model of university autonomy is one of the most important and influential contributions of EUA, but it is not the only one.

EUA initiated an autonomy project in 2007, continuing until today. The project started as a survey “to provide a broad overview of national and institutional trends regarding autonomy and governance”.<sup>13</sup> EUA published a series of important reports (Estermann and Nokkala 2009; Estermann et al. 2011; Pruvot and Estermann 2017; EUA 2017) and created an interactive online autonomy tool as part of this project.<sup>14</sup> The project involved applied research (or “studies”, in the language of EUA), workshops and conferences, with contributions by EUA staff and external experts (including one of the co-authors of this chapter). Along the way, EUA developed a tool for measuring autonomy, called “Autonomy Scorecard”, first published in 2011 (Estermann et al. 2011). In the most recent EUA

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<sup>12</sup><http://eua.be/About.aspx> accessed on 15 December 2017.

<sup>13</sup>[http://www.eua.be/activities-services/projects/past-projects/governance-autonomy-and-funding/autonomy-scorecard-\(2009-2012\)](http://www.eua.be/activities-services/projects/past-projects/governance-autonomy-and-funding/autonomy-scorecard-(2009-2012)) accessed on 15 December 2017.

<sup>14</sup><http://www.university-autonomy.eu> accessed on 3 January 2018.



autonomy report, the immediate purpose of this entire endeavour is presented as being about “monitoring, comparing, and measuring different elements of autonomy” (Pruvot and Estermann 2017, p. 6). The ambition of the project, however, goes beyond just monitoring, comparing and measuring, as the same report acknowledges indirectly:

Discussions around university governance and autonomy emerged across Europe in different contexts as a response to different challenges. As a result, the need became manifest to develop a common terminology and structure to address such an important topic, with an increasing demand for comparability and benchmarking across borders (ibid, p. 7).

The project has already achieved more than just creating a tool for measuring, monitoring and benchmarking: it has articulated a European concept and model of university autonomy. This is one interesting example in public policy when an attempt at measuring resulted in important conceptual developments. It is also an illustration of how an attempt to “measure what we treasure”, to use the title of a UN report assessing the progress in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (United Nations 2015), leads in the end to what we could call, with some concern, “treasure what we measure”.

What are the main elements or substance of the model? It assumes that autonomy is a multidimensional concept, with four main independent dimensions: organisational, financial, staffing, and academic autonomy, each of them with a number of discrete sub-dimensions. For example, the sub-dimensions of financial autonomy are: length and type of public funding, capacity to keep surplus, capacity to borrow money, ability to own buildings, ability to charge tuition for national/EU students, ability to charge tuition for non-EU students. The project team (including external experts) has identified the four dimensions in consultation with the EUA individual and collective members (universities and national rectors’ conferences) in the process of developing the Autonomy Scorecard in 2010–2011, based on the review of the literature and available data. A recent study by Orosz published in this volume appears to prove, using elaborated statistical analysis, that the four dimensions are indeed independent and, in this regard, the validity of the model is confirmed (Orosz 2018). The model further assumes that the four dimensions are necessary and sufficient to define autonomy. Other models of autonomy discuss either fewer or more dimensions (Matei and Iwinska 2014). Furthermore, this model assumes that autonomy can be measured exactly on each sub-dimensions and that actual values for each can change over time.

We can identify several elements of underlying epistemologies embedded in the EUA model. As discussed in this chapter, such elements can be inferred from the dominant policy narratives in the EHEA. The European integration policy narrative is reflected here in the conviction that a European-wide model or concept of autonomy is both possible and necessary. It is further implied that putting forward such a concept or model is a matter of active engagement (it needs to be created, or generated) rather than a matter of discovery (it is not the case that it exists “naturally” in Europe). The neo-liberal policy narrative is also immediately detectable. The final purpose of the exercise is to help create tools and policies, or elements of policy frameworks that would help increase the efficiency of universities:

Institutional autonomy is widely considered as an important pre-requisite for modern universities to be able to develop institutional profiles and to deliver efficiently their missions (Pruvot and Estermann 2017, p. 7).

Although the model is about autonomy, which means at least in part about freedom, or freedoms, no moral arguments or reasons are mentioned, and the language of rights is not present. The focus is on efficiency. The concerns for efficiency, measurement and benchmarking explain why the model led to the development of a Scorecard which has been compared with a ranking. EUA itself made it clear the Scorecard was not meant to be a ranking (*ibid*). The success of the Scorecard, however, as expressed in the large degree of public attention it has received, has to do in part with its capacity to present a kind of league tables (for systems, not for individual institutions, though) which, in turn, made it easy to use by the media, policymakers or universities themselves, in a manner similarly to the rankings, in which entire countries or systems are ranked depending on the degrees of autonomy in their universities on these four dimensions.

A third element of situated epistemology here refers to the knowledge society. The EUA model is based on the conviction or belief that knowledge is fundamental to the political, social and economic advancement of Europe and, therefore, it is important to put in place the requisite conditions for universities to make their necessary contribution to the creation and use of knowledge. Autonomy is understood to be both a necessary condition for achieving efficiency (the words “rights” or “necessary freedoms” are not used) and a responsibility, both for the university themselves (practice it responsibly, with accountability, and efficiently) and for the policymakers (make sure regulatory systems supportive of autonomy are in place).

Although still very young, the model has become consequential in Europe and beyond. It has become a reference in policy discussions and major policy initiatives and reforms, in moments of expansions but also contraction of the space for autonomy. The publication of the EUA autonomy reports and of the two editions of the scorecard, in particular, attracted each time a lot of attention in the media in Europe. The EUA online autonomy tool is regularly used by scholars, university administrators and policymakers. It is the only such tool allowing for benchmarking of autonomy available in Europe and probably in the world. In Hungary, media outlets and universities have used the Autonomy Scorecard to denounce the restrictions imposed by the government through a series of restrictive legislative reforms mentioned. A comparison of the 2011–2016 Autonomy Scorecard results indicates that Hungary has moved downwards in the rankings in most of the autonomy dimensions, from being placed 6th to 28th on the financial autonomy dimension, from 16th place to 23rd in organisational autonomy, and from 17th to 22nd in staffing autonomy. Only the position of academic autonomy appears improved and moved up from 24 to 16 (Kenesei 2017). A major set of reforms undertaken by the Government of Kazakhstan, this time to enhance the autonomy of public universities rather than restrict it, has been based on the EUA model and has been implemented with help from EUA or associated experts.

Reporting on these reforms, Alpysbayeva and Akhmetzhanova published an article with the exact title “Reforming university autonomy in Kazakhstan: a project to evaluate the current status and generate precise reform directions using the EUA university autonomy tool” (Alpysbayeva and Akhmetzhanova 2016). At present, the Government of Kazakhstan implements a EU funded project called “Transition to University Autonomy in Kazakhstan”, which is led by EUA itself.<sup>15</sup> In Myanmar, a country far away from Europe, the reform of university autonomy is a major part of the transformation of higher education currently taking place after several decades of dictatorship and repression of higher education. This reform of the regulatory framework for autonomy is led by the ministry of education and a national education policy commission appointed by Parliament, with the support of international partners (mainly Central European University), and it is based on the EUA model as well.

The concept of university autonomy remains a contested one and it has multiple and evolving understandings in the EHEA and in the world. The EUA model has become a common European reference, conceptually and operationally, and it is increasingly influential in other parts of the world as well.

## Conclusion

The chapter identifies diverging paths of development within and between academic freedom and university autonomy. These distinct but related areas of university governance have developed differently as part of the broader EHEA evolutions. Academic freedom has become a disregarded and underdeveloped area. University autonomy, in turn, has benefited from a lot more attention. A European model of university autonomy has emerged within the EHEA, initially driven by a desire to monitor and measure autonomy. This model is now influential beyond just Europe. As is often the case in public policy, an exercise in measuring has become an exercise in definition and codification. The emergence of this model has been influenced by a mix of powerful policy narratives in higher education (e.g. knowledge society, European integration, neo-liberal democratic development). Conceptually, the evolution of both university autonomy and academic freedom in Europe has been influenced by specific epistemologies embedded in these policy narratives.

A tendency to focus on instrumental aspects of governance can be identified during the period studied (from 1999 to 2000 until today), linked to the preoccupation for increased efficiency of universities as “delivery organisations” at the service of the knowledge societies. This tendency explains to a large extent the specific nature of the EUA model of autonomy. It also explains why academic

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<sup>15</sup><http://www.eua.be/activities-services/projects/current-projects/governance-funding-public-policy/transition-to-university-autonomy-in-kazakhstan> accessed on 3 January 2018.

freedom tended to be ignored. More generally, it helps to explain the decreasing attention to moral aspects and rights (including from a legal perspective) in the discussion about autonomy and academic freedom, how they can be codified, promoted and protected.

Based on this analysis, it appears necessary to pay attention to both academic freedom and autonomy in the EHEA. Academic freedom, as a special, regulated freedom (or freedoms) of individuals in the university, must not be sacrificed on the altar of autonomy, understood as freedom of the institution.

An influential 20th century report on higher education found that in order to “perform its mission in the society, a university must sustain an extraordinary freedom of enquiry and maintain an independence from political fashions, passions, and pressures” (Kalven report 1967, p. 1). For the specific case of the EHEA, Bergan et al. rightly point out that, even more than that, academic freedom and institutional autonomy “are essential to democratic societies, and they are essential to improving and maintaining the quality of higher education and research” (Bergan et al. 2016, p. 2).

We need to recognise in Europe that both university autonomy and academic freedom are needed. In addition, we need to reinsert the rights perspective, together with the instrumental one, on both.

While universal definitions might not be useful or even possible, a European-wide endeavour of reflection on, and monitoring of both academic freedom and university autonomy is needed. Moreover, if the EHEA as a continent-wide, supranational space for policy dialogue and practice in higher education is to stay and develop, efforts for a European codification of both should be imagined, preferably with a legal value as well. These tasks could be assumed by new or existing organisations and bodies, such as the Magna Charta Observatory (provided it can find the resources), EUA, or some EHEA structures (perhaps the Bologna Follow-Up Group). We realise that any particular choice regarding who would assume this endeavour implies different routes and degrees of feasibility, given the different status of the respective organisations (e.g. voluntary expert body, association, intergovernmental). In the end, we need to remember that what is at stake is important and it is not primarily a theoretical or conceptual matter, but a practical and moral one. Universities in Europe could not fulfil their mission in the absence of good regulatory frameworks and practices for governance.

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# The Future of European Higher Education in an Age of Demographic Headwinds



## The Impact of Demographic Decline on Higher Education System Structures Funding in Romania Poland Russia

Robert Santa

Central and Eastern Europe is currently undergoing a rapid transformation due to the decline in birth-rates that occurred after the collapse of communist regimes across the region. The demographic transformation is increasingly affecting higher education systems, and the process was particularly acute in the years following 2008. The present paper aims to discuss the challenges faced by higher education in the context of population ageing and decline. Demographic trends across the European Higher Education Area are likely to make population contraction a key contextual factor in shaping higher education in the decades to come.

Currently, there is somewhat limited research aimed at assessing the impact of population decline brought about by sub-replacement fertility rates<sup>1</sup> on higher education systems. This can be linked to the fact that low fertility rates are a fairly new demographic occurrence. While low fertility rates cause rapid and often abrupt declines in birth rate and demographic cohort sizes, they take at least 18 years before they start having an impact on higher education, due to the age structure of the student body. Furthermore, countries with hitherto low higher education participation rates (e.g. Germany) often compensate for cohort size reduction via rapid growth in university access rates per cohort. As such, there is as of yet still a limited number of countries in which low TFR (total fertility rate, see below) has started having a significant impact on higher education systems, and even here the literature tends to discuss low TFR as a background rather than a transformative factor. However, the situation is likely to change dramatically over the next two decades, with steep population ageing and long-term contraction of education systems,

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<sup>1</sup>The average number of children per woman is insufficient to maintain long-term population stability. A fertility of around 2.05–2.1 is needed for long-term population stability in a 0 migration, stable life expectancy scenario.

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including at tertiary level, becoming more permanent realities. For those countries unable to establish selective immigration programmes, further negative consequences are likely also to affect the economy, social relations and possibly the role and functions of the state. These can include pension system deficits, loss of public services and even complete collapse of entire communities (see Matanle 2013 for an insight into the comparable Japanese case).

The present paper will discuss the situation in Central and Eastern Europe, one of the regions most affected by population decline brought about by low fertility rates. Specifically, it will cover Romania, Poland and Russia, three countries that represent three distinct types of population decline. Romania has seen rapid fertility adjustment with high outward migration. Poland has seen slow fertility adjustment (cohorts shrink gradually) with relatively high outward migration. Russia has seen sharp fertility adjustment with positive immigration rates and is the case country that has had the most significant rebound (registering positive population growth in the past few years).

Typically, the paper will focus on how demographic decline has shaped the structure of the higher education systems in the three countries, as well as funding approaches and realities. The paper is exploratory in nature and relies on literature, data and interviews with several types of stakeholders in the analysis it employs. It is important to note that all three countries started seeing their student populations contract around 2007, so the window in which higher education policy can be analysed against the backdrop of demographic decline is still rather small. The focus period will be 2008–2015, the years in which the steep fertility decline that occurred at the end of communism most strongly echoed in declining enrolment numbers (Tables 1 and 2).

## The Demographic Backdrop

The main factor behind the demographic decline and population contraction in Central and Eastern Europe is low fertility. As fertility fluctuates year by year based on a variety of factors, long-term fertility rates are usually measured in terms of TFR. TFR is a synthetic rate used to measure the fertility of an imaginary woman

**Table 1** TFR evolution in Russia, Poland and Romania

Country	TFR 1990	TFR 1995	TFR 2000	TFR 2005	TFR 2010	TFR 2015
Russia	1.89	1.34	<b>1.20</b>	<b>1.29</b>	1.57	1.78
Poland	2.04	1.65	1.35	<b>1.24</b>	1.38	<b>1.29</b>
Romania	1.83	1.33	1.31	1.32	<b>1.30</b>	1.58

TFR below 2/3 of replacement level highlighted in red

Lowest-low TFR highlighted in bolded red

Sources Eurostat, Rosstat, INS

**Table 2** Average cohort size evolution in Russia, Poland and Romania (*sources* Rosstat, GUS, Eurostat and INS)

Share of 1980's mean annual birth cohort size, of post-communist mean annual cohort sizes grouped into 5-year clusters (last period is a 4-year cluster)						
Country	1981–1990	1991–1995	1996–2000	2001–2005	2006–2010	2011–2015
Russia	2,331,154	1,506,644	1,265,872	1,429,145	1,670,868	1,895,560
Poland	641,475	496,327	399,361	358,711	401,501	378,065
Romania	358,093	253,808	234,931	216,127	218,141	191,556
Russia %X	100.0%	64.6%	54.3%	61.3%	71.7%	81.3%
Poland %X	100.0%	77.4%	62.3%	55.9%	62.6%	58.9%
Romania %X	100.0%	70.9%	65.6%	60.4%	60.9%	53.5%

which would theoretically be subject in a single year to all the age-specific fertility rates of women aged 15–49 recorded in a sample population (United Nations n.d.). This indicator is particularly useful for the present cases as it does not lose accuracy because of migration (as emigrant females are no longer factored in) or age distribution in the population (e.g. World War II echo effects). Birth rate, by contrast, is distorted by both fertile-age emigration (and immigration) and by echo booms or busts resulting from outstanding events (such as previous baby booms or wars). The only weakness errant to TFR is the fluctuation emerging from postponed fertility, especially if the mean age of motherhood rises rapidly.

When using TFR, a clear indicator of its impact in the long run is the relationship it has with the replacement level TFR, which is widely considered to be 2.1 in countries with low infant mortality rates. This indicates the average TFR needed for a generation to be roughly equal in size with the previous one, thus ensuring a balanced population in the long term. Kohler et al. (2002) arbitrarily define lowest-low fertility as 1.3, with populations halving in less than half a century. In the three cases covered in this paper, TFR collapsed rapidly and strongly after the collapse of communism and lowest-low fertility was still observable in Poland recently<sup>2</sup>.

Within the population, this collapse of TFR has caused a rapid decline in the size of annual cohorts (the number of people born in each year). If measured against the 1980's mean cohort size, all three countries experience a drastic decline.

In the long run, a stable TFR of 1.3 means that a population halves every 45 years (Goldstein et al. 2009). Even a small variation in TFR can have a dramatic effect on population dynamics, with a stable TFR of 1.6 leading to population halving time doubling to 90 years.

The TFR declined most steeply in Poland, but Romania had a larger decrease in cohort size due to higher emigration rates reducing the number of fertile-age women. Also, it is important to note that starting in 2007, Russia experienced a

<sup>2</sup>TFR in Poland might be deflated by its double-counting of emigrants living in other European countries.

significant revival in birth and fertility rates due to a mix of economic revival and pro-natalist policies initiated by the Putin government (Chirkova 2013).

The above numbers have a significant impact on the number of upper secondary school graduates entering higher education. A decrease of 40% in mean cohort size (at birth) implies the need to raise participation rates by over 65% in order to prevent a net loss in new admissions from the respective age cohort. The scale of TFR collapse in the three cases reflects such a rapid decline in cohort size that it becomes increasingly difficult for enrolment rates to rise faster than the recruitment pool can decline unless older learners rapidly increase their share in the student population.

It is also important to note that migration distorts the demographic realities of the three countries to some extent. Russia has tended to have an overall positive migration balance despite significant emigration while Romania and, to some extent, Poland have tended to have negative migratory outflows (Izyumov 2010). In fact, Romania's emigration rate was so high that an average of just 75.6% of the average 1980's birth cohort was still living in the country on January 1, 2014<sup>3</sup>. Given fairly low mortality rates, this is symptomatic of a very high emigration rate. But even in Romania's case, most emigration takes place among people older than the average age of front-loaded higher education participation (participation by recent upper secondary graduates). For example, 86.5% of the 1991–1995 cohort still resides in the country, as does 92.6% of the 1996–2000 cohort.

Demographic variation seems to be a fairly disregarded factor when it comes to advanced policy and systemic planning by governments and institutional actors (Kwiek 2013), though in the case of Russia, demographics have been a focal point for public policy as of 2007 (Chirkova 2013). Furthermore, some demographers tend to consider lowest-low fertility as a transitional manifestation of postponed childbirth (Goldstein et al. 2009), but in the light of World Bank<sup>4</sup> data indicating that there are over a dozen countries with ongoing, long-term fertility rates at 2/3 of the replacement level or below, such demographic realities could easily become permanent.

## **The Influence of Declining TFR and Birth-Rates on Student Populations**

Before discussing the impact of demographic change on higher education systems, it is important to distinguish between birth-rate decline and other factors that have influenced the behaviour of higher education systems. While all three cases have

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<sup>3</sup>As per INS Tempo data accessible online via an INS account at [www.inssse.ro](http://www.inssse.ro) accessed on October 1, 2017.

<sup>4</sup>World Bank data bank for fertility, available online at <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN>, retrieved on March 3rd 2018.

seen student numbers fall in 2005 (for Poland) and 2007–2009 (Romania and Russia), there are other major societal and economic trends which could be considered significant factors in determining variations in the size of student populations. For example, many Romanian interviewees pointed out the role of falling numbers of school students passing their baccalaureate examination as a key factor in falling student populations (interviews 01, 05, 06, 07). Importantly, the moment in which smaller demographic cohorts started reaching the traditional admission age of 18/19 coincided with the global economic or with rising emigration rates (in Romania in particular).

Sadly, there is a lack of sufficiently reliable statistical data or survey information to clearly estimate the impact of most of the above-mentioned factors individually. However, it is possible to calculate correlations between the size of birth cohorts and variations in the student population in each of the three countries using linear regression (Tables 3 and 4).

Application of a linear formula indicates high levels of association between average at-birth cohort sizes and student populations in each of the three countries. The value of correlation coefficient  $r$  is 0.973 for Poland, 0.956 for Romania and 0.975 for Russia. Due to the high value of  $r$ , the null (zero) hypothesis is rejected for all levels of significance despite the relatively small  $n$  (number of cases). As such, it can be determined that there is a very strong positive correlation between declining birth cohort sizes and declines in student numbers.

**Table 3** Typical university-age population cohort size and student populations

Year	Poland		Romania		Russia	
	X	Y	X	Y	X	Y
2007	613	1923	370	1030	2374	7461
2008	587	1912	374	1035	2297	7513
2009	570	1880	365	939	2158	7419
2010	552	1818	345	816	1976	7050
2011	533	1737	320	661	1782	6490
2012	517	1676	294	572	1632	6074
2013	496	1549	269	541	1507	5647
2014	472	1469	244	512	1409	5209
$n$	$n = 8$		$n = 8$		$n = 8$	

Unit thousands pers

Source multiple. X indicates average 18–23-year-old cohort size for the respective year and Y student populations

**Table 4** Coefficient of determination

	Correlation coefficient	Coefficient of determination $r^2$
Poland	0.973	0.947
Romania	0.956	0.914
Russia	0.975	0.951

This, of course, is not an absolute causal inference. The impact of other contextual factors on student population decline cannot be disproved. Nevertheless, the high level of the coefficient of determination implies that over 80% of the variation in the dependent variable (student populations) **can** be explained by variations in the independent variable (birth cohort size, 5-year average) for each of the three cases.

In any research on the topic of this article, establishing a link between declines in cohort sizes and decreases in student enrolment is important in that it indicates the fact that the compensatory mechanisms that contribute to increased enrolment outside of demographic factors (growing participation, international students, etc.) are no longer strong enough to counteract demographic headwinds.

## Changes in the Structure of the Higher Education System

One of the key areas in which a measurable impact can be seen concerning the consequences of demographic decline on universities is the structure and organisation of the higher education system itself. The precipitous decline in the number of students after 2008 transformed the structure of the higher education systems of Poland and Romania and also saw significant changes in the structure of the Russian higher education system. The decline in the student population coincided with a “perfect storm” of circumstances that hurt private institutional educations (in Romania and Poland) and part-time programmes (in all three countries) particularly hard.

Elements of this “perfect storm” include the demographic crunch itself, but other factors were involved in shifting the patterns of demand across higher education systems. First of all, the legacy of Romania and Poland’s extreme communist-era *numerus clausus* had included a large number of mature learners taking advantage of flexible part-time programmes offered on a fee-paying basis. The boom tapered off gradually and continued to do so at the same time as demographic factors started bringing down front-loaded student admissions (interviews 03, 05).

Private education was only legalized in the early 1990’s and remains, in all three cases, dominated by non-traditional forms of study, including part-time and distance education. To some degree, and especially in formerly restrictive Poland and Romania, private institutions enabled older adults to receive the degrees that were inaccessible under communist-era *numerus clausus* and ended up ballooning to over a third of the entire higher education system (interviews 03, 05) (Table 5).

The 2008–2015 decline in student numbers has spurred faster declines in private education enrolment than in the public system in all three countries, but especially in Poland and Romania. The reasons for this are complex, but have to be understood in the context of declines in the demand for non-traditional forms of education (the generations previously deprived of higher education access were now ageing and even retiring, among other factors) and especially as a side-effect of the

**Table 5** Sectorial evolution—student numbers

Edu sector	Peak enrolment			2013 enrolment			Decline (%)
	Number	Year	Share (%)	Number	Year	Share (%)	
RU—public	6,215,000	2008	86.7	4,762,000	2013	84.3	23.4
RU—private	1,298,000	2008	17.3	885,000	2013	15.7	31.8
PL—public	1,330,717	2004	69.6	1,150,859	2013	74.3	13.5
PL—private	660,467	2007	34.4	397,889	2013	25.7	39.8
RO—public	650,247	2007	63.1	461,314	2013	85.3	29.1
RO—private	410,859	2008	39.7	79,246	2013	14.7	80.7

*Data sources* national statistics institutes' databases

dual funding system specific to all three countries. There are, however, notable differences in the scale of system transformation between them.

**Russia** stands out with regard to the comparatively modest scale of its private higher education sector. While it started developing as early as the private education sectors in Romania and Poland, non-public institutions in Russia never attracted the same share of students as their Polish and Romanian counterparts. At its numerical peak, in 2008, the private education system still accounted for little over 1/6 of the entire student body. Like in Romania and Poland, part-time and distance learning were overrepresented in the system. In 2008, slightly fewer than 25% of all students in private institutions were enrolled in full-time programmes. When the smaller cohorts of the 1990's baby bust started bringing down admission totals, the Russian private sector contracted at a much slower rate than its Polish and Romanian counterparts, but faster than the public sector. Furthermore, the dominance of non-traditional education forms increased, with full-time education having a share of just 13% of the private education student body by 2013/14. By contrast, it remained steady in the public sector at around 50%.

Even though the private HE sector has downsized faster than the public one, many indicators point to a resilience not seen in either Poland or Romania. First of all, the trend of relative decline in private education was not consistent throughout the period of rapid decline in student numbers: in 2014, while the number of public institutions declined by a further 30 (from 578 to 548), that of private HE institutions rose by 11, from 391 to 402 (Rosstat 2015). And while the number of students in private institutions continued to fall faster year-on-year than in the public sector, the number of new admissions rose in terms of relative share as compared to the public system (*ibid.*). Furthermore, a long-term look at the Russian system indicates that as of the academic year 2014/2015, the public HE sector had shrunk to just a few percentage points above 2000/2001 levels in terms of gross enrolment while the private sector was still enrolling 70% more students than at the beginning of the century.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup>As per Rosstat numbers (orig Russian), retrieved on October 14, 2017 from: [http://www.gks.ru/free\\_doc/new\\_site/population/obraz/vp-obr1.htm](http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/population/obraz/vp-obr1.htm).

The public HE sector, despite losing proportionally fewer students than private universities, registered a similar level of decline in terms of number of institutions. 114 universities from the public sector (17.2% of the total) were merged or dissolved between 2009 and 2014 (Rosstat 2015). Many of these developments have been incremental and not part of a systematic strategy of system optimisation. While Russia's education demographic crisis was anticipated at its very onset,<sup>6</sup> there had been relatively few efforts to systematically downsize the public sector in order to adapt to new realities. Several declarations by Russian ministers and a new 2016–2020 strategy for HE seem to indicate that a full-scale restructuring of the public university sector is forthcoming, including the closure of two out of every five major public institutions.<sup>7</sup> Whether this is implemented and its potential effect on competing private institutions remains to be seen.

Of the three countries covered in this article, **Poland** has experienced the most moderate decline in student numbers. This is due to the fact that the abrupt collapse in birth-rates witnessed by Romania and Russia between 1989 and 1991 was more protracted. This has provided for a gentler decline in mean cohort size, starting as early as 1984 and accelerating from 1992 onwards. While Russian birth-rates bottomed as early as the 1997–2000 period, Poland only did so in 2002–2004. These smallest cohorts are not yet enrolled in higher education, hence the decline in student numbers in Poland was probably not yet complete as of 2015.

It is important to note that, much like Romania, Poland placed serious caps on the number of students admitted into higher education during the years of the communist regime (Kwiek 2013). This created considerable demand which exploded in the 1990's and early 2000's under the form of part-time courses that were organized either in a fee-paying system by public universities or in the booming private education sector. Often, these courses had non-traditional students such as older adults forming a big part of their enrolment, and the demand for them tapered off at the same time as the size of traditional student cohorts declined (interviews 02, 03). Unlike Russia, where the ratio for full-time programmes changed only moderately, almost the whole contraction in the Polish higher education system consisted of part-time forms of education (Fig. 1).

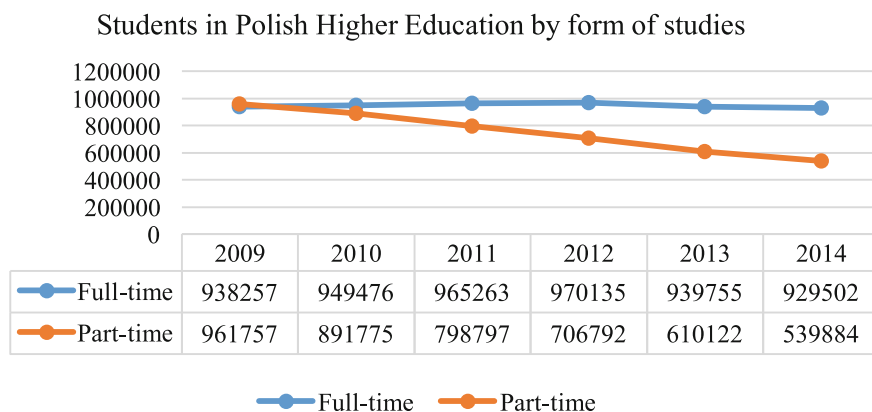
This is further encouraged by the fact that full-time studies are entirely subsidized by the state, with the exception of limited administrative fees. This applies to the entirety of the student population enrolled in state universities, unlike Romania and Russia where the dual funding policies also apply to some full-time programmes in public universities.

A further look at GUS (Polish Statistics) data indicates that full-time studies have seen their share rise in both public and private education. In private education, the share rose from 17.4 to 21.8% in the five years to 2015. The public sector saw a

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<sup>6</sup>E.g. Russian ministry “warned” fall to 4.000.000 students likely: <http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20100305111840656>.

<sup>7</sup>News appeared in the “University World News”, retrieved 14.10.2017 from: <http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20150417043945585>.



**Fig. 1** Evolution of the student population in Poland by type of studies 2009–14. *Source* GUS (2015) ([http://swaid.stat.gov.pl/en/Edukacja\\_dashboards/Raporty\\_predefiniowane/RAP\\_DBD\\_EDU\\_12.aspx](http://swaid.stat.gov.pl/en/Edukacja_dashboards/Raporty_predefiniowane/RAP_DBD_EDU_12.aspx), accessed October 17, 2017)

similar rise from 65.4 to 76.7%. Public institutions even saw a slight rise in the absolute number of full-time places available, though the closing down of fee-paying distance learning programmes represented a blow to revenues (interview 03).

**Romania** represents an outlier among the three cases in that the contraction of the education system has been both very rapid and more transformative. The most significant variation occurred in the Romanian private education system which has seen a contraction of over 80% between its peak in 2008 and the 2013/2014 academic year. The decline was so extensive that the system is now less than half the size of the single largest private university (the scandal-ridden “Spiru Haret” University)<sup>8</sup> less than a decade ago.

Part of the explanation probably lies in Romania’s static dual funding system and the scale of overall contraction within the student population. In essence, the number of state-funded places has remained constant on a backdrop of falling demand (CNFIS 2013, 2014). The result was that an ever-larger share of applicants was able to enrol in programmes in which they did not incur any costs. For traditional-age students, advantages associated with these programmes include heavily subsidized dormitory and canteen services, thus creating an appealing alternative to private institutions’ distance and part-time programmes. The number of state-funded places was constant at between 284,000 and 290,000 (CNFIS 2014). With the implosion in student numbers, these places have gone from covering under 30% of the student population to covering nearly 60%.

<sup>8</sup>A scandal had erupted in 2009 after “Spiru Haret” had allegedly recruited as many as 300,000 students in precarious study conditions. Newspaper article (retrieved October 10, 2017) available here: <http://www.zf.ro/politica/cum-a-ajuns-spiru-haret-sa-aiba-300-000-de-studenti-sub-ochii-autoritatilor-statului-video-4667002/>.



Another key factor determining the contraction of private education seems to be represented by the numerous scandals in which Romanian private education has been involved, including non-recognition of diplomas and non-authorisation of programmes (interviews 01, 05, 07). These have been prominent over most of the past 10 years, commencing even before the demographic crunch started to hit. A simple use of Google's search function for the Romanian term "Universitatea Spiru Haret"<sup>9</sup> in 2015 yielded the following results: two official university web-pages, their Wikipedia entry, two entries for judicial counselling for issues of diploma non-recognition, three press articles related to various institutional scandals, the university forum, two benign press articles on various "Spiru Haret" programmes and a mock-news article declaring that the university now offers admission to horses. In essence, half the content has a negative connotation towards the university. By contrast, a Google search for "Universitatea Babeş-Bolyai", the largest public institution, provided no information with a negative connotation in the first two pages. Furthermore, two of the search results were press articles with a positive appreciation of the university's programmes and research activities.

While the private higher education sector contracted in a rapid fashion, attempts to rationalize the structure of the public sector have largely failed. Pressure to reduce the number of universities has been growing for some time, and many institutions are now keen to undergo ranking exercises that place them in positions likely to increase attractivity among student graduates (interview 06). The need to compare institutions and reduce the number of universities had already been established as a focal point of public policy by the reports of a Presidential Commission set up to investigate higher education (Presidential Commission 2008).

An attempt was made in 2011 to create a hierarchy of institutions. The idea behind the exercise was to coordinate funding policy and to determine the privileges of various universities (for example the right to award Ph.D. titles) based on their position in the classification. The exercise also aimed to introduce incentives for institutions to merge and to establish a higher education system with fewer but more consolidated universities (interview 07). The effort failed, however, amid accusations of lack of transparency, a lawsuit by a small regional university and a lack of follow-up. While several other legal reforms have been discussed since, none has yet tackled the issue of mergers or of regional university closures.

Even as the classification scheme failed, the problem of funding for smaller public universities (which have lost a larger share of their students since 2009) has reached the point to which they are often propped up by the Ministry of Education using emergency funding. There seems to be a lack of political will to initiate closures, especially as public universities in small county capitals have an important social function, being both leading local employers and a source of prestige for

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<sup>9</sup>Search run on October 10, 2017 on the Romanian language version of the Google search engine. By late 2017, the results were considerably more positive.

economically marginalized communities (interview 01). And while the current government has maintained a commitment to the classification exercise, ongoing policies in higher education do not factor it in.

## Changes to Funding in an Age of Demographic Decline

Institutional funding patterns in all three case countries are closely linked to student numbers, with research and other complementary activities having a smaller weight in funding when compared to many Western universities. As briefly mentioned earlier, all three case countries have developed a dual funding system for public universities after the collapse of the communist regime. All three had moved from offering exclusively state-funded places (with significant subsidies for accommodation, food and transport on top of that) during the communist era to having at least 50% of their students paying some form of tuition fee at the peak of their student population growth. New and (until recently) dynamic private higher education sectors largely funded by fees emerged and have complemented the public higher education systems since the mid-90s.

In the global context, a large share of funding literature puts emphasis on the growing diversification of funds, spurred by dwindling political willingness to fund higher education (Johnstone 2007; Johnstone et al. 2006) and by policies aimed at income diversification (Privot and Estermann 2012). This is to a large extent the case for the three countries studied here up to 2005 (in Poland) and 2008 (in Romania and Russia). However, one of the immediate effects of demographic decline in the three countries is a growing role of the state in overall funding, and this is the case especially in Romania and Poland. The two countries had suppressed demand for higher education to a far greater extent than Russia during the communist era and subsequently developed a comparatively larger private fee-paying sector (during the transition). These trends were abruptly reversed once student cohorts started shrinking. Notably, Romania saw the share of university places funded by the state nearly double (CNFIS 2013, 2014), and Poland managed a slight increase in the number of full-time students despite the ongoing demographic decline. All of these tendencies happened on a background of declining numbers of students enrolled in fee-paying forms of education, as detailed in the previous section.

**Russia** defies the “normal” theoretical models associated with higher education funding diversification, due to the fact that fee-paying tracks and a private higher education sector were introduced during a time of declining student enrolment. Unlike Poland and Romania, Russia actually experienced a decline in its student population in the early years of the transition to a market economy.

For Russia in particular, discussing changes of funding solely in the context of demographics-fuelled changes in the student population is a limited exercise, in as much as the Russian economy (more so than Poland or Romania) has seen quite severe boom and bust cycles during the post-communist period. Furthermore, the

country experienced far more severe cuts in services, investment and social safety nets over the course of the early transition to capitalism (Izyumov 2010). The succession of the transition recession and the 1998 Russian financial crisis, in particular, contributed to underfunding throughout the 1990's. The share of funding for education fell from 7.0% of GDP in the 1970's to just 4.4% by 1994, amid a significant decline in nominal GDP (Heyneman 2000).

The severe economic problems Russia faced encouraged early income diversification, despite the lack of the massification pressure seen in Poland and Romania. In 1993, constitutional guarantees on access to free higher education were complemented by the creation of a legal framework for fee-paying places in state universities. Outside the legal framework for income diversification, the state sector saw the emergence of an informal academic economy consisting of tutoring fees, ad hoc fees and bribes as well as the development of complementary revenue by offering various services (Gorbunova et al. 2007; Androuschchak et al. 2013).

As the number of students expanded in a belated massification trend, the share of state-funded places within the overall higher education system fell to a minority, even within the public university sector (Carnoy et al. 2012). Nevertheless, Russia initiated a series of funding reforms during the second Putin and Medvedev presidencies. In 2008, it designated a number of elite universities earmarked to receive extra funding in an effort to enhance quality (Carnoy et al. 2012). Other than extraordinary funding issued to elite universities, state financing of public institutions was increasingly linked to student numbers, as opposed to the granting of bulk financing by ministerial authorities.<sup>10</sup> As student numbers fell, the Russian government modified quotas for students to universities, and non-elite state institutions started to take a significant hit to their funding (Forrat 2015).

However, while a debate on consolidating and reducing the number of universities and improving research funding was launched, as of 2017 they have not had a noticeable impact in changing the structure of the public higher education sector.<sup>11</sup> Calls for funding and systemic reform were made within the system itself, with "stronger" institutions demanding the closure of their "weaker" competitors (Forrat 2015). This falls in line with the policies that have aimed to gradually strengthen the role of elite universities initiated as early as 2008 (Froumin et al. 2014).

With the onus being on universities to consolidate and manage their financial sustainability, the number of public institutions and their branches has been falling slowly. The sectorial (public/private) and programme (full-time, part-time/distance) breakdown within the system has remained surprisingly stable, however. This contrasts to a large extent with both Romania and Poland and reflects the capacity of Russia's partial market system of funding governance to gradually evolve as the socio-demographic landscape changes.

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<sup>10</sup>Note that in Russia funding was provided by different ministries, based on the topical orientation of each institution.

<sup>11</sup>See the regular articles in international media on "massive closures" that seem to be repeated every few years without the closures actually ever happening, e.g. <http://monitor.icef.com/2013/03/russia-begins-to-implement-new-higher-education-strategy/>, retrieved on September 21, 2017.

A distinctive feature of **Polish higher education funding during** the transition period has been the higher share of students in state-funded places as compared to Russia and especially Romania. This has been the case even at the peak of the massification process, as all full-time programmes in public universities continued to benefit from full state financing. While the share of students in fee-paying places rose briefly above 50% during the early 2000's, it has subsequently fallen below 40%.<sup>12</sup> During the peak of the enrolment boom, even state universities tried to maximize the number of students enrolled in fee-paying part-time forms of study as these were proving more "lucrative" than state-supported places paid for from the public budget (Kwiek 2013).

When the number of students within the system started falling, the share of students now able to access the (more or less stable) number of state-paid places grew as a share of the total student population. Furthermore, the once booming number of mature learners who were enrolling in distance and part-time tracks started dwindling as the post-communist participation rebound came to an end (interview 03).

The Polish government responded to declining student numbers (and the subsequent fall in university revenues) via several policies, the key one being replacing the funding formula with a complex system that reduces the weight of sheer student numbers and introduces quality indicators as well as a growing focus on research activities (interviews 02, 03). As of the latest update of the funding formula (taking effect in 2015), student numbers have a reduced weight in the decision to distribute state funding among institutions (interview 03).

The decline in part-time programmes disproportionately affected private universities, as these mainly relied on such programmes, fuelled by what has traditionally been a client seeking marketing policy (Kwiek 2013). The decline in overall student numbers and the better individual odds of accessing state-funded places have meant that many of the smaller private institutions had to completely close down (interview 03). Others have initiated efforts to merge with other institutions in an attempt to generate economies of scale (interview 02).

Much like in Russia, changes in the funding pattern within the Polish higher education system have been gradual and incremental. Unlike Russia (or Romania, to some extent), Poland is likely to experience further contractions in student numbers up to at least 2020. Unless the funding mechanism changes, it is likely that private universities and fee-paying places in the public sector are looking at further downsizing for years to come.

**In Romania**, the main system of funding for public universities has not changed for the past 25 years. Funding is allotted on a *per-student* basis, with various indicators modifying the *per capita* amount that each institution receives, and funding of *student-equivalents* as opposed to physical students themselves. The theoretical *student-equivalent* favours institutions with higher training costs such as

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<sup>12</sup>GUS database accessible from [http://swaid.stat.gov.pl/en/Edukacja\\_dashboards/Raporty\\_predefiniowane/RAP\\_DBD\\_EDU\\_12.aspx](http://swaid.stat.gov.pl/en/Edukacja_dashboards/Raporty_predefiniowane/RAP_DBD_EDU_12.aspx), accessed September 17, 2017.

polytechnic schools and especially arts schools (the largest amounts being awarded to cinematography and music students due to small student-staff ratios). A large number of full-time, part-time and distance courses offered public universities significant, complementary sources of funding during the student population boom that preceded peak enrolment in 2008/2009. According to CNFIS (2013), the Romanian HE funding body, over half of the students in the public sector were paying fees in 2008. System-wide, less than 30% of students were enrolled in state-paid places that year (*ibid*).

Private institutions relied exclusively on fee-based funding, often from part-time and distance learning programmes. They also had an unusual share of non-traditional, mature students. For example, the largest private university (“Spiru Haret”) recruited a disproportionate number of public sector workers aiming to improve their job security by obtaining a tertiary degree (interview 05).

Romania’s funding patterns for higher education changed dramatically once the student population started decreasing. As cohorts shrank and fewer school students passed the baccalaureate, new admissions plummeted and a large share of new students was now able to access the free-of-charge, state-paid places in public universities. Not only did this change of pattern almost destroy the private higher education sector, but a few universities even failed to fill their quota of state-subsidized places (interview 01). Several small public universities are now dependent on emergency funding by the Ministry of Education to continue existing and are unlikely to ever become sustainable due to the rapid population collapse in certain regions, especially the South-West (see CNFIS 2014).

Attempts to change the funding model have existed but have been broadly unsuccessful. The most comprehensive one was linked to a system of rankings/classification devised as part of the 2010 Education law, but as of 2017 this system is not yet functional (interviews 01, 07). Ironically, there has been no change in the legal framework of funding public universities so the court-mandated cessation of ranking activities has transformed the funding of public institutions into a rather *ad hoc* activity (interview 07).

Another key trend in Romanian higher education funding has been a gradual lowering of the total funding in an incremental fashion. Successive Romanian governments lowered per-student-equivalent funding once the crisis started despite explicit legal requirements to allot 6% of GDP to education financing (interviews 01, 05). The result is a Romanian higher education system losing funding across the board, in both absolute and relative terms, from both state sources and the collection of tuition fees.

## Conclusion

The structure of the higher education system in the three countries was changed to different degrees by the process of transition-era demographic decline which peaked between 2008 and 2015. In essence, there is some differentiation between Romania

and Poland, which saw considerable transformations, and Russia, which conserved the overall structure of its higher education system despite losing over 2,000,000 students system-wide. In the latter, the fluctuations in the share of the student population between the private and the public system remained fairly moderate, and changes to the share of full-time studies in the structure of the system were fairly moderate as well. Full-time, day-time studies continued to represent just little over half of all public system enrolments in Russia with remarkable resilience, though they experienced a small relative decline in the private sector. By contrast, Romania and Poland saw the private sector education that emerged during the transition era decline. Poland's large part-time sector has decreased, and there has been a renewed dominance of full-time studies, while both Romania and Poland saw a significant rise in the share of study places directly funded by the state.

One major outcome of the demographics-fuelled reduction in student numbers has been the consolidation of the position of an elite group of (mostly public) universities that have managed to weather the storm better than their regional and/or private peers. The non-discriminatory growth of the 90's and 00's was now replaced by a reality increasingly shaped by the preferences of the highest-achieving secondary school graduates and, especially in Russia, that of governmental authorities keen on having world-class universities.

The demographic decline has also influenced public funding of higher education. Even though Izyumov's (2010) framework on the social costs of transition hints at a deeper withdrawal of the state from the public provision of services in Russia than in other Eastern European countries, contextual and demographic factors have seen Romania reach the lowest share of publicly funded places in higher education during peak enrolment (2008). Poland has, for the most part, maintained a relatively high share of public funding for higher education throughout the transition period and the subsequent period of demographic decline.

While all three countries now have a smaller higher education system to fund, there has been no systematic long-term attempt to increase relative funding, despite the possibility to do so with minimum added burdens to the overall budget. In fact, in Romania in particular, the sharp drop in student numbers has been accompanied by an overall reduction in total funding devoted to tertiary education. All three countries, however, have mulled the introduction of policies for the advancement of excellence, often favouring major research universities within the overall higher education system.

In the future, it is likely that countries facing similar demographic conditions will be confronted with a significant need to rationalize their higher education systems, both to adapt to smaller and less traditional student populations and in order to use available funding more effectively. It is likely that there will be resistance to university closures and increasing competition for public budgets for the needs of a rapidly ageing society. However, to better understand and differentiate the exact impact of demographic decline on higher education institutions, there is an urgent need for further research involving both quantitative and qualitative approaches. At least, some of this research needs to be employed in better predicting the mid-term

evolution of student enrolment, thus aiding policymakers in determining system structure, planning funding allocation and investment priorities.

Furthermore, it is important to note that population reduction and ageing will bring about other significant socio-economic changes that might shape the higher education landscape in the longer term. This includes changes in the economy, such as the speed of economic growth or the cost of labour or the structure of wages. It will also change power structures and government priorities, with an older voter base likely to push governments to invest more in areas such as social care as opposed to initial education. How all of these challenges interplay with universities and education policies remains to be seen, though a long-term preservation of the *status quo* seems unlikely.

## Annex—List of Interviewees

Nr.	Date	Country	Profile of the interviewee
1	10.05.2015	Romania	Male, central level institution with policy role
2	15.05.2015	Romania	Male, institutional representative with management role
3	18.06.2015	Romania	Female, central level institution with policy role
4	19.06.2015	Poland	Male, central level institution with policy role
5	28.06.2015	Poland	Female, stakeholder representative with policy involvement
6	30.06.2015	Poland	Male, institutional representative with management role
7	09.07.2015	Romania	Female, central level institution with both policy and management role
8	22.07.2015	Romania	Male, stakeholder representative with policy involvement

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# Implementation of Key Commitments and the Future of the Bologna Process



Una Strand Viðarsdóttir

## Introduction

The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) is a unique international collaboration on higher education, where 48 countries, with different political, cultural and academic traditions, cooperate on the basis of open dialogue, shared goals and common commitments. Although membership is voluntary, the convergence of higher education systems in all EHEA countries, and as such the entire concept of the EHEA, relies on the implementation of a common set of commitments: structural reforms and shared tools, which have been agreed to and adopted at a political level in all member countries. Furthermore, the EHEA is grounded in a number of shared fundamental values, including a commitment to academic freedom, free mobility by students and staff, institutional autonomy and the full and equal participation of higher education students and staff in institutional governance.

The EHEA is thus a wide-ranging international collaboration with the potential to bring about radical change in European higher education, and for some countries and across some borders it has managed to fulfil that potential. It proposes to change the way the entire EHEA structures higher education with a range of shared tools, values, and a level of transparency that is not found or even attempted in many other international collaborative areas, designed to allow ready, free and fully recognised mobility across the entire EHEA.

When fully implemented, the Bologna Process foresees countries working together across geographical and political boundaries, bringing with that the idea of a near to utopian higher education system of a borderless Europe and beyond, with common values and a shared fundamental philosophy; a philosophy of academic freedom, democracy, stakeholder participation, institutional autonomy, and higher education actively building social cohesion and responsible citizenship.

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## The Limitations of Utopia

A process that began with Ministers responsible for higher education in 29 European countries signing the Bologna Declaration in 1999 has expanded to 48 countries in the intervening near to 20 years. In such a rapidly expanding collaborative network, countries will find themselves at various stages in the adaptive process and advancing through it at vastly different paces. Such an uneven advancement of improvements can be workable if all within the process are moving in the same direction and aiming to meet the commitments which they have signed up for as soon as possible and at least within a foreseeable future. That determined directionality, however, is not always evident, and national reports on implementation suggest that the EHEA is still a long way from functioning in the way it is intended. In some cases, such as the recent reintroduction of the appointment of rectors by the Minister in Turkey, it may even be suggested that countries have changed direction and are moving further away from the shared Bologna goals and values that they had previously committed to.

Upon examining the level of implementation of even the most basic of Bologna commitments, such as the implementation of ECTS credits or recognition of qualifications obtained abroad, it is evident that not only are there countries which are moving very slowly, admittedly in a common direction but also that this group includes countries which are not newcomers to the EHEA. In other countries, the implementation of certain Bologna commitments has ground to a complete halt. Thus for a number of countries, implementation of even relatively simple commitments is incomplete or even non-existent. More worryingly, amongst them are countries which have participated and thus been supposedly committed to the process for a long time.

The 2015 Bologna Process Implementation report (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2015) highlights well some of these problems, only a handful of which are highlighted here. Degree structures are highly variable across the EHEA, and workloads behind qualifications differ so dramatically between education systems that those with the greatest number of ECTS credits for the first two cycles combined are 120 ECTS longer than those with the smallest number of ECTS credits for the same. In addition, many countries still offer first cycle higher education programmes that are longer than four years, as well as programmes that fall completely outside of Bologna structures, even when equivalent programmes elsewhere in the EHEA have been successfully shortened or separated into two cycles and meet equivalent learning outcomes. This difference in workload leads to problems with recognition of degrees and makes recognition of qualifications across borders problematic. It also raises the question whether learning outcomes in what should be equivalent qualifications are proportionate to the length of the course of study and the workload needed to finish it.

National qualification frameworks (NQFs) are too frequently either not fully in place or remain unimplemented. Although a number of countries have made significant progress in implementing NQFs in the period between 2012 and 2015,

some others have made no progress at all, in particular with regard to institutional implementation. The majority of EHEA countries also face challenges in including non-formal qualifications within their national qualification frameworks. Without functioning NQFs, higher education systems remain both non-transparent and difficult to compare and hinder the mobility of qualifications and credits, and by extension students and employees. Such mobility is further hindered by the fact that two-thirds of EHEA countries fail to fulfil all the requirements of the Diploma Supplement (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2015: p. 74), i.e. do not issue them to all graduates automatically, free of charge and in a widely spoken European language, despite such a commitment having been initially entered into in the Berlin Communiqué in 2003 to be effective across the EHEA from 2005.

External and internal quality assurance is evolving rapidly in the EHEA, and most EHEA countries now have established quality assurance agencies, with a majority having been demonstrated to be ESG compliant (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2015: p. 98). However, there is still a need for greater involvement of students, employers and other stakeholders at all levels of Quality Assurance in many EHEA countries, and there is extremely limited openness to cross-border quality assurance work, with only 25% (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2015: pp. 95–96) of EHEA higher education systems allowing their institutions to be evaluated by a foreign EQAR registered agency. It is worrying that such an opportunity to increase integration of quality assurance in the EHEA is only being adopted by such a small number of EHEA countries.

In addition to the problem with implementing fundamental tools of the Bologna Process, many of the fundamental values of the Bologna Process have also not been universally adopted, and some, such as academic freedom and institutional autonomy, are actively being eroded in a number of member countries. In 2015 there was such concern about fundamental values in the EHEA that in the Yerevan Communiqué the ministers stated that:

We will support and protect students and staff in exercising their right to academic freedom and ensure their representation as full partners in the governance of autonomous higher education institutions. We will support higher education institutions in enhancing their efforts to promote intercultural understanding, critical thinking, political and religious tolerance, gender equality, and democratic and civic values, in order to strengthen European and global citizenship and lay the foundations for inclusive societies.

In the intervening years, this situation has not really improved; if anything, a number of instances of blatant violation of these values by EHEA countries that have been condemned by civil society and other stakeholders, as well as other international organisations or collaborations have gone largely un-noted and have certainly been rarely commented on by the Bologna Process and its representatives. These include, amongst others, the recent amendment to the Hungarian National Higher Education Law in spring 2017 that effectively undermined the operability of the Central European University; and the infringements of fundamental values of the Bologna Process following the failed coup attempt in Turkey in July 2016 that saw the closure of academic institutions and the dismissal of deans and academic staff.

## **Tackling Non-implementation: Yerevan, Paris and Beyond**

The danger with a collaboration where the lack of implementation is allowed to pass relatively un-noted and certainly without much consequence is that participation in the Bologna Process becomes seen not so much as an agreement to higher education reform but rather as a rubber stamp of approval of a country's higher education system as it stands, albeit with a vague promise to take up all Bologna tools, commitments and values at a future date, that is never officially questioned and challenged.

Inside and outside Europe, the Bologna Process and the EHEA have been promoted by the BFUG itself and by its member countries as an example of successful internationalisation of higher education, and one that could have implications for regional collaborations elsewhere. Thus coordinated structural reform, integration and resultant interoperability between national systems are seen as being exemplary of an integration that has, to all intents and purposes, led to a unified higher education area, the degrees and credits from which can and should be relied upon irrespective of the individual country in which the learning was obtained. However, problems with non-implementation do more than tarnish that example, they negate the premise that to those outside the EHEA, the Bologna Process should guarantee that a graduate from any EHEA single country, be it Iceland, Belarus, France, Russia, Albania, Norway, Austria, Belgium or Liechtenstein (to name but a few), should have obtained the same learning outcomes, under the same quality assurance standards as a graduate from any other EHEA country.

In the period leading up to the EHEA Ministerial conference in 2015, there was an increasing lack of political interest in the Bologna Process, along with considerable discussion within the BFUG on how the lack of implementation was *de facto* undermining the process as a whole, creating a two-tiered or even a multi-tiered European Higher Education Area, where trust and transparency may have existed between the systems of some countries, but the majority would question one or other aspect of higher education offered in another EHEA country. Whether it be the perceived lack of appropriate quality assurance; an incompatibility of national qualification frameworks, or even an ingrained mistrust in a system different from your own, the end result was the same: a failure to make appropriate use of Bologna tools and with it a lack of transparency and trust. Degrees and credits from some countries might have been readily transferable to others, but that was by many thought to be the exception rather than the rule. This unease is well documented in a concept note prepared for the conference entitled "The Bologna Process Revisited: The Future of the European Higher Education Area" (2015), which clearly states that the full implementation of the common framework and tools in all participating countries should be one of the priorities for the European Higher Education Area in years to come. The notion is carried forward into the Ministerial Communiqué from Yerevan in 2015 which voices the concern that "implementation of the structural reforms is uneven and the tools are sometimes used incorrectly or in bureaucratic

and superficial ways” and highlights how “non-implementation in some countries undermines the functioning and credibility of the whole EHEA.” It goes on to state that “by 2020 we [the Ministers] are determined to achieve an EHEA where our common goals are implemented in all member countries to ensure trust in each other’s higher education systems”. As a consequence, the Work Programme for the period 2015–2018 includes an advisory group dedicated solely to working on non-implementation and mandated to put together a proposal for how to tackle non-implementation issues in the future to be put before the Ministers at their meeting in Paris in 2018. The work of this advisory group is discussed in the next section of this paper.

There is a need to put this pressure to focus on implementation problems in the political context of a Europe in a state of flux. The recent economic crisis has had a clear impact on funding of higher education across much of Europe, and there is no end in sight for subsequent austerity measures put on the sector in many countries. In others, funding has been improved, adding further to the imbalance in attractiveness of different higher education systems to international students, should they want a full degree or a more limited period of educational mobility. At the same time, there is greater pressure on education in general and higher education institutions in particular to provide students with flexible and transferable skills for life, in a world where education no longer should prepare you for a job but rather for work in whichever unknown or unforeseen sector becomes important to the national or international economy through your working life.

This pressure on higher education systems is in some places exacerbated by violation of the rights of students, staff and institutions, and nationalist and populist politics, which threaten the fundamental values of the “utopian Bologna philosophy”. The upcoming exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union, the increased closing of borders to hinder the flow of people through Europe and the subsequent loss of belief in the right to free movement have the potential to create even greater distrust of education and credits gained abroad than previously. There is, thus, an ever growing need to tackle the lack of implementation of Bologna commitments head-on and put in place a constructive process to deal with the problems encountered before the effective collapse of the European Higher Education area and the Bologna Process on which its foundations rest.

One of the challenges facing those wanting to put a greater focus on the implementation of Bologna Commitments is the notion of voluntary membership of the Process and the way in which that is interpreted by some national policymakers and institutions. The idea of a voluntary process is central to the “Bologna ideology” as is necessitated by an international collaboration which is not underpinned by a strong, universally recognised, legal framework. It is, however, essential that for the Bologna Process to function, the voluntary nature of the agreement only applies to participation but never to implementation. In short—once you sign up to take part in the Bologna Process, you should not expect to find yourself in front of a *smörgåsbord* of educational delicacies where you might choose to have two slices of salmon but ignore both the ham sandwiches and the potato salad. Instead, you sit down to a set lunch, carefully nutritionally balanced but not catered to individual

tastes. It may look less appetising than the *smörgåsbord* but its constituent parts have been carefully thought through so that unless you consume all the individual components you miss out on its full benefits and it will function less than optimally.

Many member countries, however, do not interpret the notion of voluntary membership in the way illustrated above. Rather, their understanding is that upon entering the Bologna Process countries remain free to adapt and interpret the commitments that come with such a membership in a way and at a speed that best befits their national agendas and politics. Sometimes, the end result may be the same but too often it is not. The EHEA is an area comprising 48 countries that each has its own national higher education policies, agendas, and traditions. Joining the Bologna Process frequently provides a focus and direction for fundamental national reform that would most likely have taken place with or without the Bologna Process. However, the tools of the Process enable that reform to be directional and coordinated across borders, enhancing internationalisation and mobility. Contrastingly the approach of other national governments has been less systematic. Bologna tools may operate alongside incompatible national tools, or only those tools that can be fitted within current national legislation become adopted. There is the notion that by adopting all the tools of the Bologna Process, higher education policy decisions are delegated or perhaps even lost to an international body under limited national control.

The Bologna Process is a collegiate process, and for some countries that fundamental notion of collegiality is challenged by initiating a set of actions that specifically target any of its members, even when those countries have been repeatedly documented to be unable to or unwilling to implement the commitments of the Bologna Process. Thus, there is a need for any plan to tackle non-implementation in the first instance, at least, to do so in a way that reflects that ethos of peer-support and peer-review that for many is seen as the underlying principle of the “Bologna culture”. Although a worthy notion, it is also one that makes tackling non-implementation issues essentially more difficult than had the choice been made to simply set a time limit to get things in order, with clear consequences for missing the deadline.

## **Bologna Key Commitments**

The Bologna Process has many tools, values and principles, but hitherto monitoring has primarily focused on those aspects that can be easily quantified and identified. Thus, work on non-implementation has to focus on those aspects of the Bologna Process on which we have relatively reliable information, i.e. those that have been monitored through the regular monitoring process. The Advisory Group that has been tasked with coming up with ways in which to deal with non-implementation has therefore agreed to focus its work on three key elements of the Bologna Process that meet these criteria. These commitments are seen by the group as forming the core of the commitments all countries signed up to when joining the EHEA.

It should be clarified that these three commitments in no way represent all EHEA tools, reforms and common values, but they are felt to be central to the Bologna Process because, as the foundations of the EHEA, they allow recognition and mobility across the whole EHEA to function. Furthermore, their correct implementation is a necessary prerequisite to any higher education system that embraces the fundamental premises of the Bologna Process, including the ready mobility of staff, students, credits and degrees. Having put down that initial framework, the group still acknowledges that problems with implementation also lie elsewhere.

The three key commitments identified as the focus for the current work on non-implementation are as follows:

- **A Three-Cycle System compatible with the QF-EHEA and scaled by ECTS:**  
Here, the emphasis is on programmes that are structured according to the three-cycle system of the Bologna model and scaled by the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). Qualifications achieved in each cycle should be defined in a self-certified National Qualification Framework (link provided in reference list) which itself is compatible with the Qualification Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA).
- **Compliance with the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC):**  
This key commitment calls for cross-border recognition practices to be in compliance with the Council of Europe/UNESCO Lisbon Recognition Convention (link provided in reference list), including that nations promote through the national information centres or otherwise the use of the Council of Europe/European Commission/UNESCO Diploma Supplement (link provided in reference list) or any other comparable document by the higher education institutions of the Parties. The Diploma Supplement should, according to Bologna principles, be issued automatically, free of charge and in a language that is widely read through the EHEA, as agreed by the Ministers in the Ministerial Conference in Berlin in 2003 (EHEA Ministerial Communiqué 2003).
- **Quality Assurance in conformity with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG):**  
To meet this key commitment, countries should ensure that institutions granting degrees assure the quality of their programmes following the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG 2015). External quality assurance (be it at programme or institutional level) should be performed by agencies that have demonstrably complied with the standards and guidelines stipulated in the current ESG. This is best ensured where only those agencies registered on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) are allowed to operate in the country, although if countries can show their agencies to be compliant with ESG standards through other means, such as a full membership of ENQA, that too is taken as a fulfilment of this key commitment.

Although the Advisory Group on Dealing with non-implementation has been mandated to propose a method by which to improve implementation of these three



commitments, it should be emphasised that, ultimately, it is up to the EHEA Ministers to endorse and follow through any such recommendation and agree on the eventual procedure for coordinating and monitoring it. The proposal presented below has been prepared by the aforementioned Advisory Group for the Bologna Follow Up Group and outlines how support and monitoring of support for the key commitments could be managed within the ethos of the Bologna Process (for further information on the work of this group link in reference list).

### ***Support for the Implementation of Key Bologna Commitments***

The proposed support for the implementation of key Bologna commitments (Fig. 1) is a six-step repeating process with the central purpose to improve the implementation of the three key commitments of the Bologna Process. To reflect the aforementioned ethos of the process, it is built on principles of collaboration, peer-support, peer-review and peer-counselling. It aims to highlight exemplary implementation, as well as problems of non-implementation and to improve full and effective implementation of Bologna key commitments throughout the EHEA. Furthermore, it aims to make implementation of key commitments more transparent.

The timeframe proposed for a single six-step reporting cycle is the period between Ministerial Conferences, thus following the normal monitoring timeframe

**Fig. 1** The program of support being proposed to tackle non-implementation of key commitments in the Bologna Process. Please see text for a more detailed description



in the EHEA, although action plans and actions taken under its different steps may refer to a longer time frame. The process is foreseen to be facilitated by a coordinating group appointed during the Ministerial Conference, the main purpose of which is to coordinate and report back on the process, thus ensuring that countries that are failing to meet key commitments are fully supported in taking positive action to improve the situation.

### *The Six Steps of Support*<sup>1</sup>

The six steps of the proposed programme of support are expanded and explained below. Note that although taking place alongside the normal monitoring procedures of the EHEA, this cycle is distinct from and supplementary to it, albeit with a single shared step (submission of data in step 6)

1. **Survey:** The level of implementation of the key commitments is surveyed based on data submitted during the BFUG's normal monitoring procedures, using the scoreboard indicators in the Bologna Implementation Report. The implementation of the key commitments is addressed in a supplementary report thereon.

*Timing: before the Ministerial Conference*

2. The BFUG delegates of all EHEA countries are formally invited by the BFUG co-chairs to take part in one or more thematic peer groups, each focusing on one key commitment. Based on the information surveyed and reported in step 1, countries will be asked to self-identify their needs and expertise to commit to the mode through which they can contribute to the improved implementation of key commitments of the Bologna Process in the EHEA as a whole.
  - (a) Countries that self-identify as having **successfully implemented a key commitment** (indicated by none of the relevant scoreboard indicators being red and not more than one being orange) will be invited to suggest ways in which they are willing to support countries having difficulties with implementation of that key commitment, e.g. through peer-learning, reverse peer-review or other activities designed to share their examples of successful implementation and aid others in achieving the same.
  - (b) Countries that self-identify as **not or insufficiently having implemented a key commitment** (identified by having one or more red scoreboard indicator and two or more that are orange) will be invited to indicate what peer support would be beneficial to aid implementation and how it aims to use that support.

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<sup>1</sup>The model as presented here is one that will be presented for debate to the BFUG at its meeting in Sofia in February 2018. Therefore, the model included in the paper is likely to differ in some details from that presented to the EHEA Ministers at their meeting in Paris in May 2018.

Each country is expected to join at least one of the peer groups.

As it is possible to face implementation challenges in one or two key commitments while having implemented the other(s) successfully, countries could indicate a need for peer-support in certain areas while offering peer-support in others, as appropriate.

*Timing: within one month after the Ministerial Conference*

3. **Response:** The BFUG delegate sends a reply to the Bologna Implementation Coordination Group indicating what the country's implementation goals are when it comes to the key commitments and nominates representatives to the peer groups in those areas where the country requires support or can offer support, respectively. The representative(s) should be people with responsibility for the key commitment concerned, and BFUG delegates are strongly encouraged to involve relevant stakeholders who could offer or be the recipients of peer-support or peer counselling in the area. In the peer groups, they will be able to obtain advice on how to reach these goals.

*Timing: before the first BFUG meeting of the new working period.*

4. **Peer support:** At this point, peer-support will start. The Bologna Implementation Coordination Group facilitates the grouping of countries offering peer-support and those wishing to take advantage of such support into thematic peer support groups. Each peer group will be dedicated to supporting the implementation of a single key Bologna commitment. These peer groups will include both countries that have sufficiently implemented the key commitment concerned and countries coping with challenges to be addressed for full implementation. Based on the goals identified in step 3, each peer group designs its own action plan with specified activities and impacts for each country concerned, including the expected involvement of relevant stakeholders

*Timing: As all relevant implementation information is available before the preceding Ministerial Conference, this step should be initiated no later than after the first BFUG meeting following a Ministerial Conference.*

5. **Update:** Each peer support group gives an annual update to the Bologna Implementation Coordination Group on how the countries collaborating in that group have used peer support to enhance or support implementation. The Bologna Implementation Coordination Group, in turn, produces a summary report for the BFUG.
6. **Data:** All EHEA countries submit their data for the next implementation report which will mark the starting point of a new cycle.  
The supplementary report on the implementation of key commitments (see step 1) will show current implementation alongside the level of implementation in the previous report for all countries. Submitted plans for the implementation of specific key commitments will be highlighted in the supplementary report.

The cycle of support is in itself not tied to the specific three commitments currently identified as a focus by the EHEA representatives. It merely provides an operational procedure through which such issues can be addressed and can be employed to tackle problems with implementation across the full range of Bologna Commitments and values.

The most notable problem with the model as proposed is that it contains no endpoint and no obvious consequences for those countries who are either unable or, more worryingly, unwilling to participate in it and for whom no improvement is noted over the course of the cycle. It is theoretically possible within the model as it stands that it becomes a perpetual cycle of “support” for countries in which no improvement is ever seen or judged likely. Having noted the near standstill that some countries have come to with regard to the implementation of some key commitments makes it necessary that an escalation or endpoint to the model be put forward for discussion and eventual decision by the EHEA ministers at their next conference in Paris in 2018.

## **Challenges of Monitoring and Indicators**

As mentioned above, the 2015 Monitoring report makes it clear that a number of countries were facing challenges with implementing key commitments at the time when the data on which the report is based were collected. It is also evident that some traditional key indicators may need to be adapted to pick up on-the-ground implementation of the key commitments.

Information on the implementation of the first key commitment, on the three cycles and ECTS, is relatively problem free in this regard and revealed six higher education systems in need of targeted support in this area in 2015. The scorecard indicators reflecting implementation of the second commitment could be challenged to some degree, in that the Monitoring report mainly assesses the extent to which the principles of the LRC have been enshrined in law, rather than whether national cross-border recognition practices are in compliance with the Lisbon Recognition Convention. In many countries, institutional autonomy is, rightly or wrongly, seen as preventing national legislation on recognition of degrees when, in practice, the autonomic institutions may be applying the LRC fully and competently. A recent report on the monitoring of the LRC (Monitoring Implementation of the LRC 2016) gives a more nuanced view of recognition practices and could be used to clarify the picture on recognition of foreign qualifications nationally. The 2018 EHEA Monitoring report will include some new indicators that are better suited to specifically address this second key commitment.

Similarly, the third key commitment on quality assurance takes a wider approach to conformity with ESG than has hitherto been monitored. It is thus necessary to allow for that difference in monitoring that key commitment, either through the development of new monitoring criteria or by calling for further information from national representatives.

It is foreseen that a supplementary report on the implementation of these key commitments be issued alongside the main 2018 EHEA Implementation report, and the information in that report will inform further work on tackling non-implementation following the discussions of the EHEA Ministers in 2018. That report will, similar to the main report, draw not only on information submitted by BFUG representatives and the traditional sources of education statistics but also on supplementary information from the European Students' Union (ESU) and the European University Association (EUA).

## **The European Higher Education Area at Crossroads**

The debate on implementation within the European Higher Education Area is not a new one. In a report prepared for the Ministerial conference in Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve in 2009, where the focus is on the Bologna Process beyond 2010, the concerns about the lack of implementation sound eerily familiar and could just as easily apply to a post-2020 EHEA: "Not all the objectives will have been reached by all the participating countries by 2010; it is, therefore, necessary that the Bologna Process should continue after 2010 so that its implementation can be finalized. First priority for the future should be given to completing the existing action lines." (The Bologna Process revisited 2009, p. 5).

Almost a decade on, after near to two decades of the Bologna Process and 8 years of the European Higher Education Area, the EHEA ministers stand yet again at familiar crossroads. The choice lies between standing back, as has largely been done hitherto, and relying on national implementation of Bologna commitments, gradually bringing higher education systems closer together while offering peer-learning activities on disparate and broad aspects of the Bologna Process, hoping that, with time, political processes on a national level may choose to improve implementation. As a strategy, it has the merit of being non-confrontational, with a focus on voluntary participation but, as evidenced by recent consecutive implementation reports, sadly woefully ineffective. It also runs the risk of eventually causing the EHEA collaboration to fall of the political agenda of, at least, those countries for which implementation is less of a problem, effectively ending the process.

On the other hand, the ministers can cement the work carried out hitherto by actively focusing on targeted measures to improve their collaboration; through ensuring the implementation of the common set of commitments, the structural reforms and shared tools which have been agreed to and adopted at a political level in all member countries upon becoming part of the Bologna Process and the EHEA. Doing so involves first openly admitting that the EHEA is facing problems that it cannot solve through existing procedures, and secondly requires a targeted and increased effort by all member countries, those that lag behind, those who implement well, and those which have been able to go further. Such a measure will only work if there is a shared willingness to maintain the EHEA and bring it to its full fruition.

You can liken these crossroads to ones that fork in two directions.

Straight ahead is a road that looks (suspiciously) pleasant but not too much further on, the road forks into two or even three possible directions. Those who choose one will soon find themselves far away from those who choose the other(s). This is the road of the status quo where implementation problems are left unchallenged to eventually undermine the process, creating a two-tiered or multi-tiered EHEA with limited potential and an ever-increasing lack of trust between education systems.

Your other option is what looks initially like a precipitous obstacle course but as soon as you embark upon it you are joined by like-minded supporters who guide you on your journey and help you across the hurdles. As the path keeps on winding its way onwards, the road widens, the impediments shrink, and the ground is firm beneath your feet. This is the road of peer-supported measures to improve the implementation of Bologna tools and values and with it strengthen the cohesion and core of the European Higher Education Area.

At the meeting of EHEA Ministers in Paris in May 2018, the BFUG is likely to suggest that they consider taking that second road. That together, the Ministers help each other build a stronger EHEA by adopting a model that builds on the ethos of peer-support and collegiality that has been the strength of the Bologna Process, and that has the possibility, in the future, to set an example to other regions on how to ensure implementation of reform even without a strong legal framework.

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# Unintended Outcomes of the EHEA and ASEAN: Peripheral Members and Their Façade Conformity



Que Anh Dang

## Unintended Outcomes of Regional Higher Education Cooperation

The Bologna Process is a successful European political project aimed at establishing a European higher education model as a synonym for high quality in the competition for normative leadership and providing the basis for new regional higher education projects around the globe, especially in Asia (Enders and Westerheijden 2011; Robertson 2008). The European Higher Education Area (EHEA)—a major outcome of the Bologna Process, and the Association of South-East Asian Nations' (ASEAN) Common Space for Higher Education are widely recognised as outstanding examples of regional cooperation. Each project has its own trajectories of development and model of regional governance, but both have encountered unintended outcomes.

The concept of unintended outcomes can be understood as being unanticipated, unforeseen or different from the actors' intentions or expectations. Unintended outcomes may be linked to positive, neutral or negative consequences of a policy or action. For example, the opportunistic effects of the Bologna Process which created legitimacy for some actors to introduce other changes (e.g. institutional autonomy) with positive impact on the national settings, or adverse effects of the Bologna Process in furthering neoliberal reform of higher education (Dobbins and Leišyte 2014; Musselin 2009; Telegina and Schwengel 2012). Unintended outcomes are not always framed as a failure, but in general as unwelcome or undesired effects for the majority (Burlyuk 2017).

When investigating unintended outcomes, we need to establish the purposes for which a policy or decision was undertaken. Sometimes intentions are declared, other

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times they are not explicit and difficult to ascribe. Moreover, objectives and purposes are subject to continuous reassessment, especially in a long-term and multi-layered implementation chain of regional projects. If we look at the Bologna Process, we can see that it was set up to follow a set of stated objectives (i.e. Bologna action lines and benchmarks), making it possible to follow up on the implementation by means of regular stocktaking reports. In most cases, such clearly defined objectives also enable us to identify the unintended outcomes of the process. By contrast, the regional higher education harmonisation process in Southeast Asia was not set up with concrete objectives, rather with a broad goal to “realise the vision of a cohesive and outward-looking ASEAN Community” (ASEAN 2006). We can hardly find any stocktaking reports measuring ASEAN higher education cooperation against pre-set objectives. The process of cooperation is an outcome in itself. The objectives of ASEAN regional higher education activities often become known retrospectively. This paper identifies and analyses some unintended outcomes encountered by the European and Asian regional education projects.

The EHEA was launched in 2010 and currently consists of 48 countries of which 28 countries are currently European Union (EU) members and 20 countries are non-EU members. The majority of the non-EU states are newer members admitted to the Bologna Process between 2005 and 2015. Many of the current 28 EU states, especially the Central and Eastern European countries, joined the Bologna Process during their accession to the EU. The Bologna Process structural reform in these newer EU members has become a significant part of their regional integration after their admission to the EU which, in most cases, took place in 2004 and 2007 (Dakowska and Harmsen 2015). Within the EHEA, the 48 members share a converged degree structure of three cycles of bachelor, master and doctorate, a joint credit system—the European credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS) and ratification of the Lisbon Recognition Convention for recognition of study periods and qualifications, a cross-border student mobility platform, and a European set of standards and guidelines for quality assurance.

In a similar vein, since the early 1990s, ten ASEAN countries have also been making efforts to harmonise their diverse higher education systems, thus shaping an ASEAN Common Space for higher education. Compared to the Bologna Process, the striking difference is the absence of explicit declarations on establishing such a space and a timetable to achieve the goal. Although higher education has been included in the discussions of the South East Asian Ministers of Education Organisation (SEAMEO) since 1965, ASEAN higher education cooperation really gained importance and was brought to the regional agenda at the 1992 ASEAN Summit that marked the establishment of the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA). The need for greater human resources for the new AFTA was strongly emphasised over previous regional security concerns which were a core rationale for regional cooperation. At the same time, the ending of the Cold War compelled ASEAN to reorient its activities to justify its relevance in the new context (Dang 2017). The ASEAN was also enlarged by admitting new members: Vietnam in 1995, Laos and Myanmar in 1997, and Cambodia in 1999. This reorientation has brought about several significant outcomes, such as the establishment of the ASEAN University

Network in 1995, the resumption of ASEAN Education Ministers' Meeting in 2005. The process of ASEAN regional higher education harmonisation has so far been built on previous intra-ASEAN cooperation rooted in the decolonisation strategy and the recent adaptation of the Bologna experiences with regards to student mobility and quality assurance.

The EHEA and ASEAN have achieved significant results in their own ways, but they both encountered unintended outcomes that constitute the vulnerability, peripheral status and superficial conformity of newer member countries. In Asia, they are newer members of ASEAN, such as Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam labelled by the acronym "CLMV". In Europe, they are newer EHEA members and/or newer EU members some of which are lumped together with the tag "CEEC"—Central and Eastern European Countries—and others—with the "post-Soviet" badge. These groups of countries in Asia and Europe are often seen as lagging behind, peripheral or passive (Feuer and Hornidge 2015; Zgaga 2014).

This paper, therefore, raises the questions as to what causes their peripheral status and façade conformity in the regional higher education processes, what other international pressure and influence they encounter that may divert them away from the original regional integration projects. The aim of this paper is not to judge the performance of these countries, rather analyse the underlying reasons that cause their peripheral status and façade conformity that continue to persist to the detriment of regional integration.

## **Student Mobility and Regional Integration**

### ***The Emergence of Clusters Within the EHEA***

Improving student mobility is "of the utmost importance" in the Bologna Process as stated in the 2001 Communiqué. This key goal has been supported by various pan-European initiatives and high-level strategies. In the beginning of the Bologna Process, mobility between the member countries was promoted because such mobility enables students "to benefit from the richness of the European Higher Education Area including its democratic values, diversity of cultures and languages and the diversity of the higher education systems" (Bologna Process 2001, p. 1). This priority of intra-regional mobility was an essential component of the process of creating a sense of belonging to a European common social and cultural space, thus strengthening and enriching the European citizenship. This goal was also embedded in the European Cultural Convention that was adopted in 1954 to promote cultural exchanges and history and language learning after the two brutal wars in Europe. The parties to the Convention could participate on an equal basis in the cultural cooperation of the Council of Europe, including education with a justification of constructing pan-European unity. The Council of Europe became a consultative member of the Bologna Process in 2001 and the European Cultural Convention was taken in 2003 as one of the main criteria for the eligibility of new member countries

in the Bologna Process. This criterion also delineates the definition of Europe—a Europe of culture and education manifested in the EHEA. At the 2014 Bologna Process Researchers' Conference, the Armenian Minister of Education and Science, Armen Ashotyan, reminded the participants that “with 19 non-EU higher education systems, the Bologna Process is not only an EU project, but a European project” (cited in Dang 2014). Student mobility is a key tool to realise this region-building project—the EHEA—but in practice it also makes the region segregated.

In a recent study of student mobility patterns between member countries within the EHEA, Shields (2016) uses spatial approach to visualise the student flows that show an emergence of clusters of countries. His main findings support the conclusions that the number of mobile students increased and more countries met the set targets of incoming and outgoing students, but the mobility patterns have, unintendedly, made the EHEA less integrated than when the Bologna Process began. It is the mobility patterns that created clusters of countries. The largest cluster is concentrated around Western European countries, such as the UK, German, and France, which retain a central position; a second cluster centres on Russia and encompasses many post-Soviet states (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Ukraine) and other countries in the east of the EHEA; and a third cluster consists of countries towards the south of the EHEA (Greece, Italy, Romania, Turkey). The 2015 EHEA implementation report also confirms that the inflow of students is highly concentrated. That means student mobility is self-contained in clusters which increasingly divide the EHEA into sub-regions rather than an integrated area. This emergence of clusters can be seen as an unintended outcome that challenges the concept of “European Area” and invites critical revision of the EHEA's ultimate goal and model of regional governance.

Looking into student mobility among post-Soviet countries, Heyneman and Skinner (2014) also conclude that the higher education systems of post-Soviet countries—even those within the EHEA (with the exception of the Baltic states)—are not entirely connected to those in Western and Central Europe, rather they create a circuit of student mobility distinct from other clusters. Such a connection has not been created by the Bologna toolkit, such as student mobility, nor “the necessary European dimensions in higher education, particularly with regards to curricular development, inter-institutional cooperation” (Bologna Process 1999, p. 4). Although the promotion of European dimensions is a goal and an indicator of the quality of the EHEA, there is no definition of what “necessary European dimensions” are and how they are decided. It is less likely that universities on the periphery of the EHEA, like in the post-Soviet countries, will be able to make changes to pan-European curricula that are not acceded to by the universities of the continent's central powers (Heyneman and Skinner 2014). Conversely, the post-Soviet countries with weaker economic, political and cultural ties to Europe would find it more difficult to implement the EHEA's “European dimensions” in their curricula. Therefore, using the tools such as ECTS guide or Tuning Project to “tune” higher education systems across the EHEA via degree or credit conformity in the name of integration may neither accord with the reality, nor result in recognition of qualifications in practice.

There were 270.000 Erasmus students in 2012/13 in the entire EHEA (EHEA 2015, p. 225). Russia alone hosts a total number of 226.431 mobile students internationally (UIS 2017), many of whom are from post-Soviet countries outside of the EHEA. This figure shows a large percentage of internationally mobile students who can be said to study within the EHEA. In other words, the figure can be seen as an indicator of the attractiveness of the EHEA. The sheer size of the Russian higher education system and language compatibility are often considered as two reasons for the student mobility inflows from other post-Soviet countries (Heyneman and Skinner 2014). This paper points to a stronger reason which is embedded in the economic ties between Russia and some of these post-Soviet countries, particularly Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, that formed the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) in 2014. The student mobility patterns (shown in Table 1) provide a possibility for facilitating the free movement of goods, services, capital and labour which have been agreed within this new union. The formation of this concentrated mobility cluster can also be regarded as an unanticipated outcome.

Besides the educational rationale, student mobility has two other main political and economic aims which are to create European-minded citizens committed to the concept of European culture and values and to advance European economic integration via a single market including labour mobility within the EU (Robertson and Keeling 2008). Being an outsider to the EU single market and at the margin of the EHEA, the post-Soviet countries replicate the EU's regionalism strategies to create the Eurasian Economic Union and improve their peripheral status. Economic and educational regionalisation are inextricably intertwined, and student mobility patterns define (and are defined by) the configuration of relationships between countries (Dang 2015). Such economic ties, in turn, reinforce the boundaries between clusters within the EHEA.

### ***ASEAN: From Outward Mobility to Intra-regional Mobility***

Inspired by the experience of the Bologna Process in making student mobility “the basis for establishing the EHEA” (Bologna Process 2003), the ASEAN region, which has a long tradition of sending their students outside the region, has begun to promote student mobility within the region in the last ten years. By contrast, the Bologna Process moved away from its original Eurocentric focus on “making mobility within the EHEA a reality” (Bologna Process 2005) to an “external dimension” (later rephrased as “global dimension”) and even introduced a specific target of mobility and a deadline “in 2020, at least 20% of those graduating in the EHEA should have had a study or training period abroad” (Bologna Process 2009). The common benchmark which only describes outward mobility and counts the total number of graduates in the EHEA has become outdated and even insufficient to measure mobility to and from countries outside the EHEA—an important indicator of the attractiveness of the European higher education system. Therefore, the

**Table 1** Eurasian economic union's students in Russia

Sending countries	Students to Russia	Ratio (%)	Total number of mobile students abroad
Kazakhstan	59.295	76	77.96500
Belarus	18.804	66	28.54800
Armenia	4.446	58	7.65300
Kyrgyzstan (non-EHEA member)	4.430	45	9.84400

Source UNESCO Institute for Statistics, extracted and compiled by the author in October 2017. (<http://uis.unesco.org/en/uis-student-flow#>)

definitions of “balanced mobility”, “abroad”, and “measurable and realistic mobility targets” became the decisions of each member country (Bologna Process 2012). Generally, the EHEA has changed its strategy which focused almost exclusively on intra-regional mobility to one that promotes extra-regional mobility. The ASEAN region has been doing quite the reverse.

Several ASEAN countries that have traditionally sent students to the West are now diversifying their domestic provision of higher education and enhancing its quality through partnerships with Western universities on their soil. The new educational hubs in Asia, such as Singapore and Malaysia, have not only attracted students from afar but also have become destinations for students within the region (Dang 2016; Lee 2014). As a result, intra-regional student mobility has increased. However, student inflows into these hubs are part of talent development and commercialisation agendas primarily serving national interests, rather than regional integration. Consequently, this kind of intra-mobility makes more visible the differences between ASEAN higher education systems and increases imbalance of mobility, thus causing the peripheral status of some member countries, such as Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, that have limited national economic resources to send students and limited academic programmes to receive international students.

In order to understand how ASEAN collectively promotes student mobility among its 10 diverse higher education systems, it is important to understand two key regional institutions that have been taking both bottom-up and top-down approaches to realising the ASEAN student mobility agenda. They are the SEAMEO Regional Centre for Higher Education and Development (SEAMEO RIHED) and the ASEAN University Network (AUN) which were established in 1993 and 1995 respectively, and both secretariats have since been based in Bangkok. RIHED is one of 21 specialist centres established by SEAMEO—an inter-governmental organisation of 11 Southeast Asian countries including 10 ASEAN countries and East Timor. AUN is a special association of currently 30 leading universities endorsed by the national Ministry of Education in each ASEAN country. AUN may share some features with the two European organisations, the European University Association (EUA) and the League of European Research Universities (LERU), but AUN is not an equivalent counterpart. AUN was established and sponsored by national education ministries, its participating universities,

and members of its Board of Trustees must be designated by their respective government. On the one hand, AUN functions as an agent of the governments with a delegated political mandate as part of the catching-up strategy of the ASEAN developmental states. On the other hand, AUN also operates like an independent university association when it comes to academic collaboration including student and staff exchange.

AUN activities concentrate on university partnerships within and outside the ASEAN region for capacity building and on setting regional standards and procedures for quality assurance. Since none of the centrally sponsored and coordinated regional mobility schemes, similar to Erasmus+ or Marie Skłodowska-Curie, exists in ASEAN, AUN facilitates student mobility through university partnerships, particularly the establishment of subject-specific networks. For example, networks of Southeast Asian universities in engineering, public health, business, public policy, international studies. Many AUN universities or their sub-entities (faculties, departments, schools, specialised colleges, member universities) constitute these networks which have as their primary aims to enhance research capacity of academics, share resources and educate master's and Ph.D. students. Enjoying the prestige of its elite member universities, successful cooperation experience and political support from the ASEAN governments, AUN has become not only influential in shaping regional higher education policies but also strategic in forging partnerships with universities, governments, international organisations beyond the ASEAN region, particularly with China, Japan, Republic of Korea, and the EU. Although the works done by AUN have spill-over effects on ASEAN higher education, AUN has mainly been facilitating partnerships amongst elite universities and promoting academic mobility for a small number of students who can compete for scholarships offered by either home or host countries.

On the contrary, SEAMEO RIHED's activities target a broader range of universities in the spirit of community building. The ASEAN International Mobility for Students (AIMS) is a flagship programme coordinated by SEAMEO RIHED. Originated from a pilot project between the three older ASEAN member countries, Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand, in 2009, AIMS has now become an ASEAN mobility programme, consisting of 68 higher education institutions from six ASEAN countries (Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, Brunei, and the Philippines), Japan and Korea (as of November 2016). AIMS provides short-term mobility (one semester of no more than six months) for undergraduate students in ten different study fields which are determined collectively by the participating countries. They include hospitality and tourism, agriculture, language and culture, international business, food science and technology, economics, engineering, environmental management and science, biodiversity, and marine science. There are no plans to expand the range of study fields in the near future, but rather to increase the number of participating higher education institutions in the newly added study fields (environment management, biodiversity, marine science). The sending governments provide funding for their own students, whilst their education ministries nominate the higher education institutions involved in the AIMS programme. Generally, student exchange is based on the reciprocity principle.

SEAMEO RIHED acts as the overall coordinator which facilitates communication (website, operational handbooks for international officers and students) and chairs the steering committee. The participating institutions decide on the number of students for exchange and on administrative arrangements through bilateral agreements (Sirat et al. 2016). According to SEAMEO RIHED, so far 1800 students have benefited from the AIMS programme. A future plan is to develop massive open online courses (MOOCs) to offer virtual mobility to a larger group.

Both AIMS and AUN mobility programmes operate with the principle of self-sufficiency and solidarity whereby member countries support their own participation and contribute with their academic readiness. Both programmes are of small scale in spite of the fact that ASEAN has a student population of over 15 million and over 7000 higher education institutions (SHARE 2016). There are no pre-set targets, and hence, no benchmarks to measure the level of conformity by each ASEAN member country, simply because “there is no point comparing the hard facts”, according to a representative of the ASEAN Secretariat (interview, March 2015). Unlike the pan-European coordinated Erasmus mobility scheme for the entire 37 million students in almost all study fields in the EHEA (2015), SEAMEO RIHED and AUN are organising different schemes with different purposes. “AUN promotes the elite universities in ASEAN, whereas RIHED’s activities are more towards inclusiveness” (interview, March 2015). Although there are no discernible mobility clusters in ASEAN as in the EHEA, the intra-ASEAN mobility is faced with different challenges.

*First*, due to the lack of a central coffer like Erasmus+, the sustainability of intra-ASEAN mobility depends on whether individual member governments are able to provide financial support for student mobility and for the development of international programmes at their universities. Although there is no specific EHEA budget per se, Erasmus+ (previous versions of this funding scheme) is, arguably, the de facto European coffer that sustains the implementation of the EHEA activities as well as the EHEA Implementation Reports.

*Second*, the Erasmus+ is for all EU countries, non-EU programme countries and its partner countries,<sup>1</sup> which are almost all the EHEA members. The programme does not place a limit on specific higher education institutions in these countries. All ASEAN countries participate in AUN, but with a combination of eligibility criteria, such as quality standards for AUN membership, the size of each higher education system, and the political support and financial commitment of the respective governments. Consequently, Cambodia has two universities, Laos has one, and Myanmar and Vietnam each has three universities in AUN despite the large size of their higher education systems. With regard to SEAMEO RIHED’s mobility scheme, at the moment, Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar do not participate in AIMS largely due to the absence of financial support and academic readiness.

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<sup>1</sup>Erasmus+ Programme Guide [https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/programme-guide/part-a/who-can-participate/eligible-countries\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/programme-guide/part-a/who-can-participate/eligible-countries_en) (accessed 10 November 2017).

*Third*, even when there are ASEAN regional mobility programmes, the emphasis is still stronger outside the region, especially for the students of AUN elite universities. Some government scholarship schemes of ASEAN countries even encourage their students to go afar by allocating higher grants and rewards for the students who study at higher ranked universities in the West.

In summary, unlike the cultural and linguistic clusters in the EHEA, the ASEAN higher education space is divided by the national economic status of member countries. The high-income and low-middle income countries (Brunei, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and recently Vietnam) are more active in regional projects, whereas the lower income countries (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar) are focused on policy reform, system expansion and infrastructure development. This divide also constitutes the peripheral status of the newer members.

## **The Cause of Peripheral Status and Façade Conformity**

### ***The Transformation and Dysfunction of State***

In the early 1990s, higher education reforms took place in the Central and Eastern European countries (CEEC), the post-Soviet countries and newer members of ASEAN in the context of major political and economic transformations in each country (Dakowska and Harmsen 2015; Rany et al. 2012). Generally, these transformations entail the move from authoritarian regimes to democratic ones, and from a closed planned economy to an open market economy. In the Eastern European context, the new governments relinquished their control over universities and liberalised them, both in academic and economic terms. The restoration of university autonomy was the main objective of the reform. The attitude of “returning to Europe” or “catching up with the West” in Eastern Europe was a strong impetus for reforms and it was reflected in their efforts to replace the former educational policies and practices with Western ones as quickly as possible in order to meet the needs of the market economy (Dang 2015; Dobbins 2011; Dobbins and Leišyte 2014; Silova 2011). The CEEC became “laboratories of reform” for experiments on different ideas in reshaping the higher education sector (Dakowska and Harmsen 2015). In many CEEC, higher education reforms took place during the period of their accession to the EU and continued at different stages depending on the national context. The reforms became part of a larger European integration project, in which the Bologna policy tools (degree structures, the common ECTS credit system, the Diploma Supplement, quality assurance) were no longer a reference point, but became a hegemonic influence and even mandatory criteria (Deca 2015). Joining the EU provided a windfall of benefits for many CEEC including funding and access to new knowledge for their stagnating education systems. But the EU’s “power of the purse” has spurred actions of domestic actors and exerted considerable leverage in shifting the higher education systems of the CEEC’s and



“Neighbourhood” countries’ toward the common EHEA (Batory and Lindstrom 2011). Furthermore, for those newer members of the EHEA, the Bologna agreed action lines, benchmarks and timetables were presented as non-negotiable and conformity was expected. In sum, unintended outcomes in these cases were the so-called “coercive voluntary” participation and “façade conformity” to the Bologna rules and standards.

In the CLMV countries, higher education reforms also took place during their accession to the ASEAN, there were neither requirements for structural reforms of higher education, nor financial incentives (and pressure) from the central coffer as in the EU. On the contrary, the governments (or universities) had to spend more on joining regional programmes. Their peripheral status in the ASEAN regional process is caused by the limited capacity of their higher education systems. Different wars and isolation periods have, to varying degrees, destroyed higher education in these countries. In Myanmar, a violent and erratic military regime strategically dismantled the nation’s higher education system until 2011. As of 2013, only 11% of the nation’s young people had any kind of higher education. And in most cases, the quality of that education is suspect, since learning materials are often dated or unavailable after 50 years of destruction, isolation, and neglect (Anderson 2016; Kamibeppu and Chao 2017). The November 2015 election in Myanmar gave its mandate to a National League for Democracy which is committed to reengineering the higher education system. Similarly, Cambodia was estimated to have lost 75% of its higher education lecturers and nearly all (96%) of its students through genocide, persecution and escape from the Khmer Rouge regime between 1975 and 1979 (Rany et al. 2012). Subsequently, the development of Cambodian higher education has faced many problems in providing educational services because of political instability and civil war until 1998. Hun Sen assumed the Prime Minister’s post in 1998 and he sought to rebuild higher education infrastructure almost from scratch with very scarce resources. This disastrous legacy still haunts Cambodia’s higher education system today, explaining its many challenges. With the rapid expansion of higher education in the last decade, governance remains a major challenge. There is no single authority overseeing all higher education affairs although the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS) and the Ministry of Labour and Vocational training have the most higher education institutions under their wings. However, in practice, the Cambodian higher education institutions and their regional branches were supervised by 14 government ministries and agencies and the regulatory mechanism is built around “an overdose of outdated, incoherent, patchy and reactive policy documents” (Cheong and Ghanty 2016, p. 31). In brief, in these two cases, the dysfunction of the nation-state can arguably be seen as causing the low capacity for regional integration, thus the peripheral status of the higher education system.

In Laos and Vietnam, higher education reforms have been influenced by the international partners and financial providers. Since the mid-1980s there has been a heavy external investment in the education sector in Laos, and the external development partners wielded considerable influence on development policy including higher education (Noonan et al. 2013). For example, the Asian

Development Bank (ADB) has provided grant and loan assistance of some USD 70 million in 2009 and 2016 to improve Laos' higher education systems (ADB 2016). Similarly, Vietnam has also taken three tranches of a loan of USD 150.000 million provided by the World Bank for implementing three major higher education reforms (Dang 2009). Consequently, higher education reforms in both countries have been redefining the role of the nation-state and reframing the role of the market in higher education governance.

### *The Rise of Private Higher Education*

A common trend in all CEEC, former Soviet countries, as well as in CLMV countries is the rapid expansion of private higher education providers in the past two decades (Dang and Nguyen 2014). There are many types of private higher education provision, but the three most common types in these countries are local private institutions, foreign branch campuses, and joint programmes between local public universities and foreign universities. Most of them were established in the 1990s and the number increased rapidly. For example, the number of Polish higher education institutions increased from 115 in 1996 to 258 in 2002 (Simonová and Antonowicz 2006) and 338 in 2010–2011 (Dakowska 2015). Unlike other sectors, privatisation in higher education in most CEEC has not resulted from foreign investment, rather it appeared to be a domestic phenomenon. In the CEEC, the share of students attending private higher education institutions has increased and accounted for roughly 30% of the total enrolments in Estonia, Poland and Romania, and lesser scale in Hungary, Russia, Slovenia (Dakowska 2015). However, tuition fees have been introduced in for-profit programmes at a number of public higher education institutions. Therefore, the proportion of fee-paying students may exceed 50% of the total student population (ibid). The initial reforms in most CEEC in the 1990s were to liberalise the higher education sector from authoritarian regimes, thus resulting in its partial privatisation. In the 2000s, the reforms were justified by the Europeanisation agenda and accelerated by the Bologna tools for competition (e.g. quality assurance) and by the European funds. Consequently, the demarcation between privatisation/marketisation and Europeanisation became blurred. This may be seen as an unintended outcome or at least an undeclared objective of the Bologna Process.

The newer ASEAN members also experienced an explosion of private higher education institutions. In Cambodia the number of higher education institutions grew from only 8 public institutions in 1997 to 105 in 2014, of which 66 were private, as a result of the soaring demand for higher education for the labour market after Cambodia became a member of ASEAN in 2009 and the WTO in 2004 (Rany et al. 2012; Un and Sok 2014). Private institutions serve more than 60% of students (Feuer and Hornidge 2015). In Vietnam, the number of higher education institutions increased from 153 in 2000 to 421 in 2013, of which private institutions increased from less than 10 in 1999–2000 to around 100 in 2012–2013, enrolling some

300,000 students (Dang and Nguyen 2014). In both Cambodia and Vietnam, the lack of human capital and the shortage of resources have led to the emphasis on quantitative expansion over qualitative improvement. The new private providers focus on teaching and neglect research and social public service. They offer courses which require the least investment in infrastructure and serve vocational demands, such as business, marketing, accounting, English language, information technology. Many of these institutions employ underpaid lecturers from public institutions who seek extra income.

In terms of quality, there are various issues: the joint programmes and foreign campuses are of better quality, whereas many local private providers and the unclear legislation about private higher education are sources of concerns. For example, they may offer a degree to students who can pay, but the entry requirement and student responsibility to perform may be under-emphasised. In Ukraine, for instance, the State Attestations Commission withdrew licenses from 116 educational programme, branches, affiliates in 2006 alone, just one year after the country joined the Bologna Process (Osipian 2009). In the EHEA and ASEAN, quality assurance and credit transferability are two sides of the same coin because credit transferability is a de facto measure of quality, since such transfers rely on an agreement between two institutions that the credits in question represent a certain quality/quantity of educational attainment or learning outcomes. One major unintended outcome is that the local private institutions' reputation and the quality of their programmes, on the whole, cause complications for the regional efforts of the Bologna Process and ASEAN to make degrees and credits transferable between countries.

### *Corruption in Higher Education*

Corruption is reported in many public services, but the increase of corruption in the education sector is serious in many newer members of the EHEA and ASEAN. Since national laws differ and legality/illegality are not universal, corruption in higher education is time- and space-specific and may be found in private as well as public institutions (Osipian 2009). Education is a special public good, its professional standards include more than just material goods, hence, education corruption is defined as "the abuse of authority for personal and material gain" (Heyneman 2004, p. 638). According to several studies of corruption in post-Soviet countries, phenomena such as payment for grades, bribery to gain entrance to university, or corruption in institutional accreditation and licensing have become so commonplace as to threaten the reputation of entire systems (Heyneman and Skinner 2014; Osipian 2009, 2012). More dangerously, the Russian students' attitude becomes more favourable towards corruption as they pass through their university years (Denisova-Schmidt et al. 2016) because they socialise with learning various cheating techniques and become more confident in corrupt practices. They may transfer this attitude to their professional lives, thus hampering economic and social

development. The consequences of corruption in the higher education sector include higher cost of hiring, lower graduate salaries, reduced economic returns expected to higher education investments. Furthermore, at the systemic level, efficiency reduces where corruption occurs. For example, instead of increasing the competition within the university, bribery limits competition and reduces quality (Heyneman et al. 2008).

One of the subtle but serious forms of corruption in the former communist higher education systems is associated with the creation of branches of national prestigious public universities in various provinces within the same countries. This phenomenon was pervasive in the 2000s in many post-Soviet countries and also in Vietnam, and it is different from the foreign university branch campuses which were set up in other national jurisdictions. The branches were to maximise revenue for the public universities in the form of tuition fees and other informal payments, but the quality of programmes offered at those branches was poor. These branches created room for corruption because the degrees conferred by the branches were not different from those conferred in the central (original) institutions. Moving away from a planned economy, the discourse “decentralisation” was strongly promoted in these former communist countries. However, in practice, decentralisation in the case of university branching has also led to an increase in corruption because delegation of power to lower levels created room for abusing discretion (Heyneman 2007; Heyneman and Skinner 2014; Osipian 2012).

Although some improvements have been made, an unintended consequence for regional cooperation in the EHEA and ASEAN has been that the reputation of these higher education systems derailed the transferability of credits and degrees with other countries in the region they have joined. It is difficult to imagine why a country or a university with a high reputation would allow its degrees to be made equivalent to those of a university or higher education system with a reputation for corruption. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, education is a special public good, whose function is to teach students standards of personal conduct and professional ethics. If the education system is corrupt, one can expect future citizens to be corrupt as well.

### *Influx of International Influences*

The newer members of the EHEA and ASEAN are also influenced by other international partners with different geo-economic and geo-political visions. As part of the “Belt and Road Initiative”, China established a new cooperation platform with 16 Central and Eastern European countries (CEEC) in 2012. The CEEC group includes 11 EU countries: Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia; and five non-EU countries from the Balkans: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”, Montenegro, and Serbia. All these CEEC countries were placed on the eastern side of the “Iron Curtain” dividing Europe.

The financial crisis of 2008 made the CEEC turn to China in search of investment, financial cooperation and new trade agreements. The new grouping has convened an annual “China-CEEC Summit” since 2012 ([www.china-ceec.org](http://www.china-ceec.org)). Besides a vast amount of credit for infrastructure, such as airports, high-speed railways, roads, the Chinese government planned to provide 5000 scholarships for students of the CEEC to study in China and an investment fund of USD 3 billion to expand cooperation in science, technology, innovation, environmental protection (Musabelliu 2017). A new student mobility pattern is in sight as the economic ties with China become increasingly stronger.

In a similar vein, ASEAN has also been experiencing an influx of international geopolitical changes in the region. While China is active in the CEEC, the EU is taking the relations with ASEAN to the next level with “a partnership with a strategic purpose” (EC 2015). Higher education is a priority in the partnership. A four-year EU-funded project “Support to Higher Education in the ASEAN region” (SHARE) was launched in 2015 to share the Bologna Process experience and build a stronger higher education area with 400 scholarships for student mobility within the ASEAN region. The project also gives special support to the CLMV group (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam) to narrow the development gap in ASEAN.

Moreover, the relationship between ASEAN and the United States resumed in 2009 under the Obama Administration. The ASEAN Economic Community has become the fourth largest goods and export market for the United States (USAID 2016). Alongside the traditional development donors such as Japan and the European Union, the United States and China are becoming increasingly influential in ASEAN. Since 2014, the CLMV group has been implementing the five-year workforce development programme “Connecting the Mekong through Education and Training” sponsored by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID COMET). The project supports universities and vocational schools to adapt their curriculum and teaching approach, specifically in the Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, Accounting and Tourism (STEM-AT) sectors, to better meet private sector demands and prepare graduates of the lower Mekong countries to enter the increasingly competitive labour market of the ASEAN Economic Community. Besides the cooperation with the multinational technology companies, such as Cisco, Google, Intel and Microsoft, for internships, COMET also provides short-term mobility to universities and colleges in the United States. By 2019, USAID COMET will help 20 higher education institutions equip 120,000 students with the workplace skills, and set up professional networks, such as “Women in science and technology” in the region (USAID 2016).

Although Western Europe and North America are still the favourite study destination of ASEAN students, a new trend of “studying closer to home” has emerged. Not only the generous scholarships provided by China, Japan and Korea, but also closer economic relationships between these countries and the ASEAN region have influenced student mobility. In the recent year, these three Northeast Asian countries have set targets to increase numbers of international students and the majority of students are from Asia (ASEAN included) as shown in Table 2.

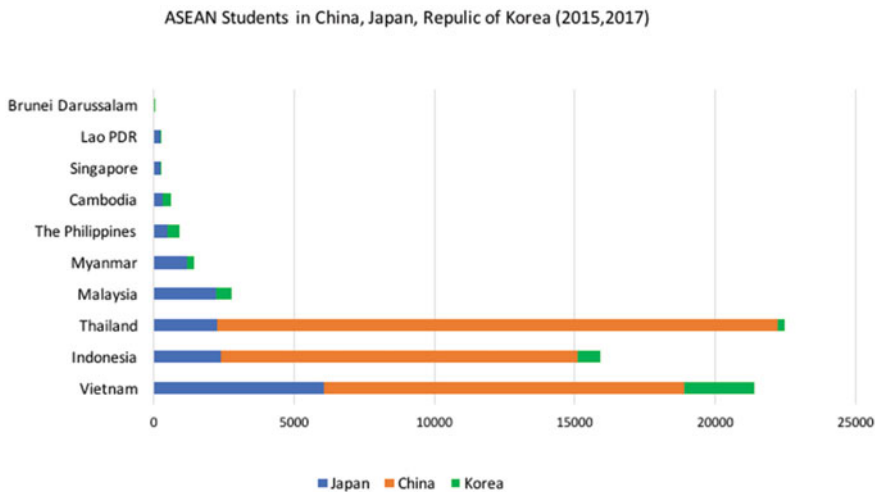
**Table 2** Asian student mobility ratio in China, Japan, Republic of Korea (2005–2011)

Countries	Incoming international students in 2005	Incoming international students in 2011	% of international students from Asian countries in 2005	% of international students from Asian countries in 2011 (%)
China	141,000	293,000	n.a	87
Japan	126,000	152,000	94%	93
Republic of Korea	16,000	63,000	92%	94

Source Adapted from (ADB/OECD/ILO 2014, p. 17)

Compared to the modest scope of the two ASEAN mobility programmes mentioned earlier (e.g. AIMS supports 1800 mobile students in 8 years), the total number of ASEAN students studying in China, Japan and Korea is significantly larger. Over 60.000 students from Vietnam, Indonesia and Thailand study in China as shown in Fig. 1.

The obvious challenge for intra-ASEAN mobility is to improve quality and diversify the study offers in English. A representative of the ASEAN Secretariat shares the thought that “[...] we want to see the gravity shifted back to the ASEAN countries, but this is a very difficult undertaking” (interview, March 2015).



**Fig. 1** ASEAN students in China, Japan, the Republic of Korea (2015, 2017). Source UNESCO Institute for Statistics, extracted and compiled by the author in October 2017, for the data of ASEAN students in Japan and Republic of Korea. (<http://uis.unesco.org/en/uis-student-flow#>). Project Atlas, extracted by the author in October 2017, for the data of students from Indonesia and Thailand (in 2015), and Vietnam (in 2013) in China. Data of students from other ASEAN countries in China are not available or insignificant. <https://www.iie.org/Research-and-Insights/Project-Atlas/Explore-Data/China>

## Implications for Future Regional Cooperation

This paper has sought to analyse some unintended outcomes and their causes of the regional higher education projects in Europe and Southeast Asia. Although both the EHEA and ASEAN aimed at creating regional common space of harmonised higher education systems, the implementation outcomes have shown the emergence and existence of clusters of countries within these spaces. Generally, in the EHEA students tended to move from the East to the West (or from newer EU member states to the older ones) and/or from smaller higher education systems to larger systems, whereas in the ASEAN region the tendency has been from larger systems (Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam) to smaller but more advanced systems (Singapore, Malaysia) where English is more widely spoken.

In both regions, student mobility has been used as a tool to construct regional higher education space, but mobility has also been a factor that divides such supposedly integrated space into segregated clusters. Apart from the usual cultural and linguistic rationales, this paper pointed out that political and especially economic relationships between countries within the EHEA and ASEAN are a decisive cause shaping student mobility patterns and clusters of countries, such as the Eurasian Economic Area and the lower Mekong basin countries. Hence, in devising future policies, student mobility cannot only be seen as an end in itself, it is vital to revisit both the political goals and academic projects (pedagogical nature) of mobility beyond the idea of benchmarking against the common standards across members.

The paper also underlined the kind of façade conformity of newer members that continues to persist to the detriment of regional integration. One cause of such façade conformity is that the Bologna Process puts “structure before content” (Papatsiba 2006) and newer members have little (or no) choice to negotiate the systemic structural higher education reforms and the pre-set benchmarks. Many components of such structural reforms and policy tools, including the use of financial leverage, have led to a number of unintended outcomes at domestic and regional levels. The Bologna policy tools were designed for regional integration and shared with Asia, but integration may not be achieved by declaring the name of a higher education area for what in fact is not. As the paper demonstrated, the rise of poor private higher education, declining quality and corruption in both public and private institutions of “the dishonest few can destroy the reputation of the honest majority” (Bergan 2011, p. 66). Thus, the recognition of qualifications across higher education systems will remain unrealistic, and regional cooperation on equal terms will only be a benign version of regional talks between ministerial officials.

Although exclusion of member countries is not yet a practice in the EHEA and ASEAN, the peripheral status—in essence, a form of exclusion—has become a key feature of the clusters consisting of newer members of the regional projects, be it higher education or economic integration projects. In the EHEA, the peripheral status or low achievement of newer members has been made even more visible by the implementation monitoring reports. This paper suggests that such a peripheral status will be improved if some of the underlying causes, particularly the issues of

corruption and academic malpractice, are tackled effectively and in different ways for specific national, institutional and departmental contexts. Beyond the “name and shame” tool, such as the implementation report, more support and assistance mechanisms should be introduced. For example, regional expert groups should be set up, relevant guidelines should be initiated, and more research into the issues should be encouraged, including the function of nation-states, economic and cultural practices and consequences of educational corruption and malpractice, governance models at macro, meso and micro levels.

In the changing global geo-economic context, even when European integration projects provide a strong reference frame and financial incentives for processes of national structural changes, various international pressure and domestic contexts still matter a great deal. Based on the analysis of several new sub-regional economic projects, such as the 16 + 1 grouping between 16 CEEC and China, interventions of the World Bank, Asia Development Bank and international donors in some ASEAN higher education systems, the paper further argued that influx of multiple, overlapping and even conflicting international influences also causes disintegration, façade conformity and complex reconfigurations of the higher education systems in the CEEC, post-Soviet and CLMV countries. Such international influences make the EHEA and ASEAN regional spaces of higher education porous.

In conclusion, the Bologna Process and EHEA carry with them a multiple and changing European identity, whereas ASEAN common space for higher education is a nascent project, hence, in the process of constructing a regional identity. The EHEA’s ability to continue to leverage this European identity and use it in the pursuit of advancing social, political, cultural and educational objectives will impact its sustainability and normative leadership. ASEAN’s deliberations should focus on academic integration activities rather than manufacturing political consent if members are to reap the benefits of regional higher education space.

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**Part IV**  
**Transparency Tools—Impact**  
**and Future Developments**  
**(Coordinated by Ellen Hazelkorn)**

# The Accountability and Transparency Agenda: Emerging Issues in the Global Era



Ellen Hazelkorn

## Introduction

Higher education is usually seen as serving the public interest because its benefits extend to the individual and society. As such, there is an implicit “social contract” that balances public support through taxation and public policy in exchange for academic and institutional autonomy. But, universities and colleges are increasingly being accused of being insufficiently accountable to students and society for learning outcomes, graduate attributes and life-sustaining skills in exchange for the funding they receive. These tensions are coming to dominate the discourse about higher education and affect our institutions around the globe. They take slightly different forms in different countries but, essentially, questions are being asked about the degree of transparency and accountability about what higher education institutions (HEI), both public and private, are doing about these matters.

This paper reviews some of the issues and tensions driving the accountability and transparency agenda and asks if our existing systems are (still) fit for the 21st century? Can traditional forms of academic accountability, such as quality assurance and accreditation, continue to deliver public assurance of the quality of institutional performance or are new/different forms required? How do we balance different perspectives with expanding societal demands? There are three sections. Part 1 situates growing concerns about accountability and transparency in the context of the massification, internationalisation and globalisation of higher education. Part 2 discusses some theoretical and policy issues, looking at Ireland as

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example of the overall trend. Part 3 concludes with a review of emerging questions around quality, performance and accountability in the global era. Finally, the paper previews the chapters in this section of the book.

## Massification, Globalisation and Internationalisation

The United States had the first mass system of higher education, beginning in the aftermath of World War 2, but massification is now evident everywhere. Over the last fifty years, the combination of demographic growth, economic and labour market changes, globalisation and internationalisation have pushed up the demand for higher education participation, and for graduates. Everywhere, our (higher) education systems have been transformed, spurred by the recognition that education is key to driving sustainable social and economic growth, empowering personal satisfaction and success, and improving societal outcomes. Despite the lingering effects of the 2008 financial crisis and the Great Recession, across OECD countries, there is on-going evidence of increased demand for highly skilled people, with skill gaps already appearing in some EU Member States (Eurostat 2017a). This rise in the number of graduates has, however, had little impact on the graduate premium (OECD 2017, 106–111), because as Carnevale et al. (2013, 7) argue, “[e]mployers are still willing to pay more for the college degree—a symbol of a worker’s attainment of the knowledge, skills, and abilities that improve productivity”.

These dynamics help explain the continuing rise in gross enrolment rates, which increased from around 10% in 1970 to over 35% by 2015 (World Bank 2016). This trend is buttressed by an on-going upswing in students as a percentage of the world’s population, forecast to rise from 4% in 2012 to 10% by 2040 (Calderon 2012; Maslen 2012). While the “relationship between demography—or more specifically the size of the younger age cohorts—and higher education enrolment levels is a complex one”, the number of tertiary students has risen from 100 m in 2000 to 207 m today and is estimated to climb to more than 262 m by 2025 (UNESCO 2017). Amongst EU-28 countries, there were 19.5 m tertiary education students in 2015, compared with 11 m in 1992 (Teichler and Bürger 2005), of which 7.2% were following short-cycle tertiary courses, 61.4% were studying for Bachelor’s degrees, 27.8% for Master’s degrees and 3.7% for Doctoral degrees (Eurostat 2017a). It is anticipated that demographic change will see a gradual reduction in the number of domestic students, but this is likely to be offset by increases in participation rates to hitherto under-represented groups, greater numbers of international students, and life-long learning (LLL)—in other words by on-going massification. The “political will [exists] to pursue the expansion of higher education systems in most countries”, and there is “still significant potential for growth in participation in many countries” (Vincent-Lancrin 2008b, 52).

Today, across OECD countries, educational attainment rates among 25–34-year-olds have reached 43% compared with only 26% in 2000. Among EU-28 countries, 33.4% of those aged 25–54 have attained a tertiary qualification

(Eurostat 2017b), and the EU 2020 Strategy aims to push the proportion of 30–34-year-olds to 40% (Eurostat 2017c). As education opportunities have expanded, so has the diversity of the student cohort. Until the 1990s, males outnumbered female students (Vincent-Lancrin 2008a). Since then, the pattern has reversed with expectations that women will be in the majority, albeit statistics hide differences in terms of field and careers (Sursock 2015). The socio-economic composition of tertiary education is also broadening, with greater numbers of new communities of students, older students studying while learning, part-time and online students, international and transnational students, and new immigrant groups. As life expectancy improves, there will be on-going demand for continuing education and retraining opportunities.

International student mobility has been another impactful trend. The number of foreign students in tertiary education worldwide has risen from 0.8 million (late 1970s) to 4.6 million (today) to 8 million (2025). While OECD countries continue to attract 73% of all students enrolled abroad, the international market is “dividing up quite differently with countries like Japan [and some European countries] getting a larger share”, and the US is losing out proportionately (ICEF 2015; OECD 2014; Fisher 2017). Various factors affect student choice, one of the biggest of which is quality or rather “perceptions” of quality, which is where global rankings, reputation and quality intersect (Hazelkorn 2015, 88–89); this can include institutional prestige or country profile and whether the qualification will be recognized by future employers.

These developments have correspondingly led to a spectacular growth in the number and range of tertiary educational programmes and providers, with boundaries between public and private blurring. While the exact number of institutions is hard to pin down, the World Higher Education Database (WHED 2017) suggests there are 18,500 degree-awarding institutions today,<sup>1</sup> while others report as many as 26,368 “universities” (Webometrics 2017). It is estimated that in 2009, the last year for which comprehensive data is available, 31% of students worldwide were enrolled in private (both non-profit and for-profit) higher education (PHE) (Middlehurst and Fielden 2011, 3; Hazelkorn 2016). Across the EU-27, the PHE share represents only c.12% provision, with a modestly higher share for Europe more broadly defined (Levy 2012). A related but different phenomena are branch campuses, which have increased from 84 in 2000 to approximately 311 in 2017, catering for approximately 180,000 students (Mok et al. 2017). Whatever the actual figure, what is clear is that the total number and diversity of tertiary providers has grown dramatically over recent decades with “almost all regulatory bodies or quality assurance agencies mak[ing] little distinction [any longer] between public and private institutions” (Mohamedbhai 2017).

Globalisation and internationalisation have introduced other changes and challenges. Because higher education’s talent and knowledge productive capacity and capability is co-dependent with national requirements for attracting mobile talent,

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<sup>1</sup>Refers to higher education institutions offering at least a 4-year professional diploma or a post-graduate degree and which are recognized by their national competent bodies.

services and products, higher education has been “drawn into the logic of capitalist expansion and world market-making” (Robertson et al. 2016). A globalised economy has certain pre-requisites and inter-dependencies around mobility flows, e.g. recognition of credentials and quality assurance; standard setting and guidelines; data infrastructure, definition and collection; credit transfer and accumulation systems; etc.

Increasing compatibility and comparability across national education systems is a prerequisite for international student mobility. Educational accreditation standards and information play an important role in removing barriers to student exchanges and supporting the global market for advanced skills. International co-operation in this field is essential (OECD 2017, 296).

Accordingly, a wide array of bilateral and international agreements, frameworks and organisations have evolved over the recent decades (Gallagher 2010; Salmi 2015). Together, a rules-based global architecture to enable, support and sustain trans-nationalising education and research is emerging in much the same way as, for example, the World Trade Organization (1995) deals with the “rules of trade between nations” in order to “help producers of goods and services, exporters, and importers conduct their business” (WTO) or the World Intellectual Property Organization (1967) “lead[s] the development of a balanced and effective international intellectual property (IP) system that enables innovation and creativity for the benefit of all” (WIPO). Trust and (re)assurance around quality is the essential lubricant.

This growing complexity of the global system has transformed higher education and reframed its relationship to the state and society in each country. Whereas historically the state provided for the needs of universities, today the university provides for the needs of society (Hazelkorn 2017, 13–14; Dill and Beerkens 2010, 4). Nation-states remain the primary arena of/for higher education, but higher education systems are open systems, with HEIs operating as global players within and across a multi-dimensional, multi-level and multi-lateral paradigm (Enders 2004). Boundaries are necessarily permeable. Indeed, the enormity of the educational enterprise has meant many practices previously taken for granted and enshrined as “principles” of academic life—such as collegiality, self-assessment, self-reporting and peer review, and self-governance—have all come under pressure and challenge. What was possible and normal for a small elite system with students of similar socio-economic and cultural backgrounds comprising c.5% of the population is extremely challenging for more complex systems and societies anticipating rates of over 60%, if not beyond. Thus, many emergent tensions and conflicts derive from and reflect the sheer logic of complex decision-making and massified systems, as well as changes in expectations around the “social contract”—the role and purpose of (higher) education in/for society and the economy. As Trow (1974, 91) noted, as the system expands in terms of students and providers, matters of higher education come



to the attention of larger numbers of people, both in government and in the public... [they will] have other, often quite legitimate, ideas about where public funds should be spent, and, if given to higher education, how they should be spent.

Together with the desire to ensure “more rapid responses from institutions of higher education” to societal requirements (Neave 1998, 2012), higher education organisations and management have, by necessity, been required to acquire greater professionalization with corresponding changes in structures and leadership. There has been a parallel re-balancing of relations between higher education and the state.

Concerns about quality and standards, effectiveness and efficiency, and regulation and governance (within institutions and at the system level)—to name but a few key issues—are matters which now concern constituencies far beyond the jurisdiction of higher education. Once higher education is recognised and promoted as the “engine of the economy” (Castells 1996), then how it is governed and managed, along with matters of performance and productivity, necessarily comes to the fore. As King (2018) says, “the very centrality of higher education outcomes for national competitiveness and prosperity and the taxpayer and consumer funds that are deployed for support require that universities and colleges are subject to levels of public scrutiny.” Institutions regularly engage in benchmarking while countries look for international comparability and solutions as they seek to “develop policies to enhance individuals’ social and economic prospects, provide incentives for greater efficiency in schooling, and help to mobilise resources to meet rising demands” (OECD 2017, 3). Accordingly, pursuance and assessment of quality and excellence have become geopolitical matters. Which bring us to issues of transparency and accountability.

## The Accountability and Transparency Agenda

Over recent decades, the concepts of accountability and transparency have taken centre stage in public and policy discourse. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2017) defines accountability as not simply accounting for or recording one’s activities, but actually acknowledging both the obligation and the responsibility to be accountable. For Bovens (2003), contemporary concerns about accountability “has moved beyond its bookkeeping origins and has become a symbol of good governance, both in the public and in the private sector.” Hence, there is an emphasis on being transparent—being responsive and answerable as well as being straightforward and truthful—for one’s actions. Bovens et al. (2014, 16) argue that these issues are associated with the “ever increasing complexity of governance” as well as broader concerns about elites and the misuse of public funds “fuelled by scandal and perceived misuse of authority in both the private and public sectors” (Leveille 2013, 6).

Others have tied accountability to the rise of neo-liberalism and new public management (NPM) and the adoption of private corporate mechanisms to public

sector organizations not just higher education (King 2009, 42). A key influence has been the view that the market and competitive principles are a more effective mechanism to effect change and bring about greater efficiency and benefit for customers and consumers, including students. It is operationalized in terms of control and power, often with respect to resource allocation (Morrell 2009). A strong evaluative culture has materialised, with an emphasis on measuring, assessing, comparing and benchmarking performance and productivity—using a preponderance of quantitative indicators in a variety of “governance indices”—to drive, monitor and evaluate behaviour as well as focusing on/funding outputs, outcomes and impacts rather than inputs (Neave 2012; Dahler-Larsen 2011; Erkkilä and Piironen 2009).

Over the years, governments have extracted themselves from direct control, ownership and/or management of (public) services. Governance has shifted from top-down intervention—in some cases micro-management—to an indirect softer, steering from a distance (Erkkilä 2007). However, recent concerns about the limits of the market in many domains, such as banking and financial services, especially in the aftermath of the global financial crisis, have provoked concerns about insufficient oversight. In response, many governments have stepped up their role endeavouring to (re)regulate in order to ensure a closer alignment with societal and national objectives, adapting various forms of networked governance. This altered relationship between the state and its various agencies reflects a broader transformation in public attitudes towards public services and the level of tax required to support them, as well as the degree of public trust between different sectors of society (Ferlie et al. 2008) and public interest in the effective and efficient use of public resources and the contribution and value back to society. This helps explain the broader movement towards enhanced democratic governance and political accountability (Lijphart 2012).

With respect to higher education, a war-of-words has opened up in many countries around educational relevance, graduate attributes, and the contribution of research as higher education institutions are accused of being too self-serving and insufficiently interested in student learning or outcomes (Hazelkorn and Gibson 2017). These issues speak to concerns about holding higher education accountable and responsible

to the public for quality. It is about meeting the needs of students, society and government. It is about the effectiveness and performance of colleges and universities as well as their transparency of their efforts. Accountability is about higher education serving the public interest and about higher education as a public trust (Eaton 2016, 325).

Higher education has traditionally relied on peer-review and self-reporting and has asked the public to trust this form of accountability. But, this system no longer seems adequate. The absence of acceptable, appropriate or sufficient (independent or external verification) mechanisms and tools has been a source of growing public scrutiny and questioning. Rankings have emerged to fill the gap; but their methodology is unsuitable, the indicators are insufficiently meaningful, and the data

is unreliable. Their over-emphasis on research and elite universities has also made them educationally and politically contestable.

These concerns have re-focused attention on the “social contract” between higher education and the “society of which it is a part” (Zumeta 2011, 134) and the extent to which that bargain is being upheld and interests balanced—sometimes portrayed as emergent tensions between (university) autonomy versus (societal) accountability (Scott 1998; Estermann and Nokkala 2009). The European University Association acknowledged that the current debate around “institutional autonomy” reflects the

constantly changing relations between the state and higher education institutions and the degree of control exerted by the state...in response to the demands of society and the changing understanding of public responsibility for higher education (Estermann and Nokkala 2009, 6).

A survey for the US Association of College and University Governing Boards (AGB) also acknowledged this friction, with about 57% of members agreeing/strongly agreeing that public perceptions of higher education had declined over the past 10 years (Gallup 2017). While people believe “some kind of postsecondary education or training” is important (Lederman 2017), surveys and studies in the United States and United Kingdom continue to highlight growing public concerns around credential relevance, career readiness and cost versus price (Public Agenda 2016; HEFCE 2010; Immerwahr and Johnson 2010; Lumina 2013; Ipsos MORI 2010). European students have said they favour *independent* reports on the quality of universities and programmes to help them decide where to study (Eurobarometer 2009, 5). Ideological as well as deepening cultural divides, evidenced by recent elections in the US, UK, France and other countries, have fed a narrative about the higher education’s isolation from the communities and regions on which they rely and in which they reside (Pew Research Center 2017; Inglehart and Norris 2016).

Ireland is an example of this seismic shift (Costello and Hazelkorn 2018). From 3200 students at the beginning of the 19th century attending five universities, there are around 170,000 students today, estimated to rise to 182,000 by 2020 and 211,000 by 2028. Over the last sixty years, participation rates have risen from about 10% at the beginning of the 1960s to 20% by 1980 and about 60% today, which places Ireland at the upper end of EU and OECD benchmarking levels (Clancy 2015, 36; HEA 2015). Fundamental to this expansion has been sustained policy emphasis on widening access at increasingly advanced levels, from the introduction of free secondary education in the mid-1960s to free undergraduate education in 1996. Today, there are seven universities and fourteen Institutes of Technology (IoT), alongside a small number of other publicly-aided institutions, and a growing number of for-profit private institutions (HEA 2016).

Initially, institutional funding was determined by a combined input and legacy model; over the last decade or so, three broad approaches have been adopted for monitoring and steering.

- 1 Performance via greater transparency, using greater levels of reporting on what is being delivered by higher education, such as regarding graduate outcomes, student feedback, quality reviews, etc.;
- 2 Performance via funding, using particular targets to widen access or reduce drop out, etc.; and
- 3 Performance assessment via compacts, using a set of guidelines and a process of negotiated agreements or compacts.

Often overlapping, there has nonetheless been an evolution from remote or hands-off governance towards more direct steering in response to the changed economic and political climate. The idea for formalizing the “social contract” between Ireland’s HEIs and society was recommended in the *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030*. It referred to the desire to establish a

new contractual relationship or service level agreement...to ensure that the requirements for performance, autonomy and accountability are aligned (DES 2011, 14).

While there has been a strong social justice and equity component to Irish education policymaking since the foundation of the state in 1922 (Hazelkorn et al. 2015), formally embedding national objectives as a strategic purpose into higher education policy marked a radical departure.

IoT institutions had been established between 1967 and 2000 with the mission to underpin economic development (GoI 1967; Walsh 2009). In contrast, the universities had a broader remit; however, since 1997, they have had a legislative requirement “to support and contribute to the realisation of the national and social development” (Universities Act 1997). Recent developments have strengthened this component. The government has formally articulated societal requirements in the form of a performance framework (DES 2013). In turn, HEIs are asked, through a series of institutional submissions, discussions and negotiations, called strategic dialogue, to affirm how, according to their mission, they will meet these national objectives. The forthcoming revised resource allocation model is likely to endorse these linkages more directly.

A big factor behind these developments has been the depth of the global financial crisis and the resulting Irish banking collapse which elevated concerns around cost, effectiveness, efficiency and impact to a national obsession as tax-payers experienced tax hikes and cuts to salary and services.<sup>2</sup> This has fed broader public, political and media discordance with what is perceived as the unwillingness of various organisations and elites, including the police, banks, charities and politicians in receipt of public funds or benefit, to be fully transparent with respect to the use of these funds and/or benefits (see Quinn 2016). The failure by one university to respond to what were seen as legitimate allegations of financial

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<sup>2</sup>Funding levels for higher education collapsed at the same time that student demand increased, resulting in a significant decline in funding per student, dropping from about €12,000 per student in 2008 to a little over €9000 by 2015, and unemployment rose from about 4% in 2008 to over 12% by 2012.

irregularities by whistle-blowers, which included preferential payments to senior staff, provoked a firestorm of critical commentary. Newspaper reports and a television programme raised a number of questions about public accountability, and there were animated discussions at the parliamentary Public Accounts Committee, especially when it was revealed that presidents of several HEIs had been less than forthcoming in their answers or material provided (RTÉ 2017a, b). These events have led to the entire sector coming under increased public scrutiny, with allegations of arrogance. A formal teaching evaluation, modelled perhaps on the UK Teaching Excellence Framework (McGrath 2017), has been mooted as well as legislative changes strengthening the regulatory authority of the Higher Education Authority (O'Brien 2017).

The extent to which these incidents have raised questions about the sector's "political" judgement and "own goal" is certainly warranted. However, more significantly, these developments signal profound changes around public trust in colleges/universities and elites, and shifting boundaries around the public interest in higher education. Twenty years ago, when the Universities Act 1997 was introduced, the universities received considerable public and political support strengthening university autonomy; indeed, this Act is the only legislation regulating the relationship between universities and the public interest. It is notable how strongly felt then was the respect for the autonomy of the universities to manage their internal affairs, and a clear concern to ensure that governments did not control the universities. Such was the outcry from Opposition parties and the media against a perceived take-over of the universities by the State, that the original Bill had well over 100 amendments during its enactment. Crucially, the then government felt it necessary to write into the Act strong protections for institutional autonomy and academic freedom giving to government, through the agency of the Higher Education Authority, limited capacity to interfere in the internal affairs of a university (Boland & Hazelkorn 2017). No such lobby exists today. Hence, whether students and the "public" genuinely distrust higher education or policymakers, the media or others are encouraging such distrust, no longer matters; a problem exists and it is affecting higher education.

## Emerging Issues in the Global Era

Defining and maintaining quality, guided by norms of peer review, has been a cornerstone of the academy since the 17th century, underpinning academic-professional self-regulation and self-governance (Rowland 2002, 248). University autonomy has been an important symbol of independence of thought and decision-making, enabling the academy to shape its curriculum and research, be the primary determinant of quality, and speak "truth to power", even in politically challenging environments. University autonomy was re-affirmed in the Bologna

Declaration with reference to the *Magna Charta Universitatum* (1988),<sup>3</sup> and it continues to be recognised as a core principle in most national legislation as well as by the European Commission.

These values were further strengthened by the Bologna Process and enshrined in quality assurance processes which are built around institutional ownership of quality with assessment mechanisms which aim to enhance rather than enforce or measure quality. Since 2005, key components of institutional based and oriented quality assurance have been reinforced by the adoption of qualifications frameworks at the European and national levels, recognition and the promotion of learning outcomes, and the paradigm shift towards student-centred learning and teaching (DG Education 2017). These actions have been underpinned by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) and formalised in the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance across the European Higher Education Area. Over the years, a meta-structure (Maassen and Stensaker 2011) has emerged, “reinforced by the international tide of “new governance” that enthused national governments...[and which] stressed transparency, accountability, and value-for-money for taxpayer-funded expenditure” far beyond the European Union (King 2018).

Ensuring qualifications are of high quality and internationally comparable and transferable is a precondition for participation in the global economy and for talent mobility. With the surge in the number and range of educational programmes and providers, inter alia for-profit and transnational/cross-border higher education, there are corresponding concerns about standards, ethics, and consumer protection. While quality and pursuit of excellence are institutional strategic goals, they are also national and global goals—albeit with slightly different implications (Eaton 2016). In this environment, there has been a growing dissatisfaction with the usefulness, robustness and comparability of traditional collegial mechanisms. Several issues come to the fore.<sup>4</sup>

First, quality is a complex term, and “despite the fact that the concept is used widely, there is no agreed-upon definition...or how it should be measured, much less improved. Everyone has their own perspective, as evidenced by the different approaches, methodologies, and choice of indicators” (Hazelkorn et al. 2018; Valeikienė 2017). Emphasis has primarily been on teaching and learning, and research, but increasingly quality extends beyond internal matters and reflects the capacity and capability of higher education to meet a variety of societal needs and demands. Collectively, these different attributes matter because of the significance of (higher) education for national competitiveness and global positioning; hence,

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<sup>3</sup>“The university is an autonomous institution at the heart of societies differently organised because of geography and historical heritage; it produces, examines, appraises and hands down culture by research and teaching. To meet the needs of the world around it, its research and teaching must be morally and intellectually independent of all political authority and intellectually independent of all political authority and economic power.” *Magna Charta*, 1988.

<sup>4</sup>This section draws on issues raised in Hazelkorn et al. 2018.

there is increasingly a geo-political aspect to quality. It is often used in association or conterminously with “excellence” as if to assert or emphasize the objective of quality. This means that quality is effectively shaped by who-ever decides, by the choice of methodology (qualitative and/or quantitative) and the indicators—rather than on the basis of standards. This means quality can appear to be variable, and hence a cause of great perplexity and unhappiness. As academics, we may understand why that is so and why context matters, but to others, this seems to be just a(nother) form of obfuscation.

Second, quality assurance has been the mainstay of the academy, but the inability to provide comparability and to provide evidence in a usable and easily digestible format has become a major handicap. In the US, accreditation has come up against similar challenges. Without doubt, promotion of and embedding a quality culture is a vital first step, especially for countries and institutions with no history or understanding of these issues (Sursock 2003). Academic self-reporting and self-governance require taking meaningful ownership of quality management by placing responsibility on higher education. But the emergence of a coterie of internationally mobile peer-reviewers—a quality “industry”—carries many of the same limitations inherent in peer-review for research. Moreso, despite its observable virtues, quality assurance is often seen as being/becoming too process-oriented and insufficiently focused on real outcomes. Indeed, it often seems that the process of assessing and monitoring is just that—a process, which is arguably an inefficient use of public resources and people’s time, a system which benefits the academy (which has a proclivity towards process-oriented actions) more than students or society and is not scalable in any meaningful way.

Third, while quality-standards remain important, higher education is now being asked additional questions about performance and productivity which get to the heart of the matter. Performance involves questions of how well the institutions operate vis-à-vis their goals and those of society; hence, the focus is on actual outcomes and outputs rather than simply the process. While quality assurance focused traditionally on individual institutions, performance-related deliberations have shifted attention onto academic and professional staff and students. There has been a long history of measuring research activity, but questions are now being asked about what academics produce through their teaching, and issues of academic outputs and outcomes, such as progression and graduate employment. This may be a welcome rejoinder to global rankings which overwhelmingly focus on research, but it speaks directly to public and political perceptions about what academics do all day or all year. Thus, what people want to know is how effectively students are learning, what they are achieving, and how personnel, institutions and the systems overall help students to succeed.

Fourth, assessing and evaluating performance is both a controversial and complex process. Traditional approaches have relied on collegiality, expert judgment, and peer review. More quantitative and externally-driven approaches have emerged in recent decades, including, inter alia, international as well as national rankings and bibliometric systems; multi-dimensional profiling and classification tools; teaching excellence assessments, learning gain initiatives, and wider usage of learning

analytics; government databases and “scorecards” alongside open-source websites; institution- and even department- or field-based approaches; and national and international benchmarking frameworks such as that proposed by the OECD (Hazelkorn and Gibson 2018). At a national level, various countries are experimenting with re-constructing the “social contract” using a set of negotiations, such as performance agreements or compacts. While the latter enables both government and institutions to set goals (apropos the Irish case aforementioned), this approach can’t respond to wider demands for international comparability. Students have been an important part of the process. But, as our systems become even more diverse, and society looks for evidence of value and impact, the participation of third-parties, including business and employers and civil society, becomes inevitable. Indeed, new technologies will make the participation of citizens easier than ever with the potential to by-pass the academy entirely.

Finally, each approach has shortcomings and is controversial in some way, but they all reflect growing frustration with the inability to identify an acceptable and transparent approach for assessing, measuring, comparing and thus improving higher education outcomes for students and society. The significance of these different instruments for underpinning and governing international higher education is illustrated by the fact that actions—involving myriad players: higher education institutions and organisations, academics and governments as well as a web of knowledge intelligence businesses—are now being progressed, with great urgency, at national as well as at international and supra-national levels. No doubt, the challenges associated with this rapidly expanding and diverse “brave new world” are problematic but it could be argued that the academy’s grip on “quality” has been overtaken by events. There is, therefore, an imperative on universities and colleges, of all missions and around the world to “start driving the bus” if they are not to be left on the side of the road.

## Chapters in This Section

There are eight papers in this section which look at different aspects of the accountability and transparency debate. Jongbloed, Vossensteyn, van Vught and Westerheijden set the scene by looking at the development of transparency instruments and evaluating their impact on higher education governance and policy over the past 10 years or so. In particular, the paper focuses on changes in governance and what that has meant in terms of public and governmental “intervention”, with particular reference to redefining the social contract.

This is followed by four papers which provide interesting case studies from different parts of the world, scrutinizing real-life experiences and what can be learned. Weingarten and Hicks examine how Ontario, Canada is developing new ways to measure higher education performance and student outcomes by linking the system directly to government objectives. Morris charts significant growth in the number and variety of transparency tools in Wales and England over the last fifty



years, pointing to the fact that each policy development has added sedimentary layers of control. Gunn looks specifically at the new UK Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) and asks to what extent TEF can actually meet policy objectives. Finally, Huang offers a view from Asia and in particular looking at the experience of China and Japan; are there lessons here for Europe?

Finally, three papers look at possible future issues and directions for the transparency and accountability agenda. Murphy and Dębowski focus on non-formal qualifications. One of the defining characteristics of advanced economies is higher participation levels which has helped transform the student cohort and multiplied the number of diverse. Non-formal qualifications, which have existed outside the traditional academic community, are becoming both more common and attractive but there are implications for qualifications frameworks. Szabo and Tück analyse the path undertaken by and commitment of Bologna signatory countries to external quality assurance procedures and assess the extent to which they have succeeded in realising trust and transparency. Finally, Lennon looks at the effectiveness of learning outcomes as a means to make quality more transparent. The paper challenges conventional assumptions and suggests learning outcomes policies are often misaligned with goals, misapplied in implementation, and misdirected in goal choice; however, rather than dismissing the concept, more work is required.

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# Transparency in Higher Education: The Emergence of a New Perspective on Higher Education Governance



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## Introduction

A new perspective on the governance of higher education systems is emerging. Worldwide, relationships between governmental authorities and higher education institutions are changing, particularly because of the increasing importance of information about the learning outcomes and the research impacts produced in higher education. Reliable information on the benefits that the various higher education institutions (and their subunits) offer to their students, funders and society in general is key for their legitimacy, their funding and their competitiveness. Transparency about these benefits is an important ingredient in the governance framework in higher education because it contributes to the quality of decision-making and accountability. In turn, accountability is expected to lead to (re-) establishment of “guarded trust” in higher education among societal stakeholders (Kohler 2009). However, information needs a succinct, yet honest presentation, otherwise, it leads to information overload, especially for stakeholders who are not higher education experts. Designing instruments that fulfil these requirements is not a sinecure.

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There are several reasons for the growing need for information. First, financial contributions made by students, taxpayers and others to higher education are rising. Second, the increasing number and variety of the providers of higher education and the (degree and non-degree) programmes they offer: public and private (not-for-profit and for-profit), traditional higher education institutions and new (e.g. online) providers, national and international offerings. The growing variety makes it increasingly difficult for (prospective) students to decide where and what to study. Likewise, governments wish to be assured that higher education providers in their jurisdiction continue to deliver the quality education and research services that are needed for its labour market, its businesses, its communities, and so on. Third, today's network society is increasingly characterized by mass individualization, meaning that a higher education institution's clients (in particular, its students) demand services that are customized to their needs, plans and abilities. Clients, therefore, constantly seek to assess and evaluate the specifics of the services offered, searching for those products and providers that best meet their specific needs.

The result is an increasing demand for transparency. From the side of students, public authorities and the general public, the need for tools that allow better and broader use of information regarding the services and performances of higher education institutions is growing. Enhancing the transparency of the activities and outcomes of higher education institutions is becoming a central objective of rethinking governance in higher education.

For three decades, several tools have been (re-)designed to increase transparency about quality and relevance of higher education across its missions: education, research, knowledge transfer and community engagement. Some (e.g. accreditation) are policy tools put in place by public authorities, others originate from private initiatives (e.g. rankings produced by media organisations). The European Union, too, supports higher education reform through analysis and "evidence tools" or "transparency tools" (European Commission 2011, 2017). In this chapter, we discuss three higher education transparency tools: accreditation, rankings and performance contracts. We present these tools in the broader context of higher education governance and policy-making, and we analyse how they are reshaped to address the growing need for more transparency in higher education.

## Information Asymmetry

The basic theoretical notion underlying the increasing interest in transparency in higher education stems from an (economic) understanding of higher education as an *experience good*. An experience good is a good or service whose quality can only be judged after consuming it. This contrasts with the textbook case of "search goods", whose quality can be judged by consumers in advance. Experience goods are typically purchased based upon reputation and recommendation since physical examination of the good is of little use in evaluating its quality. It might even be argued that higher education is a *credence good*: a product, such as doctors' consults and vitamins, whose utility consumers do not know even after consumption

(Bonroy and Constantatos 2008; Dulleck and Kerschbamer 2006). The value of credence goods is largely a matter of trust. Moreover, the “production” of higher education takes place in the interaction between teacher (or e.g. an online learning platform) and learner or student. Whether students after graduation really know how good teaching has been in enhancing their knowledge, skills and other competencies is subject to debate. Anyhow, we may safely assume that higher education clients cannot know its quality in advance (van Vught et al. 2012). Higher education’s being an experience or credence good underpins the importance of trust.

Looking at it from the perspective of the provider, academics (as teachers) may argue that they know better than any other stakeholder what it takes to deliver high-quality higher education; and surely, they have a case. At the same time, this view implicitly perpetuates—and justifies—information asymmetry between client and provider. According to the principal–agent theory, information asymmetry might tempt academics and higher education institutions not to maximise the quality of their education services. For instance, universities might—and do—exploit information asymmetries to cross-subsidize research activity using resources intended for teaching (James 1990), e.g. tuition fees.

In principal–agent theory, several means are considered to protect clients and society against abuse of information asymmetries. Broadly, the means can be categorised as either aiming to limit the agents’ behaviour to what is desirable, for instance through regulation, through contracts that guarantee that the expected quality in all its dimensions will be provided, or through alleviating the information symmetry (Winston 1999). All three categories can be found in higher education. Some of the policy tools in practice combine aspects of affecting the behaviour and of increasing transparency.

Regulation of behaviour—by governments or by the providers themselves—may involve rules on service quality, standards for teaching, qualifications frameworks, quality assurance requirements, or conditions imposed on providers. Alternatively, incentives may be devised to reward desirable behaviour and sanction undesirable behaviour; performance contracts agreed between principal and agent belong to this category. Besides, regulation may aim to alleviate the information asymmetry by focusing on the provision of information, i.e. on transparency tools. In the absence of objective information about the quality of higher education, proxies must be used. Signalling or labelling is a common proxy; the experience of current or previous clients is another. Accreditation, quality assessment, student guides and listings of recognized providers are some obvious examples in the area of higher education consumer protection. Implementing tools such as monitoring, screening, signalling and selection may be initiated by the government, but may also take place through agencies acting independently of the government or created by the providers themselves.

The emergence of new or redesigned approaches to focus higher education providers on producing value for society signals a new approach to the governance of higher education. For better understanding the role and functioning of these tools, we first turn to the emergence of networked governance, this recent perspective on higher education governance.



## Networked Governance

Many governments, because of the increasing complexity of higher education systems and their expanding array of functions, are neither capable nor willing to exert centralized control over higher education. They acknowledge, moreover, that local diversities exist among higher education institutions and realise that these providers must have regard for the needs of their own stakeholders and local clienteles in contexts ranging from rural areas to metropolises, and with varying connections to the globalised knowledge economy. Accordingly, governments are seeking new governance approaches that allow higher education institutions to refine and adapt national policies to reflect those differences of locality, mission, etc. Moreover, some governments seek to empower students and external stakeholders to exert more influence over higher education institutions while other governments continue to rely on more top-down regulation. Yet, other authorities look for smart governance approaches that combine vertical steering (traditional public administration) with elements of market-type mechanisms (new public management).

Recognising the diversity of needs and approaches, the concept of *networked governance* was developed (Stoker 2006), which combines a “state supervisory government” model—promising increased autonomy for higher education institutions—with a new focus on (local) clients. In this emerging governance approach, higher education institutions negotiate with their local network consisting of stakeholders (including students, local stakeholders, government authorities, and so on) the services they will provide. At the same time, all higher education institutions constitute a network in which they act partly autonomously, partly collectively and partly in response to the coordinating centralised “broker”, i.e. the governmental authority (Jones et al. 1997; Provan and Kenis 2007). Networked governance emerged out of the New Public Management (NPM) paradigm of the 1980s and 1990s. It widened the perspective from NPM’s focus on efficiency and effectiveness to include public values such as social equity, societal impact (relevance, producing value from knowledge) and addressing the diverse needs of the large variety of clienteles. Networked governance also relies on negotiation, collaboration and partnerships, much less on NPM’s uniform one-size-fits-all, centralised approach. The focus lies on co-creation of education and research by higher education institutions together with their relevant stakeholders while keeping an eye on individual needs and solutions of clients (Benington and Moore 2011; Stoker 2006).

Government remains a key actor in this governance model. The “supervisory government” wants to be assured that national interests are served and clients’ (in particular: students’) interests are protected. This implies some limitations on the autonomy of higher education institutions, as well as renewed demands for accountability. Government also demands transparency, it being a precondition for accountability, allowing negotiations and the build-up of public trust in higher education.

## Accreditation

We begin our discussion of transparency tools with the oldest tool of this kind in higher education. Currently, accreditation is, probably, the most common form of external quality assurance in higher education. In the 1980s and 1990s, accreditation was—from our perspective of transparency—an effort to create and disseminate information on the quality of higher education. The distinguishing characteristic of accreditation is that external quality assessment leads to a summary judgment (pass/fail, or graded) that has consequences for the official status of the institution or programme. Often, accreditation is a condition for recognition of degrees and their public funding. Accreditation is the simplest and, therefore, *prima facie* most transparent form that quality assurance can take. However, the transparency function of quality assurance is an additional aim—its primary aim is to assure that quality standards are met.

When accreditation and other forms of external quality assurance were introduced in governance relations in Western higher education systems (that is: since the 1950s in the USA and around 1985 in Europe), their focus was on what higher education institutions were offering, measured by *input indicators* such as numbers and qualifications of teaching staff, size of libraries, or staff–student ratios. Study programme managers had to describe the curriculum and—in modern parlance—intended learning outcomes. Such input indicators could relatively easily be collected from existing administrative sources. However, the relevance of input indicators for making the quality of the teaching and learning experience (i.e. the teaching and learning *process*) more transparent, or for exposing the quality of *outputs* (e.g. degree completions) and *outcomes* (e.g. graduate employment, or continuation to advanced study) was questioned. Subsequently, various adaptations to accreditation have been introduced.

In Europe as well as in the USA, and in line with New Public Management, governments increasingly wanted to know about outputs and outcomes, stressing value for money and the wish to protect consumers' (students') rights to good education. Increasingly, therefore, accreditation standards began to include measures of institutional educational performance, such as drop out or time-to-degree indicators. From the mid-1980s onwards, in the USA, this movement led to coupling accreditation with student assessment (Lubinescu et al. 2001) while in Europe parallel developments ensued especially since the articulation of the *European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance* (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education 2005; European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education et al. 2015). From a governmental, accountability perspective, the focus was mostly on graduation rates (or their complement: drop-out rates), and in the USA also on students' loan default (since graduates who cannot pay back their federal loans pose a financial risk to the government).

As a recent result, after many years of debate about the conservatism and lack of pertinence of accreditation in the USA, and following incremental policy changes, in 2015 the so-called Bennet-Rubio Bill was proposed (reintroduced in 2017) to

focus accreditation on outcomes-based quality reviews, with a focus on demonstrating—presumably also to the public—measures of student learning, completion and return on investment.<sup>1</sup>

In several European countries (e.g. Sweden and the Netherlands), the focus of accreditation has recently emphasised achieved learning outcomes. The degree to which study programmes succeed in making students learn what the curriculum intends to teach is assumed to present a more transparent, more pertinent, and more locally-differentiated picture of quality. However, prospective students derive little information from the accreditation status of a study programme, as it is a binary piece of information. Additionally, some academics regard this approach as an infringement of their academic freedom rather than as aiding quality enhancement. The emphasis on achieved learning outcomes redirects accreditation more towards the diversified information needs of students, i.e. more on higher education's public value and intends to enhance transparency. Still, the additional effort needed to assess achieved learning outcomes may produce better and more useful information, i.e. higher levels of transparency. However, this is only the case if the assessment of learning outcomes at the programme level is comparative in nature, preferably on an international scale, and the results are made public. Today's global order in higher education is leading to huge information asymmetry challenges, which necessitate an international, comparative assessment of students' learning outcomes based on valid and reliable learning metrics (Van Damme 2015).

The recent move in several European countries, including e.g. Germany, towards institution-level accreditation reduces transparency for clients and increases again the information asymmetry in favour of higher education providers unless other arrangements ensure publication of programme-level quality information.

Admittedly, whether students are interested in measures of achieved learning is another matter. Even if students behave as rationally as policy would have it, they would not only be interested in outcomes in the distant (uncertain) future but also in characteristics of the educational process and its context. In other words, there are good reasons for students' interest in matters of education delivery, methods and technologies of teaching, intensity of teaching, teaching staff quality, numbers and accessibility of education facilities, availability of educational support and so on. Students (and others) will most likely also be interested in the current students' satisfaction with such factors, allowing them to benchmark satisfaction scores across different institutions and thus to make proxy assessments of course quality. However, in accreditation systems, such information is often hard to find. Unlocking this information is one of the challenges in further redesigning accreditation mechanisms towards stronger transparency tools. Various semi-public and private information websites have been developed since about 20 years to do just this, e.g. the "Die Zeit" ranking in Germany, or Studychoice123 in the Netherlands. The UK's recent teaching excellence framework (TEF) leads to similar information.

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<sup>1</sup>See [www.chea.org/4DCGI/cms/review.html?Action=CMS\\_Document&DocID=1045](http://www.chea.org/4DCGI/cms/review.html?Action=CMS_Document&DocID=1045); accessed 2017-09-19.

The German and Dutch approaches rely on detailed, multi-dimensional information while the UK approach is to simplify all the information into three ratings (bronze, silver or gold provision). There is a trade-off between *prima facie* transparency for the masses (UK) and in-depth information for an interested audience (Germany and the Netherlands).

Meanwhile, allowing cross-institutional comparisons based on student satisfaction scores and student outcomes is also one of the objectives potentially addressed by university rankings.

## Rankings

Whereas quality assurance and accreditation were introduced as transparency instruments mainly on the initiative of governments (Brennan and Shah 2000), university rankings have appeared mostly through private (media) initiatives. Rankings emerged in reaction to the binary (pass/fail recognition) information resulting from accreditation. They intend to address a need for more fine-grained distinctions in a context where many institutions and programmes pass the basic accreditation threshold.

Rankings, in this way, may assist students in making choices. They can be helpful to potential customers of higher education institutions as well as to policymakers and politicians. In addition, they offer snap-shot pictures of the performance of higher education institutions. Such apparently *prima facie* understandable league tables appear to be attractive to the general public.

It is widely recognized that, although current global rankings such as the Times Higher Education, QS or Shanghai rankings are controversial, they are here to stay and that especially global university league tables have a considerable impact on decision-makers worldwide, including those in higher education institutions (Hazelkorn 2011). Rankings reflect the increased international competition among universities and countries for talent and resources; simultaneously, they reinforce that competition. On the positive side, they urge decision-makers to think bigger and set the bar higher, especially in the research universities that heavily feature in the current global league tables. Yet, major concerns persist about the rankings' methodological underpinnings and their drive towards stratification rather than diversification.

The rankings that first appeared in the USA and later on elsewhere in the world have received much criticism (Dill 2009; Hazelkorn 2011). We distinguish the following sets of problems surrounding the familiar global rankings (Federkeil et al. 2012). First, traditional university rankings do not distinguish their various users' different information needs but provide a single, fixed ranking for all. Second, they ignore intra-institutional diversity, presenting higher education institutions as a whole, while research and education are "produced" in faculties, hospitals and laboratories, etc., which each may exhibit quite different qualities. Third, rankings tend to use available information on a narrow set of dimensions only,

overemphasizing research. This suggests to lay users that more and more frequently cited research publications reflect better education. Fourth, the bibliometric databases used for the underlying information on research output and impact on peer researchers (mostly World of Science and Scopus) mostly contain journal articles, while journal articles are a type of scientific communication that is relevant for many natural science and medicine disciplines, but less so for areas like engineering, humanities and social sciences. Moreover, the journals covered in these databases are mostly English-language journals, largely disregarding other languages. Fifth, the diverse types of information and indicators that underlie rankings are weighted by the ranking producers and lumped into a single composite value for each university. This is done without any explicit—let alone empirically corroborated—theory on the relative importance and priorities of the indicators. Changing the ranking methodology—not uncommon in some rankings—produces different scores for higher education institutions even though their actual performance does not change. Sixth, the composite indicator value is converted to a position in a league table, suggesting that #1 is better than #2 and that #41 is better than #42; thus, “random fluctuations may be misinterpreted as real differences” (Müller-Böling and Federkeil 2007).

Given these criticisms, some analysts (including this chapter’s authors) have endeavoured to construct alternative rankings and in recent years—partly due to these efforts—not only innovative rankings have appeared but also the methodology of traditional global rankings has improved: information on individual areas (fields, disciplines) was added to the global rankings and the dimensions of the data included were broadened.

In particular, U-Multirank (van Vught and Ziegele 2012) has addressed the shortcomings of the traditional global rankings. As a transparency tool, this ranking is very much in line with a more networked governance approach. Firstly, because U-Multirank takes a multi-dimensional view of university performance; when comparing higher education institutions, it informs about the separate activities the institution engages in: teaching and learning, research, knowledge transfer, international orientation and regional engagement. Secondly, U-Multirank invites its users to compare institutions with similar profiles, thus enabling comparison on equal terms, rather than “comparing apples with oranges”.<sup>2</sup> From thereon, it allows users to choose from a menu of performance indicators, without combining indicators into a weighted score or a numbered league table position, giving users the chance to create rankings relevant to their information needs. Thirdly, U-Multirank assigns scores on individual indicators using five broad performance groups (“very good” to “weak”) to compensate for imperfect comparability of information internationally. Finally, U-Multirank complements institutional information pertinent to the whole institution with a large set of subject (field-based) performance profiles, focusing on particular academic disciplines or groups of programmes,

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<sup>2</sup>Thus, U-Multirank gives a level playing field in rankings to, e.g., teaching-oriented higher education institutions, rather than prescribe the research university as the only “winning” option.

using indicators specifically relevant to the separate subjects (e.g. laboratories in experimental sciences, internships in professional areas). Whereas transparency on individual fields is particularly important to, e.g., students looking for an institution that offers the subject they want to study, other users (such as university presidents, researchers, policymakers, businesses and alumni) may be interested in information about the performance of institutions as a whole.

The basic characteristics of U-Multirank empower stakeholders to compensate for their asymmetrical information position vis-à-vis higher education providers. In that sense, it embodies principles of the networked governance model.

## Performance Contracts

Performance contracts are agreements between individual higher education institutions and their government(s) or funding authorities that tie (part of) the institution's public funding to its ambitions in terms of performance.<sup>3</sup> Performance contracts allow higher education institutions to receive funding in return for their commitment to fulfil several objectives as measured by specific target indicators agreed upon between the relevant governmental authority and the institution (Salmi 2009).

Delivering on the performance contract leads to a financial reward for the institution, thus encouraging it to improve its performance and to be forward-looking. Usually, such contracts invite higher education institutions to elaborate their strategic plans, outlining their vision of the future and the specific actions directed to reaching their strategic objectives. Performance contracts allow institutions to select and negotiate their goals with an eye upon their individual context, strengths and key stakeholders. Thus, the primary aim of performance contracts is to reward the desired behaviour, increasing mission diversity in the higher education system and increasing performance in terms of quality and relevance. Secondly, largely through their use of indicators, they also seek to increase transparency for the various clients of the institution.

Performance contracts—under several names and in various forms—have been implemented in many countries, such as Australia, Austria, some Canadian provinces, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Hong Kong, Ireland, Japan, the Netherlands, Scotland, and some states of the USA (de Boer et al. 2015; Jongbloed and Vossensteyn 2016). So far in practice, most performance agreements have stressed the accountability and performance dimensions and have not yet played a major role in increasing transparency. However, in some countries, e.g. the Netherlands, Ireland, and Finland, the contracts did have a transparency impact and successfully pointed public attention to the goals that higher education institutions were

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<sup>3</sup>For an analysis of other dimensions of performance contracts than their contribution to transparency, see our chapter on performance contracts in this volume.

expected to meet in return for the public funds they received. In the Netherlands, the contracts caused institutions to publish information about their efforts and successes in areas like improving the students' degree completions (Reviewcommissie Hoger Onderwijs en Onderzoek 2017). Transparency also improved in other areas because the contracts included performances in research and knowledge transfer, as well as how institutions related to their stakeholders or clients. While the second generation of performance contracts in the Netherlands is under debate at the time of writing (2017), probably they will include an increased role for negotiations between higher education institutions and their local or regional stakeholders, thus empowering those stakeholders further while reducing national, homogenising tendencies.

Performance contracts represent the culmination of a negotiation process between university leaders and (governmental) stakeholders to ensure the convergence of strategic institutional goals with national (including regional) policy objectives. As such, performance contracts are an interactive instrument of the networked governance model. In addition, they stimulate higher education institutions to reach out to their own specific clients and stakeholders, thus offering an effective basis for enhanced transparency.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we presented three recently (re-)designed transparency tools for higher education—developed to empower clients and key stakeholders, to strengthen the provision of higher education and to better communicate the various dimensions of quality, performance, and public value to external stakeholders. These tools fit in a more interactive, networked type of governance for higher education. This paradigm explicitly acknowledges the diverse information needs of a wider variety of client groups than just the central government. The networked governance view suggests a combination of horizontal and vertical steering approaches (Jongbloed 2007), limiting to some extent the providers' autonomy by stressing higher education's contribution to public values but without reverting to top-down hierarchical steering as in traditional public administration and management models. It recognises that the higher education institutions act in a multi-centric network and that they have their own steering capacity in a collective setting. Yet, the government has a special role to protect and support students and other stakeholders against rent-seeking behaviour and other perverse effects. The orientation in the networked governance paradigm on creating public value acknowledges and tries to rectify information asymmetries between higher education providers, on the one hand, and students, government and other clients and stakeholders, on the other, by encouraging transparency. Sharing information, amongst others using ICT tools such as ranking websites, is a key characteristic of the networked governance. Information sharing increases trust which enables stakeholders to behave more effectively and efficiently in the network (Schwaninger et al. 2017). Establishing more direct, "horizontal" relationships of information

sharing between higher education institutions and their regional stakeholders rather than channelling accountability only “vertically” through government strengthens this approach and is intended to create more “face-to-face” relationships; this too should support re-establishing public trust in higher education.

Our conclusions regarding the three transparency tools are as follows. Accreditation remains a crude transparency instrument, providing little information value to clients beyond the basic though crucial protection against substandard provision. The refinement that stresses public value-oriented ideas, namely focusing accreditation on achieved learning outcomes, which would make accreditation more directly relevant to (prospective) students, cannot overcome this basic crudeness. Moreover, designing such apparently more relevant accreditation schemes remains a challenge, given academics’ resistance against their intrusiveness and the efforts needed to design and incorporate sensible indicators of learning outcomes.

Regarding rankings, we have argued that some recent initiatives—in particular U-Multirank—have been designed to overcome the drawbacks of traditional global university rankings. Multi-dimensional, user-driven rankings have the potential to function as rich transparency tools, as client-driven and diversity-oriented instruments. However, such a transparency tool is only as useful as the information it offers to users. Specifically, the geographical scope of institutions in U-Multirank must be extended, and its underlying data on the higher education institutions’ value added in terms of education performance (e.g. learning outcomes, societal engagement of higher education institutions) need further elaboration. This requires close collaboration among higher education researchers, evaluation organisations and rankers with the institutional and external (e.g. national statistics offices) providers of data.

Performance contracts have the potential to contribute to interactive, networked coordination in higher education systems and to increased transparency at system and institutional levels. Their transparency function remains secondary to their performance incentivising function. However, instead of just providing information, they may empower stakeholders to actually influence what higher education institutions do for them. If local stakeholders are given a role in the specification of the contracts (through “horizontal” arrangements), more attention for realising their values may ensue, and the links between higher education institutions and their regions may be strengthened.

This brings us to scale questions of the various transparency tools. The previous sentences intimated how performance contracts might be applied at national or regional levels. In their connection to regional stakeholders’ interests or national political priorities, they do not lend themselves easily to European or international comparability and transparency.

Accreditation is usually defined within a jurisdiction, at least with regard to its consequences such as recognition of degrees and allocation of public funding. As long as states remain the primary sources of legitimacy and funds, the jurisdiction will remain the primary level of consideration for accreditation, even if the operation of accreditation procedures might be outsourced to private-law organisations or quality assurance agencies located in foreign countries—the ministers’ statement



in the Yerevan communiqué explicitly wants to stimulate European openness in that respect: “to enable our higher education institutions to use a suitable EQAR registered agency for their external quality assurance process, respecting the national arrangements for the decision making on QA outcomes” (EHEA ministerial conference 2015).

Besides, accreditation is eminently a tool for international transparency. In fact, achieving international visibility and recognition was a major motivation for introducing it in many West-European countries in the years following the Bologna Declaration (Schwarz and Westerheijden 2004). That it was a crude transparency tool and that it only provides superficial comparability internationally may not have been realised in policy circles at the time.

Finally, it was precisely to overcome the drawbacks of accreditation that international rankings emerged, as we detailed above. Rankings may be organised nationally, with national topic foci or national sets of institutions and programmes they compare, but the most debated ones are precisely the global university rankings. National rankings make sense as the large majority of higher education decisions are made within the jurisdiction: on the whole, less than two percent of students in the world are internationally mobile, and the large majority of research funding or commercial contracts with higher education institutions also are made in national frameworks. Yet, for many institutions’ prestige—the major currency in social interactions—the world scale is decisive and global rankings play a major role.

Despite the challenges faced in further developing the networked governance perspective and its accompanying transparency instruments, we have indicated how redesign and redeployment of transparency tools show great potential in this perspective. Transparency lies at the heart of the dynamics in the networked governance of higher education systems. Therefore, working on further improving transparency tools is crucial for increasing the public value of higher education in the years to come.

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# What Is Transparency of Higher Education in East Asia? Case Studies of Japan and China



Futao Huang

## Introduction

Like many other East Asian countries, the modern higher education in both Japan and China was established by their national governments based on western ideas and especially French and German patterns in the late 19th century. The remarkable characteristics of higher education in Japan and China include: their higher education systems are rigidly regulated and controlled by the central government; they are expected to produce graduates and undertake research for the service of national governments and social development and so forth. Since the early 1990s, tremendous changes have occurred in the landscape of higher education in East Asian higher education systems, including both Japan and China. One of these changes is the emergence of national frameworks of quality assurance (QA) of higher education and an increasing emphasis on the transparency of higher education. Compared to major transparency tools being utilized in European countries, both Japan and China established national-level classification systems of higher education when the modern higher education systems emerged. However, the main purpose of these systems is not for users such as students and their parents, industry or other stakeholders; they are basically employed as one of the means of the central governments to administer and control all higher education institutions. With growing impacts from internationalization and marketization of higher education since the 1990s, new forms of transparency tools have come into existence in both

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countries. Not only the central government but also individual scholars, media, and other organizations have also created various transparency tools to meet diverse users' demands. Higher education in the two countries has become more open to scrutiny and increasingly transparent. Truly, western ideas and practices have apparently shaped the current QA of higher education in the two countries, but both Japan and China have formed their own national QA systems of higher education, including transparency instruments over the past two decades. This is especially true of China. In a major sense, in recent years, both countries have developed more and diversified tools of increasing transparency of their higher education. Partly, this is because the central governments have devoted more efforts to improve the transparency of national higher education through series of national reforms. Partly, this is one of the most important influences from the market.

Previous studies have suggested that very limited research has been conducted on the relationship of transparency or accountability of higher education with existing schemes of QA of higher education in the two countries. Much less is known of what main instruments are used to seek for or to enhance transparency of higher education and especially what effects the transparency instruments have had on institutions and teaching & research activities, and students learning outcomes. The purpose of this study is to discuss the historical background and the major characteristics of transparency instruments of higher education in Japan and China based on the analysis of earlier studies, documentation, and relevant findings from national statistics. This study addresses two main research questions as follows:

- 1 What are the main characteristics of transparency instruments of higher education in Japan and China?
- 2 How significantly could current practices of transparency of both Japan and China be applied to European countries?

In relation to terminology, differing from the Europe Higher Education Area,<sup>1</sup> it appears that there are no generally-accepted definitions of transparency or equivalent phrases which are officially used in either China or Japan. In this study, the term transparency means any activities which are concerned with the disclosure of information on higher education to diverse users or stakeholders with a purpose of ensuring the data, activities and quality of higher education more transparent and more easily understandable. Specifically speaking, they include main forms of

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<sup>1</sup>For example, the working description of transparency tools in European countries refers to "Transparency tools can be seen as having primarily an information provision function. Their users can be diverse, ranging from students and families to businesses, faculty and policymakers, such as HEIs' leaders and government officials. Within each category of beneficiaries, it can be expected that individuals have quite diverse information needs and expectations. It would be probably impossible for transparency tools to meet all individual demands at once." Retrieved from [https://media.ehea.info/file/2012\\_Bucharest/28/7/brosura\\_v1\\_v12\\_vp\\_120419\\_text\\_607287.pdf](https://media.ehea.info/file/2012_Bucharest/28/7/brosura_v1_v12_vp_120419_text_607287.pdf), [https://media.ehea.info/file/2012\\_Bucharest/28/7/brosura\\_v1\\_v12\\_vp\\_120419\\_text\\_607287.pdf](https://media.ehea.info/file/2012_Bucharest/28/7/brosura_v1_v12_vp_120419_text_607287.pdf). (2 July 2017).

national classifications of higher education institutions, national ranking systems, databases, and other tools which information on teaching and research activities, as well as governance and management matters of higher education institutions is available for the public.

## Historic Heritages and Recent Changes

The formation of modern higher education systems in both Japan and China is primarily modelled on the ideas of higher education in European continental countries, especially the patterns of France and Germany in the late 19th century (Amano 1989; Hayhoe 1996).

Despite different forms and to a different degree, the central governments maintained direct and rigid control on determining the basic structure of higher education; its budgetary systems; the size of national higher education systems; and the quality of all higher education institutions in the two countries. The utmost important mission of both higher education systems is to produce professionals in law, engineering, science for the national governments and the modernization of society.

Although numerous changes had occurred in higher education in the two countries since the end of the Second World War, by the end of the 1980s, several similarities could still be found in higher education between them. For example, firstly, national governments imposed strong and direct regulation and control on all levels and types of higher education institutions, including the private and non-government sectors. Secondly, both countries formulated nationally unified standards of the establishment of new higher education institutions. The standards cover a wide range of aspects of higher education, including the size of a higher education institution, the ratio of faculty members to students, the provision of educational programs, requirements for students' graduation and for conferring a degree, the composition of basic units of education and research activities, governance style, financial arrangements, and so forth. Finally, quality of higher education at a system level was essentially assured on the basis of national standards or equivalent regulations in a top-down way. Compared with many western countries, especially the USA, there was little demand for transparency of higher education from users or stakeholders such as students, industry, students' parents, etc.

Since the early 1990s, tremendous changes have occurred in higher education in the two countries. Similar changes can be identified at a national level as follows.

Firstly, both countries have introduced the phrase "quality assurance", "quality improvement" or equivalent terms in their higher education. Although usages and interpretations of these terms may vary depending upon different contexts, the issue concerning quality assurance and/or improvement has become one of the top priorities of higher education reforms at both national and institutional levels. More importantly, in addition to original or traditional practices of assuring the quality of higher education, mainly based on the national standards of the establishment of

universities and colleges which were mentioned earlier, there has emerged more new agencies, centres, or other organizations specifically designated for quality assurance in higher education. For example, China established its Higher Education Evaluation Center of the Ministry of Education in 2004. It has legal status. In actuality, however, it is part of the Ministry of Education because its leaders are directly appointed by the Ministry of Education and its major budgets also come from the central government. In 2000, the National Institute for Academic Degrees (NIAD) in Japan was reorganized as a new entity with a new name, the National Institute for Academic Degrees-University Evaluation (NIAD-UE). Since then, it has administered the university evaluation in addition to its existing functions as a degree-awarding institution. Besides, more and more professional associations and third-party agencies as well as other incorporated bodies have come into being in the two countries since the 2000s.

Secondly, despite the introduction of market mechanisms to higher education, the central governments of both Japan and China still maintain powerful leadership or exercise strong supervision over individual corporations and private institutions in terms of approving or closing a corporate entity. Although there are more options for universities and colleges to be evaluated by a public or a private quality assurance agency, including a third-party or an incorporated foundation, etc., all these agencies or organizations in charge of external evaluation of individual universities and colleges are either directly founded by the government or required to be certified by the central government in advance.

Finally, the growing importance of external or third-party evaluation on universities and colleges and an increasingly strong request for the more accountability and transparency of operating universities and colleges from various stakeholders does not necessarily mean a declining impact from the central government or local authorities on regulating and supervising individual universities and colleges, including private institutions and transnational higher education institutions. By developing national policies; allocating public revenues; and providing other competitive funding, it is likely that the central government or local authorities in East Asia still exert a decisive and apparent influence on key aspects of universities and colleges in a new form.

## **Transparency of Japanese Higher Education**

As early as the late 19th century, when Japan established its modern higher education systems, the central government made clear national classifications of higher education institutions by funder, educational level and type and other categories. According to the University Act and national regulations, the mission, functions, duties or responsibilities, financial issues, governance arrangement, basic structure of educational and research organizations, requirements for graduation, and other aspects of academic and administrative matters of each type and sector of higher education institutions were explicitly promulgated. However, the primary purpose

of establishing the national classifications of higher education institutions was to ensure the central government and local authorities monitor and control individual institutions based on relevant acts and national regulations. They were mainly utilized to serve for the administration of the central government in relation to budget allocation, student admission, and other internal governance matters.

Since the end of the WWII, influenced by the American ideas of higher education, Japan quickly moved from elite phrase of higher education to mass phrase and then to near-universal access to higher education by the early 1990s according to Trow's definition. Like many other countries, with a quantitative expansion of both higher education institutions and higher education enrolments, Japanese higher education structure has become increasingly diversified. During the process, the Japanese government has continued to revise and update the national classifications of higher education in light of changes to higher education (MOE 1992, 1993). For the benefit of international readers, a brief introduction to the current national classifications of higher education institutions is made below:

Contemporary Japanese higher education basically consists of three major types of institution: universities, junior colleges (*Tanki Daigaku* in Japanese) and colleges of technology.<sup>2</sup> In some cases, specialized training colleges (*Sensyuu Gakkou*)<sup>3</sup> are also considered as part of higher education. Besides, the number of students being officially enrolled in the Open University of Japan (changed from the University of Air in October 2007) and those pursuing their higher education learning through TV or radios in other regular universities and junior colleges are included in the data of Japan's post-secondary education as well.

Based on these broad classifications, the distinctive features of Japanese higher education can be summarized as follows. Firstly, because the national and public sectors are mainly established, founded and administered by the national government and local authorities respectively while the private sector is established and operated by school corporations, these three different sectors are expected to play different roles and fulfil diverse functions. Especially, there is a clear division of labour between the national and private sectors. Except for a very few private universities with a long history, the vast majority of private sector are involved in educational activities. In contrast, in addition to teaching activities, the national universities are more engaged in basic, applied, and large-scale scientific research. The local public sector which is established and funded by local authorities focuses on the production of graduates for the regional economic development and engages

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<sup>2</sup>A higher education institution which offers a unified five-year education (five years-six months for mercantile marine studies) aimed at nurturing technical experts. It requires graduation from lower secondary schools or equivalent academic ability for admission. A minimum of 167 credits is required for graduation (147 credits for mercantile marine studies). Graduates are awarded the title of Associate.

<sup>3</sup>A higher education institution which provides practical and technical learning and skills in a wide variety of disciplines such as the medical care, technology, culture and general education, business, personal care and nutrition, education and welfare, fashion and home science, agriculture and much more. Graduates are conferred with Certification.



in service activities for local community. In contrast, the vast majority of private sector is involved in educational activities in humanities and social sciences at an undergraduate level. They have provided more vocational and practical educational programs. Moreover, as a huge amount of their revenue comes from tuition and fees, the operation and management of the private sector are more market-oriented than either national or local public sector.

Secondly, Japan's private sector accounts for a large share of all institutions. For example, in 2015, the private junior colleges and universities account for 94.8 and 77.5% of the total respectively. Moreover, the proportion of students in private universities and junior colleges comprises 73.4 and 94.8% of the total (MEXT 2016).

Obviously, the present classifications of higher education institutions in Japan appear to be more compatible with the USA national higher education schemes and other systems modelled on the USA ideas. For example, the structure and function of junior colleges are roughly similar to the US community colleges. The Japanese four-year universities are equivalent to the US universities. Actually, even in terms of educational programs and length of study, as well as graduation requirements at an undergraduate level, both countries share plenty of similarities.

As for ranking systems, the influence of major global university league tables such as ARWU (Academic Ranking of World-Class Universities), QS University Rankings, THE (Times Higher Education) World University Rankings, US News Week on the transparency of Japanese higher education is considerable and evident. For all these rankings have not only listed rankings of the world's best universities but also provided the information on Japanese universities which are ranked among them in terms of their teaching & research activities, international outlook, reputation and more. Their data help governments and universities to locate the position of Japanese universities and even create strategies to upgrade the presence of their universities. Further, they are a vital resource for students and their parents, helping them choose where to study, and international students to determine what universities abroad they will go to. In a major sense, all these have greatly facilitated the transparency of Japanese higher education systems.

In addition to the global university ranking systems above, with growing impacts from the market on higher education institutions and influences from economic globalization and internationalization since the early 1990s, various domestic university ranking systems have been created in Japan. According to Yonezawa's study (2013), since the early 1990s, several rankings systems focusing on different aspects of higher education have emerged in Japan. Some rankings are produced from the perspective of students and their parents. For example, *Asahi University Rankings*, which is developed by a newspaper company, provides information on almost all important aspects of Japanese universities from institutional academic performance to student life by using approximately eighty indicators. *Yomiuri Shinbun*, the largest newspaper company in Japan, publishes its rankings of Japanese universities. Differing from *Asahi University Rankings*, it devotes more attention to the quality of education provision, teaching improvement, curriculum design and has attracted the attention of universities and the general public. Others

are specifically designated to provide information to university administrators and managers. For example, by publishing a journal of *College Management*, Recruit Ltd. is also involved in issuing university rankings with more comprehensive information.

Although there are no university rankings created by the government, in reality, since the early 2000s, by implementing national-level projects or programs, the Japanese government has deliberately stimulated structural diversification and functional differentiation of Japanese higher education systems. During the process, individual universities have also been compelled to be more transparent in their teaching & research activities and internal managerial and governance arrangements. For example, in 2001, the Japanese government set the goal of fostering the “Top 30” universities towards the attainment of top global standards. Later, the program was changed into a scheme of cultivating “Centers of Excellence in the 21st Century” (COE 21). The central government chose to focus on and expand the budget for units in nine key disciplines. In 2009, the government launched a new Global 30 program aiming at accepting 300,000 foreign students by 2020. In order to achieve the goal, 13 universities, including 7 national and 6 private, were selected to play a central role in implementing the program. In 2012, the Japanese government implemented “Global Human Resource” project. The project consists of two types. For the Type A, the government selected 11 universities and asked them to produce more graduates with global perspectives and competencies. 31 faculties and graduate schools were selected in Type B focusing on producing global human resources in particular disciplines (MEXT 2012). In 2014, the Japanese government issued the Top Global University Project. There are two types in the project. Type A (Top Type, 13 universities) is for world-class universities that have the potential to be ranked in the top 100 in world university rankings. Type B (Global Traction Type, 24 universities) is for innovative universities that lead the internationalisation of Japanese society (JSPS 2017). Truly, these projects are not the university rankings mentioned earlier, however, in practice the implantation of the projects has resulted in the disclosure of more factual information on relevant universities, increasing transparency of their missions and activities, and creating a gap between different universities.

With respect to national databases, soon after the end of the Second World War, the Japanese government has implemented annual national surveys of higher education institutions, university faculty, international faculty and students, budgetary issues of higher education institutions, and other related topics of higher education. Based on findings of these national surveys, the Japanese government has built national databases of school education, including higher education, and published them annually. By disclosing the information, the central government makes it possible for the Japanese higher education to be more transparent and accountable. Among diverse national surveys and databases of higher education, the most influential one is the *Annual National School Survey*. Based on the survey, the national statistics of school education and higher education are published every year. The survey was started in 1948 and directly led the then Ministry of Education and the current MEXT. The structure of the survey consists of seven sections. They

include individual institutions, funding and real estate, infrastructure, new entry, graduates, faculty members, and students. The database of the survey is generally acknowledged to provide the most primary and fundamental statistics of overall Japanese education, including higher education. Further, partly based on relevant findings of the survey, the Research Institute for Higher Education of Hiroshima University (RIHE) also published the *Statistics of Japanese Higher Education* (RIHE 2017). Differing from the survey which is designated more from government and administrative perspectives, the statistics are gathered, categorized and administered for the sake of research and for the benefit of higher education researchers in particular. The statistics consist of four broad sections: (1) enrolment, number of students, and number of graduates; (2) higher education institutions; (3) economy, society and higher educational institutions, and (4) Japanese economic and educational statistics. There are three classifications in each section: large classification, middle classification, and organization classification. For example, within the large classification of numbers of students, there are middle-level classifications, including the data by gender, by university, by junior college, by college of technology, by university at an undergraduate level, graduate level, doctoral level, etc.; within the middle-level classification, it has statistics by institute, by gender and institutional sector, by field of study and so forth.

Interestingly, from the perspective of quality assurance, incentives of enhancing transparency of higher education in Japan has experienced the following phases (Huang 2006a).

In the first phase, from 1991 to 1997, with loosening up of the Standards of the Establishment of Universities and more powers delegated to individual institutions since 1991, the government took several measures to prevent a decline in educational quality. Initially, each national university was required to undertake self-monitoring and self-evaluation of its educational and research activities. By 1993, all national universities had appropriate structures in place with responsibilities for self-monitoring and self-evaluation, and 50 of the 98 national universities had already published their results (MOE 1993). In the second phase, from 1998 to 2001, all universities were reminded of the requirement to publish the results of their self-monitoring and self-evaluation. In addition, to ensure the quality of their educational activities, each university was expected to have an external third party verify the results. Such third-party organizations could include associations of universities, academic societies, accreditation bodies and so forth. They were expected to introduce a range of evaluative modes. The basic idea was for universities to be able to fully demonstrate their own diverse characteristics and strengths whilst improving the quality of their education and research activities. In the third phase, from 2002 to the present, the School Education Law, amended in 2002, makes it now compulsory for all universities, junior colleges, colleges of technology and law schools to be evaluated by a quality assurance agency accredited by MEXT. Not only the self-evaluated reports of each institution but also the results of reports by these external agencies were required to be open to the public. By 2005, Japan has constituted a new, plural, diversified system of evaluation and accreditation in which different actors and stakeholders are involved.

Currently, the new system is composed of the major arrangements which are mainly concerned with activities involved in assuring and enhancing the educational quality in the national sector. Especially the ex-post evaluations, which are often made up of self-assessment, certified and third-party accreditation and evaluation, are concerned with accreditation (to assess whether a university fulfils the required Standards) and evaluation (to promote the quality enhancement of education and research, and transparency and efficiency of university governance and management) (MEXT 2013).

An added measure of improving the transparency of national university corporations and local public university corporations has been taken since 2004 when all Japanese national university became corporations. In accordance with the *National University Corporation Law* of 2003 (MEXT 2003), with respect to one of the major changes in the governance of national and public university corporations, there is an expectation of “*evaluation and disclosure of information-allocation of resources based on results of third-party evaluation thus ensuring transparency to encourage increased public participation.*”

Since 2004, the corporatization of Japanese national universities on improving the transparency of national universities is also profound and evident. For instance, implementing evaluation based on six-year goals and plans by each corporation and disclosing all the results of external or third-party evaluations on the corporations have tremendously enhanced the transparency of institutional governance, usage of public expenditure, and academic performance and more.

## Transparency of Chinese Higher Education

Shortly after the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, the central government created a national classification of higher education institutions in accordance with the former Soviet model. One of the most striking characteristics of the model is that the vast majority of higher educational institutions was practically categorized according to the social professional or vocational fields. At a system level, except for a very few comprehensive universities which were normally made up of more than one field of study and speciality groups, a huge number of higher educational institutions was grouped into eleven types according to the eleven fields of study. Roughly speaking, numbers of students, faculty members, study programs or specialized subjects were rigidly categorized in the classification (Huang 2006b). In a major sense, the classification was employed by the central government to administer and regulate all higher education institutions at a national level based on the planned economy. As of 1991, not only different types of non-university professional institutions were included in the classification but also fields of study, sub-fields of study, types of specialities and numbers of programs were listed. For example, in engineering institutions, the structure of undergraduate curriculum could be illustrated in Table 1.

**Table 1** Structure of the Undergraduate Curriculum in Engineering

Field of Study	Engineering
Sub-field of study	Applied Geology, Mining, Power Engineering, Metallurgy, Mechanical Engineering, Electrical Machines & Instruments, radio & Electronics, chemical Engineering, Grain Processing & Food Industry, Light Industry, Mapping, Surveying & Hydrology, Civil Engineering & Architecture, transportation, Telecommunications, and Others
Type of specialties	364
Number of programs	4761

Source MOE (1991).

It seems that the first national statistics of education, including higher education in China, was published by State Education Commission (renamed to Ministry of Education in 1998) in 1984. It includes the statistics of Chinese education in 1949–1983. In 1986 an updated version of the *Achievement of Education in China: Statistics 1980–1985* was published. However, in both statistics, little information on higher education is provided. For example, in the 1986 statistics, only statistics of regular higher educational institutions, postgraduates, and numbers of students studying abroad, numbers of foreign students in China are classified and collected (Department of Planning 1986). From the early 1990s, the *Educational Statistics Year book of China* was published yearly. It is a comprehensive year book which is collected and issued by the former State Education Commission. It includes comprehensive information, higher education, middle school education, elementary school education, pre-school education, special education, mature education, self-taught education, educational finance, distribution of various educational institutions by region. The classification and publication of all these statistics is to provide an effective tool and indispensable factual information for relevant government divisions and sections to do research into education and to offer evidences for individual educational divisions, schools, higher education institutions to develop educational plans and guide reforms on education (Department of Planning & Construction 1992).

Since 1999, the annual publication of two main national statistics of education has played a central role in enhancing the transparency of education of different levels and types in China. One is *Statistics of National Educational Enterprise* and the other is *Statistics of Information on Implementing Educational Expenditure*. The former provides detailed data on all levels and types of educational institutions ranging from pre-school education to doctoral education (MEXT 2017b). The latter issues statistics of changes to educational expenditures by level, type, region, per pupil and student, etc. (MEXT 2017a).

According to the current national classifications of higher education, contemporary Chinese higher education institutions can be categorized into three major

types: regular public institutions, adult public institutions, and private institutions (*Minban* or *Shehui Liliang Banxue* in Chinese, meaning institutions run by the non-government sector or by social forces). The administration of most of the regular institutions and some adult institutions was vertically structured and financed by one of three types of administrative authorities: (1) the Ministry of Education; (2) central-level ministries and agencies; or (3) provinces and province-level municipalities. Except for two private adult institutions, the majority of adult institutions were run by local authorities with a few being administered by MOE and central-level ministries and agencies. There were hundreds of private institutions, but only four were qualified to confer bachelor's degrees. The remainder were two-year institutions with short-cycle programs; these private institutions were almost totally dependent on students' tuition and fees. In addition to the above institutions, there are military institutions, mostly comprised of military personnel. Besides, every year about 200,000 students achieve various certificates or bachelor's degrees through what is termed the "Self-Taught Examination System".

In relation to national ranking systems, since the early 2000s, major global university league tables have also increased the transparency of Chinese higher education. Similar to Japan, there are no national ranking tables which are developed by the central government or any public authorities. However, with the steady increase in numbers of different levels and types of higher education institutions and especially the diversifying structure and functions of Chinese higher education institutions, several rankings systems have been created and they have drawn a great deal of attention in recent years. To illustrate, as early as 2002, the first national ranking scheme of Chinese universities was launched by a researcher, Shulian Wu who belongs to the Chinese Academy of Management Science. Currently, his rankings are concerned with a wide range of information on Chinese universities such as rankings of the comprehensive capacity of all Chinese universities, the national-level 12 disciplines, 480 specialities of undergraduate studies, academic performance of university faculty, quality of new entrants, and quality of graduates, etc. The information is mainly provided for students who take part in national entry examination to universities, their parents, and other stakeholders, helping them to observe and choose universities from various angles.

*Rankings of Chinese Universities* (*Wangda* in Chinese), which was developed by a Chinese company in 1999, also has a relatively powerful impact on students who choose their universities, and foreign companies that want to seek business partners with Chinese universities, and individual domestic universities that want to locate themselves in the ranking (Wangda 2017). By providing information on academic performance, the actual situation of input and output, quality of students, reputation, and others based on objective data and surveying, it publishes annual rankings of all Chinese universities. Together with other rankings of Chinese universities, they have helped various users to achieve a better understanding of and even monitor Chinese universities and, therefore, facilitate the transparency of Chinese higher education.

Although the central government has never assigned rankings to Chinese universities, the then State Education Commission made assessments of disciplines of higher education institutions and selected key disciplines among universities in 1986–88. In most cases, the universities with key disciplines, which were approved by the then State Education Commission, could be allocated an additional funding and enjoyed more favourable academic and administrative policies. These universities are sometimes considered to be more academically competitive and socially reputable than others.

The impact of the 211 Project and the 985 Project on stimulating differentiation of Chinese universities cannot be overestimated, for it has significantly led to rearranging the position or rankings of individual universities. For example, through the launch of the 211 Project in 1994, the central government determined to establish 100 key universities in China by the twenty-first century. Among which, Peking University and Tsinghua University are expected to reach or approach a higher level in the world and become world-class institutions. Furthermore, China's Ministry of Education carried out the 985 Project in 1999, and nine universities were selected to be included in the Project as the first group. In October 2009, these nine universities agreed to create a Chinese counterpart to the ivies and formed the C9. Modelling on the "Ivies" and Russell Group universities, the C9 are committed to the highest levels of academic excellence in teaching and research (Huang 2015). As a result, the pyramid structure of Chinese higher education system has been formed with the C9 as top universities, followed by those 985 Project universities, 211 Project universities; in the middle level there are local public universities, and at the lowest level, there are non-government or private universities. Strictly speaking, either of the projects provides any league tables of Chinese universities like other global or domestic university rankings as discussed above, but in reality, it has clearly outlined top Chinese universities. The projects have not only contributed to the transparency of the Chinese higher education systems but also made it possible for students, their families, industry, and other stakeholders to know more about these top universities in relation to their missions, long-term strategies, academic performance, financial situation, and governance and managerial issues, etc.

It is noteworthy mentioning building the database of basic teaching situation in China, for it is the first time for the MOE to gather, clean, and publish all leading data of undergraduate education at a national level. The construction of the database was initiated in 2007 and directly led by the Higher Education Evaluation Center of the Ministry of Education (HECME) (<http://udb.heec.edu.cn/>). In the database (MOE 2011), nine broad groups of data are gathered. They include faculty members, teaching, educational expense, teaching and research equipment, teaching condition, basic information on students, students' activities outside classroom, research activities, and discipline construction. Within each group, several sub-categories of data are divided. In each sub-category, there are several items of data. As for its purpose, the database aims at accomplishing the following four goals:

- serving the government to analyse and monitor the micro-operation of teaching activities of all higher education institutions;
- serving higher education institutions to promote and strengthen the scientific governance and management of each sector society;
- serving the society and the public to disclose relevant information of all higher education institutions and to be supervised by the society; and
- serving the evaluation on teaching activities and monitoring, supervising and controlling the quality of teaching, to improve the effectiveness of evaluation and form the permanent mechanisms of monitoring and control.

Finally, since the early 2000s, the publication of results of extern evaluation on all regular higher education institutions and colleges of technical and vocational education and reports of quality of undergraduate education at a provincial level since 2015 in particular have also become one of the most important tools in improving the transparency of Chinese higher education.

## Concluding Remarks

As the modern higher education systems in both Japan and China were established, funded and administered by the central governments in the late 19th century, despite differences in degree and forms between the countries, only very limited transparency tools of higher education were employed. Almost all these tools were controlled by the governments prior to the 1980s. To what extent and in what ways the transparency of higher education was achieved was basically determined by the government. Since the 1990s, in addition to national classifications of higher education and government reports or national-level projects, more diverse transparency tools of higher education have emerged in the two countries such as university ranking systems developed by media and company, as well as researchers and third-party evaluation. As complementary tools, they have also contributed significantly to the transparency of higher education by helping policymakers develop strategies, students and their families choose universities, the public achieve a better understanding of the diversity of higher education, industry and job market know and even monitor academic and governance performance of higher education institutions. In a major sense, in both countries, nowadays transparency of higher education does not merely cater to government demand as it used to prior to the 1980s. It has aimed to benefit a wide range of users, including students, their parents, individual higher education institutions, faculty members, administrators, graduates, workplaces, industry, and the public, etc.

Actually, both governments have strived to utilize more diversified and effective means to improve the transparency of higher education in their countries although they may have taken different forms. Clear examples of the implementation of the



“selection and concentration” strategy, the disclosure of results of external or third-party evaluation of the university, and the periodic publication of the quality of higher education to the public. However, in both countries, the central government still plays a decisive and vital role in employing transparency tools of higher education and determining the degree to which the transparency of higher education can be achieved. The emergence of more diversified transparency tools in the two countries does not necessarily mean that the authorities and leadership, as well as control from the government on individual higher education institutions, have been weakened or vanished. It still rests between higher education institutions and stakeholders interested in higher education, including the market. The government has only changed its form and means of impacting higher education, shifting from a direct supervision and control to an indirect guidance and monitoring through policy-oriented projects and budgetary means.

Noticeably, the national database created by the Chinese government seems to be a great leap and an innovative tool in stimulating the transparency of higher education among the East Asian systems. Because it is concerned with not only surveying, gathering, monitoring, regulating and controlling the actual situation of undergraduate education but also examining on a wide variety of activities at program level, especially the teaching process: “a black box” or “a shadow of higher education”. It is likely that the effective employment of the database might further improve the transparency of Chinese higher education and benefit more diverse users, as well as provide a new perspective of enhancing the transparency of higher education for other countries in the future.

In terms of implications of transparency tools of higher education in Japan and China and their practice, firstly, from the international and comparative perspectives, more in-depth and comprehensive research based on evidence like surveying and interviews need to be conducted. More research outputs of the effectiveness and efficiency of existing transparency tools and the clarification of what kinds of tools should be applied to specific contexts are expected. Secondly, it is important for the government to be more actively involved in developing more diverse and realistic tools to improve the transparency of higher education from the perspective of “public or common good”. More importantly, the government or public authorities should play a much stronger and evident role in monitoring and making the public aware of features, especially limits and deficits of diverse tools. Finally, while developing and utilizing diverse transparency tools, individual institutions should always take students’ needs, scholarship, and the public goods into great consideration. The market tends to have growing impacts on producing and employing transparency tools worldwide, however, it should not be used as the only one means or the most decisive way to achieve a higher level of transparency of higher education in both East Asian and European contexts.

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# Performance of the Ontario (Canada) Higher-education System: Measuring Only What Matters



Harvey P. Weingarten and Martin Hicks

## Why Performance Measurement Is Important to Canada

Canadian governments, under greater scrutiny and facing demands for more accountability over the use of public funds, are applying increasing pressure to measure the performance of their public higher-education systems. This is a trend shared by many other jurisdictions. At a loftier level, governments also recognize that the outputs of higher-education systems—the highly educated students they graduate, the research and innovation they spawn and the communities they support—are essential to a robust and vibrant society that is competitive economically and that sustains a high quality of life. This is especially true in Canada where the higher-education system is essentially public. In contrast to many other countries, Canada has no private postsecondary education sector of the scope, magnitude or capacity to provide the higher education demanded by its citizens and required by the country. Canada is also more reliant on its higher-education institutions for its overall research activity than many other OECD countries (Science, Technology and Innovation Council 2015). Higher-education spending is a significant draw on the public purse, superseded in Ontario only by public expenditures on health care, K-12 education, and children’s and social services. In short, it is in the interest of governments and an expectation of them, that they will know how effectively the public funds allocated to their higher-education institutions are being used and how well their higher-education system and institutions are performing.

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## The Pragmatist Versus the Idealist

But how does one design a meaningful performance tool that is useful to the government? The pragmatist looks for a tool that can be implemented quickly to appease government's (and the public's) impatience with a lack of accountability and to satisfy demands for evidence of value for money. A pragmatist develops a performance tool using available data and existing measures. These are often a mixture of inputs, outputs and outcomes. They may or may not reflect jurisdictional priorities for higher education (there may be no clear jurisdictional priorities and, if there are, the fit between those priorities and the data at hand may be no more than serendipity). Aware of these shortcomings, and mindful of the inevitable pushback from higher-education institutional partners that the wrong indicators may have been selected, or that the data may be shoddy or oversimplified given the complex and unique characteristics of higher education, the pragmatist often tends toward embracing a larger and larger pool of indicators.<sup>1</sup>

However, a large number of indicators may, in actual fact, hinder the need to be precise and articulate about what really matters to a jurisdiction and, therefore, the key priorities on which the system must deliver. If it turns out that the pragmatist's strategy is, after a period of time, deemed no longer satisfactory, the pragmatist returns to the pool of available data and starts the exercise again in the hope of achieving a better outcome.

The idealist approaches the task of developing a performance measurement tool in a different manner. The idealist recognizes that the exercise starts first by agreeing on jurisdictional priorities for higher education. These define the outcomes the jurisdiction desires from the system. The idealist understands that to satisfy the essence of having priorities, the desired outcomes must be few in number. As Jim Collins, author of *Good to Great*, observed: "If you have more than three priorities, you don't have any" (Collins 2001). Then, and only then, the idealist asks what information is required to best and most directly measure progress and achievement of these priorities. If these measures exist already, then fine. But, if not, the idealist understands the need to build the capacity and invest in what is necessary to measure these critical things. To the idealist, while part of the motivation of the performance regime may be accountability, the dominant focus is the drive for improvement—making the higher-education system even better. So, the dominant goal is not a performance tool that reports or ranks, but rather one that drives engagement, analysis, strategic investment and change.

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<sup>1</sup>This may also result from the understanding of the "multiuniversity" nature of the modern academy (Kerr 2001) or it may reflect the strategy used by some students who submit overly long, unfocused responses to an exam question hoping the right answer must be in there somewhere.

## HEQCO's Role in Measuring Postsecondary Performance

HEQCO was established by legislation in 2005 (Government of Ontario 2005) “to assist the Minister in improving all aspects of the postsecondary education sector, including improving the quality of education provided in the sector, access to postsecondary education and accountability of postsecondary educational institutions.” HEQCO is managed by its board of directors (members of which are appointed by the government) and, as a crown agency, is independent of government. It is a relationship that the government has respected throughout the history of the agency, even when HEQCO has published research or views that may have been critical of government policies or actions.<sup>2</sup>

The act grants HEQCO a very broad research mandate. For current purposes, the most relevant clause of the act is the legislated requirement that HEQCO “evaluate the postsecondary education sector, report to the Minister on the results of the evaluation and make the report available to the public.” Thus, HEQCO is in the enviable position to dance in the space between pragmatist and idealist. We are affiliated with government, yet, as an independent agency we are neither bound nor constrained by present-day politics. We are keenly aware of and sensitive to the dominant political and policy issues of the day (we would be negligent if we were not), yet we work in a time frame that allows us to look down the road and anticipate the dominant issues and policies several years in the future. By legislation and *modus operandi*, our work and advice are to be based on evidence and not political expediency. Governments can either accept or reject the advice we provide. In fact, a clever government uses us strategically to do work or float ideas and policies that would be politically difficult for it to do directly.

Our most recent published performance review of the postsecondary system was in 2015 (Weingarten et al. 2015). Many earlier HEQCO research reports contributed piecemeal to this assessment. Our first comprehensive evaluation of overall postsecondary performance was delivered in twin publications: *The Productivity of the Ontario Public Postsecondary System* (HEQCO 2012) and *Performance Indicators* (HEQCO 2013a). Both these reports situated Ontario's performance within the context of a mix of international and Canadian indicators across four domains: quality, access, productivity and social impact. *Canadian Postsecondary Performance: Impact 2015* (Weingarten et al. 2015) was our second comprehensive examination of performance. Patterned after the Social Progress Index (Porter and Stern 2015), it measured 34 indicators that addressed access to the system, value to students and value to society. A more detailed description of the *Canadian Postsecondary Performance: Impact 2015* report and its findings can be obtained in Weingarten and Hicks (forthcoming).

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<sup>2</sup>We acknowledge that the Ontario government's respect for the independence of HEQCO may not necessarily characterize the relationship between other agencies similar to ours and their governments, which may be more likely to intervene, modulate or even censor reports.

## **Development of an Improved Performance Measurement Tool: Measuring Only What Matters**

The *Canadian Postsecondary Performance: Impact 2015* report made some important contributions to the design of postsecondary performance tools. It emphasized outputs and outcomes, not inputs. It provided a user-friendly presentation of the exhaustive data characteristic of performance reports as well as a web-based tool that allowed customization of the analysis for the reader's individual interests. It provided strong evidence that funding levels (at least those evident across Canada's 10 provinces) are uncorrelated with system performance, thus focusing attention on what systems achieve with the money they receive rather than on the amount they receive. It identified important data gaps in what is needed to have an even more informative and useful report. See Weingarten and Hicks (forthcoming) for further elaboration.

We did not abandon these design considerations in thinking through how a new performance tool could be improved. In retrospect, though, we had too many indicators because we were trying to appeal to too many audiences with too many interests. If the tool were to be improved, we would have to sharpen our thinking about the motivation and purpose of a postsecondary performance tool. This would lead inevitably to a sharp decrease in the number of indicators but, at least for the audience intended, a more relevant, informative and useful set.

Given HEQCO's mandate to provide advice that assists the government in improving its postsecondary system, our primary audience is government and the public postsecondary system it funds, supports and regulates. Thus, an improved performance tool has to allow the government to measure the effectiveness and impact of its practices and policies and to assess whether changes in policies and practices are steering the system in the right direction.

From this perspective, the obvious and most relevant issue is what matters most to the Ontario government. This is what should shape the design and details of the performance tool.

The difficulty is that in the hurly-burly of the political churn, it is not always clear what matters most to a government. We have argued before (Weingarten 2016) that it is sometimes hard to tell what matters most to the Ontario government because there are far too many goals (some of which contradict others) and their relative prominence seems to vary from one government decision to the next. But if one follows over time the various policy statements and funding announcements from government (as we do) and spends enough time with politicians and bureaucrats (as we do), then one can decipher the dominant goals the government sets for its public postsecondary system—there is no need (or appetite) for a grand visioning exercise.

In sum, as we contemplated the design of an improved performance assessment tool for Ontario, we gravitated to the following design considerations:

- We would focus on outcomes.
- We would measure outcomes that meaningfully address Ontario’s priorities.
- We would articulate them in simple language.
- We would take the time and energy to develop the required data collection machinery and measures, if these were not already available, and we would present them in an easy to digest format.

## **Postsecondary Priorities: What Matters Most to Ontario?**

### ***Equity of Access***

Postsecondary access has been Canada’s and Ontario’s dominant policy priority over the past three decades as we imagine it has for many jurisdictions.

At its most general level, access means more students participating in postsecondary education. For many years, this was the Canadian goal and it has been largely met. Driven by demographics, a belief that a postsecondary credential is essential for success in labour markets and enabled by enrolment-based funding mechanisms, institutions added more than 200,000 additional students to the Ontario system in the past decade alone. As the OECD’s *Education at a Glance* shows (OECD 2017), Canada is among the world-leading countries in overall postsecondary attainment rates among adults and, as we have shown (Weingarten et al. 2015), Ontario is a lead jurisdiction within Canada.

Access can take many forms. As noted above, it may simply reflect a goal of more postsecondary students. But, once such a goal has been achieved, as it has been in Ontario, access may be more specifically defined. For example, a goal of greater access may mean a desire for increased enrolment in certain programs or disciplines resulting, perhaps, from the distinctive economic needs or plans of the jurisdiction. In Ontario, the specific access goal is the desire to increase the participation rate of students who are currently underrepresented in postsecondary studies. These are the very students that derive, perhaps, the greatest value from a postsecondary education. Ontario’s goal to make access more equitable was stated most clearly in the mandate letter from the provincial premier to the minister of advanced education (Government of Ontario 2016a) that stated the need to “develop an access strategy to address the non-financial barriers to postsecondary education for underrepresented groups, including students from low-income backgrounds, students with disabilities and mature students.” This charge was accompanied by long called-for and significant policy and process reforms to the Ontario student financial-aid system in 2016, which were designed to spur greater participation in postsecondary education by currently underrepresented students.



## ***A High Quality Education Where Students Acquire the Knowledge and Skills Needed to Succeed***

Given that a quintessential goal of higher education is to give students a meaningful and useful education that allows them to succeed in life, measures of what students learn and how well they learn these things should be central to any postsecondary performance measurement instrument.

Multiple student surveys have demonstrated consistently that the dominant (although not exclusive) reason students attend postsecondary education is to get a credential needed to get a good job. And for decades, the dominant reason governments have supported public higher education is to graduate students with the skills and knowledge to nurture, feed, sustain and grow a robust and competitive economy.

We see many of the quality-focused measures of the past—like graduation rates, job placements for graduates and student satisfaction—to be proxy indicators for this central question: Are students learning and will they have learned the right things by the time they leave?

Our capacity (and motivation) to come up with meaningful indicators of what students learn is assisted greatly by the growing movement to articulate and measure learning outcomes—that is, what students should know and be able to do as a result of their postsecondary education. Similarly, the province has identified the quality of the student experience as a major policy priority and the use of learning-outcome measurements as a major vehicle for assessing whether this objective is being achieved (Herbert 2015). This policy and practice objective has been encouraged by many years of HEQCO research promoting the importance of articulating and measuring relevant learning outcomes in the Ontario postsecondary sector (HEQCO 2013b; Weingarten 2017c).

### ***Sustainable Institutions***

One obvious requirement of a well-functioning postsecondary system is that it and the institutions within it are sustainable and, therefore, have the financial and academic means to deliver on the expectations society and students impose on them.

In its starkest and simplest form, sustainability means that an institution's revenues and expenditures are in balance. An obvious sign of unsustainability is when an institution runs out of cash and can't meet an upcoming expense such as an impending loan payment or its payroll obligations. In the private sector, this is when one declares bankruptcy or insolvency. A much less obvious but more likely (and already evident) consequence of unsustainability within publicly funded, higher-education systems is that institutions make decisions that slowly erode the quality of the academic and student experience; that is, to maintain financial sustainability, academic sustainability is put at risk.

We recognize that sustainability is a condition that must be satisfied before outcomes such as more equitable access and higher quality can be pursued and achieved. Without it, the dialogue between government and institutions becomes stuck on questions of money and never moves on to questions of what we wish to collectively achieve, like more equitable access and higher quality learning.

The government has a particularly significant obligation to assure the sustainability of its public higher-education system. The quintessential roles of government are to be responsible stewards of public funds and to ensure the quality of public institutions. When the sustainability of a sector is questioned, as is the case now for the Ontario postsecondary system, the government is obliged to act. No government wishes to be in the position of having to bail out a public college or university facing financial exigency. In fact, the most recent changes to the formula by which Ontario colleges and universities are funded were designed specifically to stabilize the financial sustainability of its institutions that were at the greatest fiscal risk (MAESD 2017).

In sum, based on recent policy statements, reports and actions, what appears to matter most to Ontario is a postsecondary system that provides:

- Better access for underrepresented groups.
- A higher quality education where students learn the knowledge and skills to succeed.
- Sustainable institutions.

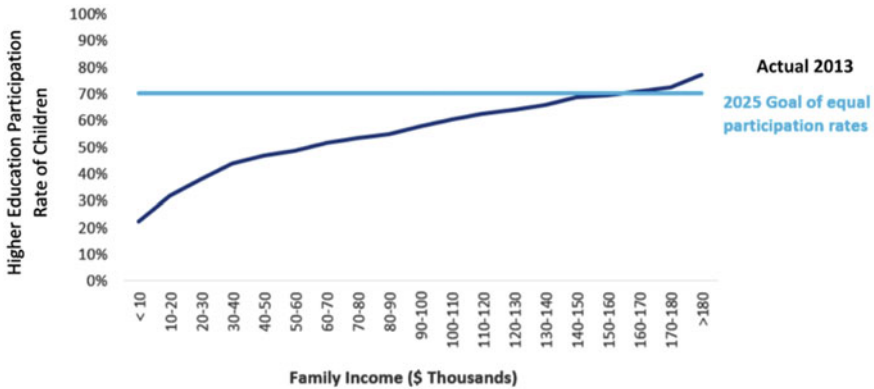
If a performance measurement instrument is to measure what matters most to government, then it must contain indicators that are directly relevant to understanding the current state of the Ontario system on these three dimensions and have the capacity to measure whether changes in government policy or institutional behaviour are driving the system to improve on them.

## **A Performance Measurement Tool that Measures Only What Matters**

### ***Equity of Access***

The Ontario government has been vocal about its commitment to increase the province's postsecondary attainment rate to 70% by 2020, a target that has been largely achieved. As a result, the current dominant access goal has shifted to the achievement of equitable access for students in underrepresented groups. The government has identified these to be Indigenous, Francophone, and first-generation students as well as students with a disability, and those from low-income families.

To increase the participation rate of these cohorts, the government has introduced special funding envelopes and other initiatives. The most significant policy and practice initiative has been the recent (Government of Ontario 2016b)



**Fig. 1** Higher-education participation rates of 18–21-year-olds living at home, by parental income in Ontario, 2013

fundamental transformation of the student financial-assistance program. The revised program front-end loads more grants (as opposed to loans) to students from low-income families (thus allowing the government to legitimately claim “free tuition” for students who come from families below a certain income level.)

At a very pragmatic level, equity of access will have been achieved when the participation and graduation rates of underrepresented groups, such as those students from families with low incomes, equal those of students from the most advantaged groups currently well represented within our colleges and universities.

This suggests an indicator that is simple, clear and measurable. If the target group is students from low-income families, for example, one can look for changes in the relationship between family income and postsecondary participation rates. Figure 1 shows the current relationship (Government of Ontario 2016b). We will have achieved greater equity of access when the participation rate for students from low-income families approaches and meets that of students from higher-income families, as shown as the 2025 goal in Fig. 1.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Given the correlations between low income and other targeted underrepresented groups like Indigenous and first-generation students—you can easily see these across the 20 Ontario universities in our latest university differentiation report (Hicks and Jonker 2016)—the measurement of participation by income may suffice as the sole equity-of-access indicator in our proposed dashboard. Correlation is, of course, not causation. In particular, this means that efficacious interventions for the redress of low participation by identified underrepresented groups will differ and will be tailored to their needs and circumstances. Financial assistance programs on their own, no matter how good, will not suffice. And, of course, government and institutions will continue to monitor and measure participation by each of the individual, targeted groups.

## ***A Higher Quality Education Where Students Learn the Skills Needed to Succeed***

Institutions report many things to the Ontario government—for example, enrolment (in Ontario counted in multiple ways and reported differently to different parts of government), capital spending, deferred maintenance, scholarships and bursaries, faculty and staff numbers, wages, salaries and benefits, research funding, executive compensation, etc. Ironically, despite the fact that we are dealing with an education system, there is almost no reporting about what students learn. We could not envision a postsecondary measurement tool that did not have academic quality and learning at its core.

There are different opinions about how to measure academic quality. In May 2017, we assembled a group of international experts for a two-day workshop to explore how this might be done (Weingarten 2017b).<sup>4</sup> The options ranged from quality measures based on inputs (e.g., number of teaching staff, class sizes), to proxies for learning (e.g., student satisfaction and engagement, graduation and persistence rates) and institution-wide standardized tools measuring attributes like critical thinking (e.g., Collegiate Learning Assessment).

Input measures provide no evidence about what is actually learned. Even proxy measures for learning may not reflect whether learning has happened; for example, students who indicate a high level of satisfaction with their educational experience may not have learned the skills they require. Proxy measures also raise concerns that teachers or institutions could engage in behaviours to improve these numbers while actually decreasing quality or the amount learned. For example, institutions might reduce standards to increase graduation rates or professors might decrease course requirements and standards to enhance the student ratings of course or professor satisfaction (OCUFA 2017).

For both philosophical and pragmatic reasons, we gravitated to measures of learning that were direct, using psychometrically reliable and valid instruments. And we adopted a pragmatic approach to defining quality by focusing on a limited number of attributes and skills that we believe all would agree are things a post-secondary graduate should have acquired (Weingarten 2017a).

Some suggest that this approach is akin to searching for the holy grail of quality measurements. We are not great believers in holy grails. But, as pragmatists, we realize that governments, like all good administrators, know that you signal what is important by how you spend your time and money. If a government spends its time measuring enrolments and allocates public funds on the basis of enrolment, then people infer that what matters is enrolment and they act accordingly. This has been the experience of colleges and universities in Ontario for decades (HEQCO 2015).

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<sup>4</sup>A book entitled *Assessing Quality in Postsecondary Education: International Perspectives* with chapters from each of the participants was published by McGill-Queen's University Press in 2018 (Weingarten et al. 2018a).

If we want to signal that what students learn is important, then we have to measure it and tie it to funding. Ontario is moving in that direction—for now rhetorically but presumably, with time, in practice.

All Ontario colleges and universities measure learning and report it via the traditional transcript that lists the courses students have taken and the grades they have received. These transcripts index the student's mastery of the course material. We are interested primarily in student learning of basic skills and competencies that most people would agree should be products of a postsecondary education—such as a certain level of literacy, numeracy, critical thinking and problem-solving ability. It is not irrelevant that these skills are exactly the ones employers value the most in their future hires (World Economic Forum 2016) and the ones they indicate as most lacking in current graduates (Grant 2016).

Quality measurements of skills are not without precedent in education. Primary and secondary education systems have long emphasized measurement of basic skills like literacy, numeracy and problem solving. In Ontario, skills of school students are assessed at regular intervals through provincial and international tests like the Education Quality and Accountability Office's Grades 3, 6, 9 and 10 assessments of reading, writing, mathematics and literacy (EQAO n.d.), and the Programme for International Student Assessment (OECD n.d.). Canada has periodically measured similar skills in adults through international assessments like the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), but never for the specific purpose of determining what, or how much, is learned in our postsecondary institutions.

Direct measurement of skills is not something that is done routinely in the Ontario higher-education system although we have promoted the benefits of doing so (HEQCO 2013b). This is where the luxury of being the idealist kicks in, especially for an organization that has research at its core.

We initiated a large trial to see whether the direct measurement of these skills was possible and whether these measurements could be incorporated into a post-secondary performance measurement tool.

We issued an Expression of Interest to recruit colleges and universities to participate in this trial. Although we targeted postsecondary institutions in Ontario, we received expressions of interest, and eventual participation, by institutions outside the province. The number of institutions interested in participating in this trial far exceeded our expectation. In the end, 11 colleges and nine universities participated in the trial. Their motivation for participating was a genuine interest in being involved in an exercise that directly measures skills and competencies that post-secondary leaders hope their graduates would acquire.

HEQCO provided administrative support and managed the trial. Each institution was responsible for receiving ethics approval for the research project. We tailored the specifics of testing within each institution to best serve the particulars and interests of institutions, as long as decisions conformed to the general pilot requirements and retained our ability to aggregate the data.

The measurement instrument we used for this pilot, which we termed the Essential Adult Skills Initiative (EASI), was the commercial version of the

assessment tool used by PIAAC to measure literacy, numeracy and problem solving in technology-rich environments in colleges and universities (OECD, nd). We selected Education & Skills Online (ESO), a product of the OECD, because, like PIAAC, the ESO has undergone an extensive and rigorous validation process and is available to test takers in English and French. Its development has been supported by the European Commission and, in Canada, the Council of Ministers of Education. It is currently administered by the Educational Testing Service. This means that assessment data collected by EASI can be compared to national and international norms.

Rather than focusing simply on the mastery of the mechanics of vocabulary or arithmetic operations, this instrument assesses the real-world application of literacy, numeracy and problem solving in technology-rich environments to provide a picture of a student's ability to use them to navigate and respond effectively. In addition to its international reputation as one of the best measures of adult skills, the ESO is useful to students. The ESO is an adaptive assessment tool, so questions become progressively easier or more difficult depending on the test taker's performance. Unlike comparable assessment tools, the ESO shares this vital information with each test taker, providing personalized scores that can be downloaded after each of the three major test components are completed.

When a testing window was opened within an institution, students in the programs to be tested were given three weeks to complete it. Students were recruited to participate by email invitations. Each week, students who had not completed the assessment received reminders to participate. The pilot included an evaluation of the effectiveness of various forms of incentives to motivate students to take the test.

EASI was designed with a value-added perspective by measuring skill levels of students in the first year and in the final year of selected programs. We recognize that different institutions accept students at varying levels of skill capacities. We are not interested in the absolute levels of these skills so much as we are in the improvement of these skills over the course of postsecondary education.<sup>5</sup>

There are other value-added skills assessments underway such as the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education (Wabash 2017) and the Collegiate Learning Assessment Plus (Council for Aid to Education 2017).

EASI is a multi-year pilot project. Testing began in fall 2016 and was completed by the end of 2017. The results will be reported publicly in 2018.

Important lessons have been learned from the testing conducted already. Most importantly, the pilot has revealed that it is possible to administer system-wide assessments that provide meaningful data about the learning that takes place in our institutions. Even though we worked with 20 different institutions, all of the logistical and methodological issues (e.g., privacy of data, students taking the test on different IT platforms, etc.) were satisfactorily resolved. At this point, the pilot

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<sup>5</sup>We have long advocated for the benefits of a policy of institutional differentiation (Weingarten and Deller 2010) and the idea that different institutions serve students with different needs and capacities. To present absolute levels would undermine this policy; it is the improvement of skills, not the absolute levels, that is important.

has demonstrated that it would be easy to scale up this type of assessment to a full system, provincial or national level. We are also encouraged by the response of some institutions that participated in this trial that are both enthusiastic and motivated to push this pilot even further and to a larger scale.

### ***Sustainable Institutions***

We are in the midst of releasing a series of publications that speak to the challenges of sustainability of public postsecondary systems and how they can be addressed. This includes a framework paper addressing what we mean by sustainability in higher education and its most important components (Weingarten et al. 2016), followed by additional papers that illuminate the revenue side of the sustainability challenge (Weingarten et al. 2017a, b). In early 2018, we released an additional paper illuminating the expenditure side of the sustainability challenge (Weingarten et al. 2018b), followed by a capstone paper that presents options to government and institutions for improving the sustainability of the institutions and the system (Weingarten et al. 2018).

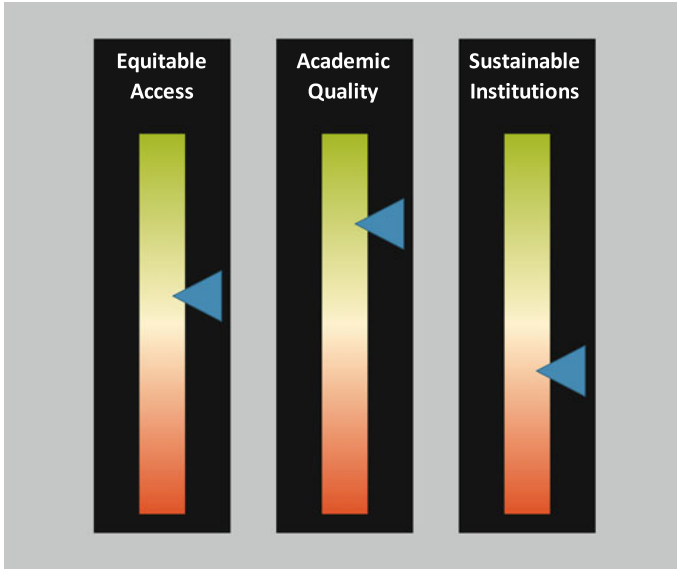
These publications reveal a number of useful measures of sustainability, many of which, by agreement, are reported by Ontario colleges and universities to the government. We refer the reader to these papers for details of these possible indicators and why evaluation of the sustainability of a system and the institutions within it is important.

### **What Is Left to Be Done?**

This paper describes the thinking leading to the development of an improved measurement tool to assess the performance of the Ontario postsecondary system. The proposed instrument will give the government a useful tool to assess the impact and outcomes of the policy and practice changes it had instituted to steer the postsecondary system based on its highest priority goals. The tool, therefore, has a limited number of indicators that measure outcomes and goals that matter most to the government. The presentation of the information will be simple and accessible—a dashboard.

For Ontario, the outcomes that matter the most are equity of access, a quality education where students acquire the skills needed to succeed and sustainable institutions. We present a version of this dashboard in Fig. 2.

Next on our to-do list is to identify the detailed measures that will make up each indicator. We are at various stages on this journey. For equity of access, we are focusing primarily on one measure—participation in higher education by income—for which the relevant data is readily available. For quality of learning, we have



**Fig. 2** Ontario's performance dashboard: measuring only what matters

described the ongoing pilot project we have launched with 20 partner institutions. There is considerable work remaining to move Ontario to the point where the direct measurement of learning is scaled up across the province. With regard to sustainable institutions, at the conclusion of our ongoing research and publication series, we will have canvassed a rich set of relevant concepts and data. We will then consult institutional and government partners to identify which of these can best reveal a forward-looking picture of institutional sustainability.

Over the longer term, we will need to consider one additional domain of higher-education outcomes: research. Our primary focus is on the learning mission of public higher education, so we have omitted development of research outcomes or impact measurement for now. Arguably, even a learning-mission focus ought to examine research, in as much as research is, at the very least, a competing focal point and expenditure pressure for higher-education institutions that may have an impact (positive or negative) on learner-focused outcomes like access and learning. We acknowledge the importance of research outcomes to Ontario and will be adding research considerations to our dashboard in the second generation of its development.

The power of our approach lies in using a deliberately limited number of indicators that are tied to a limited number of jurisdictional priorities, and in taking the time to build direct and robust data to measure these. This approach is, in our opinion, valuable and translatable to any jurisdiction. Our specific priorities and measures are, of course, Ontario-centric. Yours ought to be and will be relevant to your jurisdiction.



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# Transparency Tools in Wales: Bringing Higher Education Performances into Focus?



Huw Morris

## Introduction

The term transparency tools in a public policy context has many potential meanings (Ball 2009). For the purposes of this chapter, the term is taken to mean policy instruments devised by any stakeholder, whether a minister, policymaker, business person, institution manager, academic, consultant, or journalist, which are designed to make some aspect of practice more visible, susceptible to comparison and open to scrutiny, with a view to possible subsequent beneficial change.

Over the last sixty years, there has been significant growth in the number and variety of transparency tools designed to provide assessments for different stakeholders of the teaching and research performance of university staff and students. This chapter analyses the transparency tools that have been developed over this period in Wales, one of the four constituent nations of the United Kingdom. In this assessment, the following three research questions are addressed.

- a. Who has developed these transparency tools and why?
- b. Where and when were these tools developed?
- c. What were the key features of the transparency tools developed?

Using Michael Barber's normative model of government approaches to the regulation of public services as a guide (Barber 2015), the following pages answer these three questions by reference to five overlapping phases of recent development. The first of the five phases of development began in England and Wales in

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the early nineteenth century with the introduction of a system of collegial and professional self-regulation based on a belief in the **altruism and trust** that could be placed in academics to assure and maintain the equivalence of standards between universities and colleges. The steady expansion of higher education in the UK in the twentieth century and pressure on public finances led, in the second phase of development, to the introduction of government-sponsored audit and assessment of education and research. Implicit in these arrangements were assumptions about a different form of regulation which Barber terms **hierarchy and targets**. In the 1990s, the continued expansion of higher education student numbers prompted the third phase of development with the creation of national newspaper university league tables and international higher education rankings designed to reflect the growing marketisation of higher education through a system which assumed student and institution **choice and competition** based on measures of teaching and research activity. In the early 2000s, in the fourth phase of development, a new range of tools for measuring performance appears to have been developed in a less transparent manner for senior managers, government agencies and private funders to measure the **privatised** economic returns of higher education and research.

As this chapter aims to demonstrate, as each new transparency tool has been introduced, established tools have generally not been removed. Instead, each new tool has added a new layer of control to what has become a very complex system. Meanwhile, despite and on occasion because of the introduction of these tools, problems with what is seen to be the quality of higher education provision have still arisen.

In Wales in recent years, questions have begun to be asked about the connection between established transparency tools, local practice and national policy intention. These questions have provided the backdrop to the commissioning of a series of reviews designed to promote what Barber would term **devolution and transparency** (Hazelkorn 2015; Diamond 2016; Weingarten 2017).

## **Collegial and Professional Self-regulation—Trust and Altruism**

There are eight universities with their head offices and most of their operations based in Wales: Aberystwyth, Bangor, Cardiff, Cardiff Metropolitan, Swansea, University of South Wales, the University of Wales Trinity St David (UWTSD) and Wrexham (Glyndŵr) University. These universities provide higher education, research, innovation, community engagement, enterprise and other services to the people of Wales and to students and research funders from other parts of the UK and the wider world. In addition, there are sixteen further education colleges and work-based learning providers based in Wales which provide government-funded

higher education courses and/or higher-level apprenticeships<sup>1</sup>. There are also six other universities and one higher education provider with branch operations or franchise arrangements operating in Wales<sup>2</sup>.

The first higher education institution in Wales was St David's College, an ecclesiastical college based in Lampeter in West Wales. The College was founded by Royal Charter in 1822 but was not granted its own degree awarding powers until 1852 when it was given the power to award a Bachelor's degree in Divinity with a subsequent extension of these powers to Bachelors' degrees in Art in 1865 (Davies and Jones 1905).

Fifty years after the establishment of St David's College, three university colleges were formed by Royal Charter in Aberystwyth for mid-Wales in 1872, in Cardiff for South Wales and Monmouthshire in 1883, and in Bangor for North Wales in 1885. When first established, these three colleges provided degree courses overseen and awarded through the University of London's external degree programme which had been established in 1858 (Haldane 1918). Concern about the limitations placed by the University of London's external degree programme on the development of curricula locally led to the establishment of the federal University of Wales in 1893. This new university took on the role of overseeing the academic standards of degrees awarded in the three colleges and paved the way for further university expansion through the establishment of University College Swansea in 1920; the Welsh National School of Medicine in 1921, the University of Wales Institute of Science and Technology (UWIST) in 1967; and the subsequent inclusion into the University's federal structure of St David's College, Lampeter in 1971; Cardiff Institute of Higher Education (CIHE) in 1992 and University of Wales College Newport in 1996.

For most of the first one hundred and sixty years of the work of the higher education providers in Wales (from 1822 to 1982), the UK Government and Welsh local government, like their counterparts in England, Northern Ireland and Scotland, did not seek to regulate directly the activities and standards achieved by staff and students in these institutions (Harvey 2005). Instead, the governance and internal management of these institutions were left to their Councils/Courts and Senates (Shattock 2008).

In England, the establishment of the University of Durham in 1832 led to the development of an external examiner system designed to ensure comparability of the academic standards of students and staff at this new institution with the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge. The use of this quality assurance tool was made more extensive in the mid-1800s through the creation of the University of London

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<sup>1</sup>Acorn Learning Ltd, Babcock, CAD Centre, Bridgend College, Cambrian Training, Cardiff and the Vale College, Coleg Cambria, Coleg Sir Gâr, Coleg Gwent, Construction Industry Training Board (CITB), Gower College, Grŵp Llandrillo Menai, ITEC Training Solutions, Merthyr Tydfil College, People Plus Group and Rathbone Training Ltd.

<sup>2</sup>Kingston University, Open University, Pearson, University of Chester, University College Birmingham, University of East London and University of West London (Student Finance Wales 2017).

external degree programme in 1858 and the subsequent creation of the federal Queen's University in Ireland in 1845 and the federal Victoria University in the North of England in 1880. Under these arrangements, the equivalence of standards achieved by students in constituent colleges was assured through external examiners appointed by the federal university. This is not to say that these arrangements applied with equal force in all areas. Non-degree qualifications and diplomas were often locally regulated by colleges, as was the adult education provision expanded through the activities of the Workers' Education Association in Wales from 1903 and the pioneer classes offered by the university colleges, beginning in Wales at Blaenau Ffestiniog in 1908 (Bull 1965; Evans 1953; Lowe 1970).

The importance of collegial self-regulation of teaching activities in Welsh university colleges was affirmed by the Royal Commission on University Education in Wales in 1915. Chaired by Lord Haldane, the Royal Commission was established following two UK Government Treasury reports which had drawn attention to the lack of funds for the planned activities of the University of Wales and the poor coordination of activities between the colleges. The Royal Commission's final report in 1918 recommended that the University of Wales should assure standards by (a) fixing minimum entry requirements for degree courses; (b) laying down some general regulations for the conditions of degree level study; (c) determining the standard of the final examination for degree by means of external examiners; and (d) undertaking the general supervision and organisation of postgraduate studies. Aside from these general recommendations, it was suggested that the University's Senate consisting of academic staff should be replaced by a smaller Academic Board and that the University's Court of prominent local and national stakeholders should be expanded to over 200 members so that it could act as a travelling parliament for the University. The intention behind this proposal was that the future direction of the University should be influenced more strongly by national and local interests not only the academic interests of college staff who, it was noted, were often educated or had worked outside of Wales. In exchange for accepting these reforms, the University of Wales was provided with a supplemental Royal Charter and the additional funds needed to establish the University College Swansea and the National School of Medicine, among other things (Jenkins 1993).

The external examiner system of collegial self-regulation in Wales, like that in England but unlike that in all other European countries, except for Denmark, relied on academics from other institutions agreeing the assessment methods used with the internal examiners and then reviewing the examinations and other work completed by students before reporting to department-based committees to confirm the students' results and degree classifications (Cuthbert 2003). In many subject areas, this collegial self-regulation was supplemented by a periodic review by professional associations which took a role in the development of common standards and curricula for a range of occupations, most evidently those professions where the role of the association had been recognised through the award of a Royal Charter (Perkin 1990).

The primacy of the role of the external examiner was again affirmed by the Robbins Review of Higher Education in the 1960s (Robbins 1963). In addition, this review recommended the formation of the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) to regulate the award of higher education diplomas, undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, as well as doctoral awards in non-university settings. Under these arrangements, institutions wishing to offer these awards were required to apply for initial validation of new degree courses and then to undergo a process of quinquennial review (Silver and Davis 2006). Once established, these arrangements provided for a steady expansion of the number of non-university based higher education students. Meanwhile, the transparency of assessments of higher education teaching and assessment in these newer institutions was made clearer through the role of Her Majesty's Inspectorate which inspected polytechnics, colleges of higher education and adult education providers, but not universities unless invited (Dunford 1998). In Wales, early beneficiaries of these changes were Glamorgan Polytechnic, Gwent Institute of Higher Education (now USW), North East Wales Institute of Higher Education (now Wrexham Glyndŵr University) and Swansea Institute of Higher Education (now part of UWTSD) (Pratt 1997).

Nearly two hundred years after their initial introduction in the UK, external examiners remain a central feature of the quality assurance arrangements and have been supported in successive Parliamentary sponsored reviews of higher education (Robbins 1963; Dearing 1997; House of Commons 2009). Despite this support, concern about possible inconsistent standards and potentially overly cosy relationships between internal and external examiners has prompted three reviews of these arrangements in recent years (UUK 2011; QAA 2013; HEA 2015). Each of these reports has drawn attention to the lack of consistency in the definition of the role of the external examiner and to differences in the training and development available to people in external examiner roles. In the words of the UUK report:

“to secure widespread confidence the system should be more open [transparent], so that students know what external examiners do, what they say about programmes, and how institutions respond to this” (UUK 2011:6).

What has been less explored in recent years has been the current and potential future role of professional statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs). Here the number and function of these organisations have continued to expand. In 2016, the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) listed 178 PSRBs operating across the UK with a remit to oversee and accredit university-based courses of undergraduate students.

Away from the higher education teaching and assessment work of university staff, evaluation of the quality of research and other scholarly activity was undertaken through a system which relied on peer review of research work by academic colleagues who judged research funding applications, book proposals, draft journal articles and completed monographs (Boaz and Ashby 2003). Meanwhile, the quality of academic staff when appointed or promoted to teaching, research or administrative roles was assured using written references from academics at other universities (SCRE 2003).

## **Audit and Assessment—Hierarchy and Targets**

The traditional collegial and professionally orientated approach to quality assurance and the determination of academic standards in UK universities, with its implicit assumptions of trust in academics and belief in the altruism of university leaders and other staff, came under pressure in the 1980s (Enders 2013). In 1981, the newly elected UK Conservative Government introduced cuts in university funding which averaged 17.9% (Warner and Palfreyman 2003). The allocation of these reductions was overseen by the University Grants Committee (UGC) with advice from officials in the Department of Education and Science (DfES). Through these deliberations, it was decided to focus the reductions on institutions which were deemed to be less academically reputable, although the methods through which this was determined were not wholly transparent (Kogan and Hanney 1999).

The scale of the financial changes introduced by the UGC in 1981 created operational difficulties for many universities and led to the establishment of the Jarratt Committee to undertake a series of efficiency studies of the management of universities. The Jarratt report, which was published in March 1985, recommended that the management and governance of universities should be altered to bring them more closely into line with the practices of business organisations. Among the detailed recommendations was the proposal that “reliable and consistent performance indicators” should be developed to help universities plan and allocate resources more effectively (Jarratt 1985:22). In the report which made these recommendations, it was assumed that these transparency tools would be used by senior managers, university councils and the Government appointed regulator, but that they would not need to be visible to a wider range of stakeholders or indeed the public.

One of the less well remembered but arguably more important institutional changes introduced in the 1980s was the formation by the CVCP of its Academic Standards Group. This group published its first report in 1986 together with three codes of practice covering external examiners, postgraduate training and research degree examination appeals. By outlining agreed expectations, this report, it has been suggested, “can fairly be said to have started the widespread effective discussion about quality and standards in UK universities” (Williams 1992).

Interestingly in hindsight, the first real test of what was intended in the late 1980s to be a more hierarchical and managerial approach to the definition of standards in universities was in Wales. When financial difficulties emerged at the UCC in 1986 following the UGC cuts, the UK Government’s Department of Education and Science appointed a team to investigate and to report on what should be done in response. The results of this investigation, revealed a reluctance of senior managers to reduce costs at the institution in response to the UGC cuts and it was agreed that the best way to resolve these problems was to merge the UCC with its near neighbour UWIST and for the Vice Chancellor of UCC to retire (Smith and Cunningham 2003; Williams 2006).



The removal of the binary divide between polytechnics and universities in 1992 was accompanied by the institutional recognition of national divides in higher education arrangements within the UK through the creation of four separate funding bodies [i.e. Department of Education, Northern Ireland, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (Hefce), the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (Hefcw) and the Scottish Funding Council (SFC)]. Despite the creation of these different funding and regulatory systems, there was a concerted effort to create UK wide systems for the quality assurance and assessment of teaching and research. After some initial disagreement about how this might best be achieved, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) was launched in 1997 with a pan-UK remit to undertake institutional audits, teaching quality assessments, overseas and collaborative audits. These review methodologies provided initially for the numerical scoring of the quality of teaching and learning in higher education institutions audits of their internal quality assurance procedures. These methods developed over time to become a single integrated review methodology with judgements of either: confidence, limited confidence or no confidence in the soundness of an institution's current and likely future management of academic standards as well as the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

The development of new systems of academic quality audit and assessment was not without incident. Quality concerns were reported on by the QAA at several universities in the UK between 1997 and 2017. In Wales, two of these cases led to subsequent mergers between the reviewed institution and a near neighbour (University of Wales, Lampeter with Trinity University College 2007–10 and the University of Wales with Trinity St David 2011–13 (Lipsett 2009; BBC 2011).

In 2011, the remit of the QAA was extended by the introduction of a requirement by the UK Border Agency and its successor UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) for higher education providers to successfully complete a standards and quality review as a condition of their Tier 4 licence to recruit students from outside the European Union. In 2014, the BBC Panorama documentary team examined the operation of the English Language Testing arrangements by a private contractor used by colleges and universities across the UK. After a subsequent investigation by the UKVI, 57 colleges and three publicly funded universities, including the London campus of Glyndŵr University, had their highly trusted status suspended by the Home Office preventing them from recruiting non-EU overseas students until the alleged breaches of procedure had been rectified (THE 2014).

Running alongside the introduction of government-sponsored systems for the assessment and quality assurance of teaching and learning in universities were more formalised arrangements for evaluating the quality of university-based research activity. The first of these evaluations was the Research Selectivity Exercise in 1986 which reviewed a small selection of books, journal articles and other publications submitted by universities across a wide range of subject areas. The methods used in this initial assessment were then steadily extended in successive Research Assessment Exercises in 1989, 1992, 1996, 2001, 2008 and the Research Excellence Framework (REF) in 2014. In the last of these exercises, researchers were required to submit their four best publications over the preceding five years

along with accounts of the research environment within which they operated and a selection of impact case studies.

The requirement in the REF 2014 to submit impact case studies extended an initiative begun in 1999 by what is now the Higher Education Business and Community Interaction survey. In England, but not in Wales, this survey has been used to determine the allocation of third-stream funding to support enterprise activity and community engagement through the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF).

Recent reviews of the volume and quality of research publications as well as the content and quality of impact case studies in the last Research Excellence Framework have revealed that universities in Wales are highly productive and have very successfully demonstrated the impact of their work on commercial practice and public policy over recent years (Hewlett and Hinrichs-Krapels 2017; LSW 2017).

Meanwhile, broader evaluations of the consequences of the audit and assessment transparency tools for the operation of UK universities have drawn attention to the ways in which audit changes the way university staff work as they strive to make their institutions more auditable (Power 1999). This, it is suggested, increases the number of people involved in management and governance, reinforces discipline and subject boundaries, while reducing variation in the educational and research methods and processes used in these institutions (Strathern 2000; Morley 2003; Burrows 2012).

## League Tables—Choice and Competition

The first national university league table in the UK was published by the Times and Sunday Times newspapers in 1992 (Times 2017). The Guardian newspaper followed this lead in 1999, the Daily Telegraph in 2007 and the Independent between 2008 and 2011 using information collated by Mayfield University Consultants for the Complete University Guide (Dill and Soo 2005; Complete University Guide 2017; Guardian 2017). Meanwhile, the Financial Times began its global MBA league table ranking in 1999 and then steadily expanded the breadth of this annual survey to include seven different types of postgraduate business degree (Bradshaw 2015). The first international university league table was produced in 2003 by a team of academics at Shanghai Jiao Tong University in China. Unlike the earlier national university newspaper league tables, the assessment of individual universities in what has now become known as the Academic Ranking of World Universities is based primarily on their research prowess (ARWU 2017). Times Higher Education followed the lead provided by the Shanghai Jiao Tong league table and produced its own global rankings in association with the QS consultancy in 2004 (THE 2017; QS 2017). This arrangement ended in 2009 when the THE and QS began to produce their own separate rankings. The last of the most widely quoted international tables in the UK is the CWTS Leiden ranking which began in 2007 (CWTS Leiden 2017).

The three national university league tables in the UK referred to most frequently by academics use slightly different measures and weightings to assess and rank institutional performance. All three of these league tables include input measures of the average entry tariff asked of higher education applicants as well as one or more measures of expenditure, whether spend per student, academic services spend, or facilities spend. All three league tables also make use of an outcome measure of students' career prospects as revealed by their employment or engagement with further education and training six months after graduation. Where the national surveys differ most from one another is in the attention they place on different process and output measures. Here, the Times Good University Guide and the Complete University Guide tend to focus on measures of degree completion and the proportion of firsts and 2.1 s awarded alongside measures of research prowess. Meanwhile, the Guardian league table places greater emphasis on measures of student satisfaction with teaching, feedback and the value added by their education.

The differences between the four international university league tables are more marked. The Academic Ranking of World Universities places a heavy emphasis on the quality of the research completed by current staff and alumni as measured by Nobel prizes and Fields Medals as well as the number of articles published in leading science and medical journals. A similar approach is adopted by CWTS Leiden but with an emphasis on the proportion of highly cited journal articles produced by academics at the ranked institutions. The Times Higher Education World League table, by contrast, includes a range of input measures which include the staff-student ratio and the proportion of postgraduate students at the institution. The output measures considered place a heavy emphasis on research as measured by journal paper citations, productivity and reputation, but there is also the inclusion of a measure of teaching reputation and the scale of international collaborative work. The last of the four league tables, QS, is arguably the least objective if not the most volatile as half of the total score is derived from a questionnaire survey of academic and employer reputation.

The development of the first Shanghai Jaio Tong international university league table was prompted by a desire by academics at this institution to measure the relative performance of universities in different countries (ARWU 2017). Despite this intention, there is growing evidence that these transparency tools are used by international and more able students to help them choose between institutions (Gibbons et al. 2015; Chevalier and Jia 2015). Whether these relationships affect the overall level of university student admissions and whether the impact is of the same magnitude in all nations and regions of the UK is not yet clear. At present, anecdotal evidence suggests that the impact is similar in different parts of Wales and England and while beneficial, in the absence of student number controls, for institutions in the top half of league tables, it appears to have a negative impact on those in the bottom half (NAO 2017).

These effects, it has been suggested, also influence university mission and department activity as they encourage more institutions and academics to copy the behaviours of those organisations and individuals who appear to do well by these

measures (Hazelkorn 2008). As Shore and Wright note in their recent review of the impact of rankings on universities:

[a] ‘good dean’ knows in intimate detail how the variables in each of the rankings are constructed and will check that they are registering all the positive figures (about students, staff, income, publications, exam performance, graduate employment, etc.) in precisely the right way for the ranking companies to pick them up in their questionnaires and surveys. The deans explained that the rankings are ‘omnipresent’—that academic decisions about the curriculum, evaluation of subordinates, faculty publication strategies, admissions policies, and budget allocations are all shaped by their likely effect on the school’s numbers and ranking. (Shore and Wright 2015:428)

## Measures of Satisfaction and Return - Privatisation

In the mid-2000s, the focus of UK Government sponsored transparency tools shifted towards assessments of the experiences of students as recorded by surveys of their satisfaction by consultancy companies, as well as measures of their subsequent earnings and career prospects as measured by university agencies and government departments. This emphasis on the private returns of higher education activity for individuals has been mirrored in evaluations of research activity where the focus shifted from discipline and subject-based assessment of quality towards a greater emphasis on measures of the economic impact of this research for the commercial and public users and funders of these projects.

The first example of concern with the private returns of the customers of higher education institutions was provided by the National Student Survey (NSS) which was established in 2005 to gather the views by means of an online questionnaire of full and part-time final year undergraduate students studying at universities (NSS 2017). The coverage of this survey was extended to further and higher education colleges offering degree courses in 2008 and to alternative (and in many cases private) providers in England in 2015 (BIS 2015). From its inception, the NSS has been conducted by the private market research company IPSOS/MORI on behalf of Hefce and the other national funding bodies in the UK. The survey consists of twenty-seven questions which ask students individually about their experiences of teaching, assessment and support while studying on undergraduate courses. In 2017, over 260,000 students at 357 institutions across the UK took part in the survey including all but two of the higher education providers based in Wales<sup>3</sup>.

The launch of the NSS by the UK national funding councils in 2005 was accompanied by the parallel launch of the International Student Barometer Survey by another private educational consultancy, i-Graduate (i-Graduate 2017). This survey questionnaire is designed to help university managers to track and benchmark international student opinions of their teaching, learning and wider university

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<sup>3</sup>The NSS covers franchised higher education provision in further education colleges, but not alternative providers with specific designation, e.g. in Wales the Centre for Alternative Technology and the Union School of Theology.

experiences while enrolled at UK higher education institutions from initial enquiry to application, assessment and prospects after graduation. Unlike the NSS, there is no requirement for institutions in any UK nation to take part in this survey, however, six of the eight universities in Wales and most of the universities in England subscribe to this service (i-Graduate 2017).

Following the lead of the NSS and ISB, the Higher Education Academy (HEA) in the UK developed four survey questionnaires to help university staff assess their students' educational experiences.

The first of these questionnaires is the annual Student Academic Experience Survey (SAES) which was developed in 2006 in association with the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) to assess the experience of undergraduate students across the higher education sector. The most recent survey in 2017 drew on 14,057 responses to a survey questionnaire which was posted to 70,000 members of the YouthSight student panel, which is recruited by the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) and which pays students £4 to £10 to complete each survey (YouthSight 2017).

The second questionnaire is the biennial Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) which was launched in 2007 to assess students' experiences of supervision, institutional resources, research community, progress and assessment, as well as skills and professional development. The last survey, in May 2017, received 57,689 responses from students in 117 higher education institutions accounting for 53% of the UK's postgraduate research student population (HEA 2017).

The third HEA questionnaire is the annual Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) which began in 2009. This survey asks students questions about teaching, learning, engagement, assessment, feedback, organisation and skills development on their course. The last PTES in 2016 gathered responses from 82,000 students at 108 institutions (HEA 2017).

The fourth of the HEA questionnaires is the UK Engagement Survey (UKES) which was designed and trialed in 2013 to enable university managers to understand their undergraduate students' experiences in the areas of: critical thinking, learning with others, interacting with staff and reflecting and connecting, as well as course challenge, engagement with research, staff-student partnership, skills development and how students spend their time.

The UK Government White Paper on Higher Education, "Students at the heart of the system" published in 2011 drew attention to the variety of different measures of higher education performance and recommended that summary information should be published on their websites (BIS 2011). Many of these different measures were subsequently brought together by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) in a Key Information Set (KIS) for each institution. Developed to provide prospective students with the information, it was suggested, they would need to enable them to make informed choices about which university to attend, the KIS has more recently been collated on the UNISTATS website (UNISTATS 2017). This information includes student entry requirements, NSS results, graduate destination data and details of professional accreditations, as well as links to more detailed curriculum information.

The Longitudinal Employment Outcomes (LEO) dataset was developed in 2015 to improve the graduate destination data available to students and to enable applicants, institutions, regulators and others to gain a better understanding of the longer-term earnings prospects for graduates from different courses and institutions (DfE 2016). The LEO dataset was constructed by linking data collected by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) with the individual learner records of graduates from different institutions.

More recently, information of the type developed for the UNISTATS website has been combined with information submitted by higher education providers to form the basis for judgements in the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcome Framework (TEF) (Hefce 2017). The TEF is a voluntary system for rating undergraduate teaching, learning and student progression at an institution level. The scheme was piloted in 2016 with an assessment of the undergraduate higher education provided in each participating institution under three headings of teaching quality, learning environment and student outcomes and learning gain.

The first set of TEF results published in June 2017 divided institutions into four rating categories: gold, silver, bronze and provisional. Across the UK, 292 higher education providers took part in the first TEF, and they achieved 60 gold, 115 silver, 53 bronze and 65 provisional ratings. In Wales, twelve higher education providers or validators of awards participated in TEF and achieved 1 gold, 6 silver, 4 bronze and 1 provisional rating (Hefce 2017).

There have been no formal evaluations of the impact of TEF to date, however, provisional analysis by the Hotcourses website indicates that the ratings have had a significant impact on international students' interest institutions with marked increases in the number of students from India, Brazil, Thailand and Turkey considering applying to institutions that had achieved a gold rating (Porter 2017).

## **Devolution and Transparency**

The impact of league tables and the TEF on the pattern of local and overseas student recruitment, as well as the signals that these systems send to university leaders and academic staff about what is valued, what should be resourced and what should be rewarded has prompted Welsh Government ministers to consider the current and potential future operation of transparency tools in Wales.

Reviews of the funding and oversight of post-compulsory education in Wales by Professor Ian Diamond, Professor Ellen Hazelkorn and Professor Graeme Reid in 2015, 2016 and 2017 recommended the development of a long-term strategy for the provision of tertiary education and research to cover all aspects of government funded activity until 2030 (Hazelkorn 2015; Diamond 2016; Reid 2017). These reports also recommended that the Welsh Government should take a broad view of the objectives for the tertiary education offered to people from the age of 16 to retirement in Wales, as well as the research and innovation which underpins this activity and which supports companies and public services in Wales and the wider

World. These recommendations were consistent with the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) (2015) (Table 1).

This Act recommended that public bodies in Wales should encourage: 1. Long-term planning; 2. problem prevention; 3. integration between service providers; 4. collaboration between organisations; and, 5. involvement of the people who will be affected by any activity in its planning and development. The Act also specified seven Well-being Goals and a commitment to developing Well-being indicators which will be monitored and reported on at regular intervals by an Independent Commissioner for the Well-being of Future Generations (see Fig. 1). Building on these recommendations, Professor Harvey Weingarten was commissioned in 2017 to develop a series a performance measures/transparency tools to help Welsh Government ministers, tertiary education leaders, academics, students and other stakeholders gain a clearer understanding of the operation and effectiveness of different aspects of tertiary education provision (Weingarten 2017).

Professor Weingarten is scheduled to report on his recommended performance measures for the tertiary education sector in Wales in 2018. In addition, it is intended that a new legislative bill will be introduced to amend the laws regulating the provision of higher and further education and work-based learning in Wales and to establish a Tertiary Education and Research Commission for Wales (TERCfW).

**Table 1** Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015) Well-being goals

Well-being goal	Description
1. A prosperous Wales	An innovative, productive and low carbon society which recognises the limits of the global environment and uses resources efficiently and proportionately
2. A Resilient Wales	A nation which maintains and enhances a biodiverse natural environment with healthy functioning ecosystems that support social, economic and ecological resilience
3. A healthier Wales	A society in which people's physical and mental well-being is maximised and in which choices and behaviours that benefit future health are understood
4. A more equal Wales	A society that enables people to fulfil their potential no matter what their background
5. A Wales of cohesive communities	Attractive, viable, safe and well-connected communities
6. A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language	A society that promotes and protects culture, heritage and the Welsh language, and which encourages people to participate in the arts, and sports and recreation
7. A globally responsible Wales	A nation which, when doing anything to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales, takes account of whether doing such a thing may make a positive contribution to global well-being

This new body, it is suggested, will develop and maintain a strategy for devolved tertiary education, allocate funding, commission quality assurance and enhancement activities and monitor performance using a variety of transparency tools.

## Conclusions

This chapter has reviewed the development of transparency tools for the monitoring of higher education in Wales over the last one hundred and ninety years and commented upon who developed these tools, where and when they were implemented, as well as describing the key features of each successive set of measures. Using Michael Barber's normative model of different forms of intervention by government and other agencies, the picture that has emerged is one of an increasing range of ever more complex transparency tools. Each new tool that has been developed has been added to an existing panoply of measures and monitoring devices. With these developments, academic leaders, governors, and regulators have been presented with a bewildering array of different indicators which are more or less visible depending upon the source of information and its funding.

The external examiner system, established in the mid-nineteenth century, remains a central tool for the determination and maintenance of academic standards as well as the measurement of student achievements. However, despite over a century of operation, this system remains largely invisible to students and other stakeholders who are not employed by universities or involved directly in their regulation. From the mid-1980s, the traditional approach of trust and altruism was supplemented by an increasingly elaborate system of *hierarchy and targets* introduced by government-sponsored agencies to monitor and reward the performance of higher education institutions and their academic staff. The focus under these arrangements has switched over time from a focus on financial inputs towards greater attention to measures of process and output while attempting to link these to symbolic and financial rewards at an institutional level. At the end of the 1990s, national newspapers and universities in different parts of the World sought to support greater student *choice and competition* between institutions through the publication of university league tables. More recently, building on the market ethos promoted by university league tables, there has been a further shift towards the *privatisation* of the measures used to monitor activity. There are many more survey instruments available for monitoring student satisfaction and experience at university, but the information collected using these tools is generally confidential and not available to prospective students and other stakeholders who are not employed by the University.

In Wales, Welsh Government ministers have sought to avoid market-based systems of higher education. Instead, the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 and a series of reviews of higher education governance, funding and performance management have sought to promote a system-wide view of provision and its development. This approach has not been without its own challenges. For



example, the recent consultation over baseline regulatory requirements and performance measures for higher education institutions in Wales as well as a revised quality code designed by the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment for application to higher education across the UK has revealed some of these tensions (Hefcw, 2017a, b; QAA 2017).

The tension between national and institutional interests has been a recurrent theme in the development of transparency tools in Wales. The Royal Commission report on University Education in Wales in 1918 sought to resolve this tension by bolstering the voice of national interests through increases in the number of local representatives on the court of the University of Wales and reductions in the influence of academics by reducing the size of the University's Senate/Academic Board. In more recent times, the university parliament that Lord Haldane envisaged has been realised, albeit in a different form, through the creation of the Welsh Government and Assembly and their associated scrutiny committees and cross-party groups. However, the development of measures that enable progress with the achievement of national as well as institutional and individual student and academic judgements is inevitably challenged by the presence of wider UK and global performance measures, and league tables are often a greater focus of attention within institutions. The recently announced Weingarten review has been established in recognition of these tensions and will seek, where possible, to reconcile if not resolve these challenges.

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# The UK Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF): The Development of a New Transparency Tool



Andrew Gunn

## Context

### *Transparency Tools and Quality Assurance*

Hazelkorn (2015) notes the explosion over the previous decade of “what are euphemistically called transparency and accountability instruments and tools, operating in tandem but differing with respect to purpose, policy orientation and user”. The calls for greater transparency are a “reaction to the increasingly more inquisitive and demanding environment in which higher education operates” (Hazelkorn 2012, p. 348). This is where political and societal support for higher education can only be maintained through the availability of greater information to provide individual and public investor confidence (Hazelkorn 2012).

Van Vught and Ziegele (2011) define transparency tools as “instruments that aim to provide information to stakeholders about the efforts and performance of higher education and research institutions” (p. 25). The authors point out that transparency tools are related to quality assurance processes which also produce “information to stakeholders (review reports, accreditation status) and in that sense helps to achieve transparency” (p. 25). Moreover, Harman (2011) finds there has been increased interaction between quality assurance systems and transparency tools, such as institutional rankings, in recent years.

It is useful to establish how “transparency tools” differ to “quality assurance”. In origin, quality assurance comes from *within* the higher education community whereas transparency tools tend to be imposed from *outside*. Quality assurance is rooted in an ethos of institutional autonomy and the principles of peer review undertaken by self-regulating professionals. It is focused on assurance, and

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increasingly concerned with enhancement, rather than performance measurement and comparison (Neave 2014). Transparency tools, alternatively, may serve agendas and stakeholders outside the academic community, and they typically have characteristics more akin to external audit and public scrutiny. They intend to measure and compare performance and then share this information to expose good and bad provision.

This chapter charts the development of a new transparency tool in the United Kingdom (UK): the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). Following a discussion of the context, the second section provides an overview of the framework. The third section features an analysis of the TEF, which is followed by a conclusion.

### *Transparency Tools in a Governance Context*

Recent policy developments in the UK, most notably the launch of the TEF, can be seen as another chapter in the application of New Public Management (NPM) ideas to higher education. NPM is a policy paradigm providing a series of principles which have been used to reform public sector organisations since the early 1980s (Gunter et al. 2016; Radnor et al. 2016). It is an amalgam of theories within New Institutional Economics and a strand of management theory that has been generically applied across the public sector. The consensus emanating from this amalgam represents a compromise between the interventionist bias of the market failure paradigm—where it is the duty of the state to intervene to prevent market failure, and the case made by the public choice variant of the government failure literature—there should be limited government to enable consumer choice in the market. NPM, therefore, guides policymakers towards an appropriate role of government in a market economy and the most socially desirable forms of government intervention (Wallis and Dollery 1999).

The policy prescriptions emanating from NPM seek to empower the consumer in a competitive market, ending the dominance of “producer capture” (Trowler 2001). The resulting operating environment involves complex systems of evaluation and national schemes of performance indicators implemented by the “evaluative” or “regulatory” state (Neave 2012). Within higher education institutions (HEIs), this has resulted in the rise of strategic planning and more managerial forms of organisation (Khvatova and Dushina 2017). This is often at the expense of the professional autonomy of academics and represents a shift from more collegial forms of governance (Yates et al. 2017). For policymakers, this is justified, as the “black box” of the university needs to be “opened up” to public scrutiny and regulatory oversight. In furthering this agenda, we can see how transparency tools can be a very useful addition to the policymaker’s toolbox. This is where such tools can be used to extract information on institutional performance to enhance accountability and inform decision making.

## ***An Evolving European Policy Context***

Since 2000, the process of open coordination has accelerated the formation and visibility of an *EU Learning Area* (Lawn 2006). Here, both quality assurance and enhancement have been promoted by the *European Higher Education Area* (EHEA) (Gvaramadze 2008). Recent developments within policy show a growing interest in both transparency tools and the pursuit of teaching excellence.

A review of transparency tools published by the *European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education* by Vercruyse and Proteasa (2012) identified that delivering transparency should be regarded as an important aspect of higher education policies. It recommended transparency tools should be based on evidence of users' information needs, and their capacities to process information. According to Vercruyse and Proteasa (2012), the primary function of transparency tools is to provide information to a diverse range of users including students, businesses, academics, policymakers, and institutional leaders. The authors argue each of these groups has diverse information needs and expectations, probably making it impossible for transparency tools to meet all individual demands at once (Vercruyse and Proteasa 2012, p. 11).

The report also recommended governments should encourage the development of new indicators and processes to enable HEIs to identify and communicate their various profiles, especially the teaching and third missions which are marginalised in existing transparency tools (Vercruyse and Proteasa 2012, p. 11). An example of this is the *U-Multirank* project funded by the *European Commission*, which highlights how existing international rankings tend to focus on a single dimension of university performance—research (Boulton 2011; Van Vught and Westerheijden 2012). The project developed a new multidimensional ranking designed to recognise the diverse range of activities—including teaching—that take place within HEIs (Van Vught and Ziegele 2011, p. 17).

Sin (2015) charts how learning and teaching have migrated from the margins to the core of European higher education policy. This is because policymakers increasingly regard teaching as being critical in delivering the utilitarian and economic objectives assigned to higher education in policy discourse (p. 338). The massification of university-level education, and the need to find a way to finance this, also accounts for the increased attention paid to teaching quality and measuring graduate outcomes. The rising cost of higher education and concerns about the sustainability of the graduate salary premium have exacerbated this trend. There are, therefore, legitimate reasons, beyond the imperatives of NPM, which account for the need to subject the teaching mission to greater transparency.

## ***Transparency Tools and the Pursuit of Teaching Excellence***

The enhanced importance of teaching is evident in various reports. For example, in 2013 the *European Commission* received the report *Improving the quality of*

*teaching and learning in Europe's higher education institutions* from the *High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education* (McAleese et al. 2013). The report made a series of recommendations for public policy makers and HEIs concerning creating policy and institutional environments and professional practices to foster quality teaching. Specifically, it recommended public authorities “should ensure the existence of a sustainable, well-funded framework to support institutions’ efforts to improve the quality of teaching and learning” (McAleese et al. 2013, p. 64).

In 2014 the *European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education* published the report *Concept of Excellence in Higher Education* by Brusoni et al. (2014). The report argued:

The development of a commonly accepted “framework for excellence” would provide a basis for a more strategic approach to quality improvement, allowing institutions to measure their performance against defined criteria and facilitating the comparative analysis of institutional performance as an alternative to league tables and rankings (Brusoni et al. 2014, p. 37).

The 2015 revisions to the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance* in the EHEA set the future direction of quality assurance in the region. The report makes a more explicit link between quality assurance and the learning and teaching processes within institutions (ESG 2015), highlighting the need for more attention to be paid to the latter.

These reports follow a range of recent policy activity and academic literature in making the case for national policymakers to nurture teaching excellence, through producing frameworks which influence institutional behaviour. We can see from reports such as these the direction of travel in policy thinking and the role of government-driven transparency tools in achieving these objectives. Policy change was driven by a growing realisation that existing transparency tools and popular rankings—such as the *Academic Ranking of World Universities* (ARWU), and the *Leiden Ranking* (LR)—had inappropriately overemphasised the research mission of the university. This has negative ramifications for the teaching mission which was gaining greater recognition. New transparency tools were, therefore, required to meet the information needs of a range of stakeholders and enable them to navigate the more complex and competitive higher education landscape. In particular, there was a perceived need to provide prospective students with better intelligence on teaching quality and graduate outcomes. In this context, there is a role for state intervention, as Ciolan et al. (2015) argue, to verify and standardise all information and ensure it is usable and comparable (p. 27). The policy debates within the UK and rationales for the TEF are situated within this direction of travel.

### ***Teaching Excellence and the Teaching Mission***

There is no one definition of teaching excellence. As Skelton (2005) points out, teaching excellence is a contested, value-laden concept located within a shifting



social, economic and political context (p. 4). Definitions can be nebulous and contradictory and are connected to a wide range of contested and disputed, long-running academic debates (Greatbatch and Holland 2016). This presents many challenges when developing any kind of evaluative framework for the teaching mission of the university.

Assessing the quality of teaching has been a long-standing issue for higher education systems internationally. It remains more challenging than assessing research quality. This is because there is greater agreement around the definition of research excellence and the indicators that can be used to assess this (Trigwell 2011, p. 165). This measurement issue also explains the dominance of research in university rankings globally. Courtney (2014) identifies three main reasons for the scarcity of teaching assessment exercises worldwide: first, the conceptual and practical difficulties in defining, operationalising, and measuring either excellence or basic standards; second, a lack of consensus on the difference between excellent teaching, teachers, learning, and learners; and third, the problematic conflation of competence and excellence. The idea of “excellence”—as opposed to competence or simply meeting expectations—is particularly challenging. Brusoni et al. (2014), who advocated the “framework for excellence”, acknowledge that relating the methods of quality assurance to excellence is probably one of the most difficult tasks facing quality assurance agencies (p. 37).

The complexities within these enduring educational debates present obstacles when developing an assessment framework. There is also an additional dimension: the difference between assessing “teaching” in a university and the “teaching mission” of the university—a sibling to the “research” and “third” missions. The former is largely concerned with pedagogy, while the latter is a much broader entity, incorporating the inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes stages of the whole student lifecycle. The teaching mission includes: applicant information, entry requirements and widening participation; the student experience and teaching quality on the course, as well as the resources available to learners both online and on campus; outputs such as student retention and degree classifications; and outcomes including graduate destinations and personal development (Gunn 2018, p. 135).

The next section considers the development of a new transparency tool to measure the teaching mission of the university. Although the TEF is a UK-wide initiative, the analysis presented here applies only to England.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>This is because higher education policy in the UK is a devolved matter, where each nation (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales) develops its own policy. For example, each nation has its own quality and student fee arrangements. Even where the same tools are used across the UK, such as the TEF, they operate in different contexts creating different dynamics.

## The Framework

### *Policymaker's Rationales for the Teaching Excellence Framework*

The UK Government has four stated objectives for the TEF; being introduced as a way of:

- (a) Better informing students' choices about what and where to study
- (b) Raising esteem for teaching
- (c) Recognising and rewarding excellent teaching
- (d) Better meeting the needs of employers, business, industry and the professions (DFE 2016, p. 5).

The TEF responds to several concerns within government regarding the higher education sector and how it serves the economy. To address these concerns, the teaching mission of the university needed to be subject to greater transparency. For example, the government sees information about the quality of teaching as being “vital to UK productivity” (DBIS 2015, p. 19). This is because in the absence of information about the quality of courses and skills gained, it is difficult for employers to recruit graduates with the right skills and harder for providers to know how to improve their courses. Improved information, it is argued, may also reduce the mismatch<sup>2</sup> between graduate jobs and the skills within the graduate cohort (DBIS 2016a, p. 11).

There was also the perception that applicants were poorly-informed about the content and teaching quality on courses, as well as the job prospects they can expect; which can lead to poor decisions by the student as to which course and institution to attend. This was explained by the lack of information, which meant there was little pressure on institutions to differentiate themselves, or fully and accurately advertise their offerings. The government also believed “information, particularly on price and quality, is critical if the higher education market is to perform properly. Without it, providers cannot and students cannot make informed decisions” (DBIS 2016a, p. 11). A 2017 *National Audit Office*<sup>3</sup> report supported the government's position, finding prospective students in England to be in “a

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<sup>2</sup>This is a *horizontal* mismatch in the labour market, between degree subject/content and graduate job vacancies/requirements. It may be reduced if applicants make different choices based on information about course content and which subjects lead to which careers. Higher skill and qualification mismatch is associated with lower labour productivity, through a less efficient allocation of resources (Adalet McGowan and Andrews 2015). See McGuinness and Sloane (2011) for an analysis of the UK.

<sup>3</sup>In the UK the National Audit Office (NAO) is an independent Parliamentary body which scrutinises public spending. It is responsible for auditing central government departments, government agencies and non-departmental public bodies and reporting the results to Parliament. The reports seek to help Parliament hold government to account and improve public services.

potentially vulnerable position”—lacking adequate information to make informed choices, and, in effect, victims of “mis-selling” (NAO 2017).

Through the TEF, the government sought to introduce two things to English higher education for the first time. First, is the introduction of a national framework to bring “sector-wide rigour to the assessment of teaching excellence” (DBIS 2016a, p. 44). Second, is a shift to financing teaching on a *quality* basis, something which occurred for research funding three decades ago.<sup>4</sup> This is based on the view that “for too long, we have funded teaching on the basis of quantity, not quality. This is in sharp contrast to research, with its quality-driven funding stream allocated through the Research Excellence Framework” (DBIS 2016a, p. 43). This would be achieved by allowing HEIs with good TEF results to raise their undergraduate fees.

### *Developing a New Transparency Tool*

Paying deference to the higher education community, the TEF was not simply designed and imposed upon the sector. Development of the new framework began in 2015, going through a series of policy development stages—known as Green and White papers<sup>5</sup>—each of which provided opportunities for comment (DBIS 2015 and 2016a, b). Further technical consultations<sup>6</sup> and a process of “co-development” between the government and academy not only helped develop the novel methodology, but also allowed the academic community to become stakeholders in the process, thus giving the TEF greater legitimacy.

Through this process, a new assessment framework was developed to encompass the breadth of the teaching mission. This comprised of three components. The official descriptors of these are set out below:

*Teaching Quality*: includes different forms of structured learning that can involve teachers and academic or specialist support staff. This includes seminars, tutorials, project supervision, laboratory sessions, studio time, placements, supervised on-line learning,

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<sup>4</sup>The Research Excellence Framework (REF) replaced the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) which was launched in 1986. It is a periodic quality assessment of academic research in the UK which informs funding allocations to HEIs. The principle of funding organisations based on performance is aligned with NPM thinking.

<sup>5</sup>A Green Paper (DBIS 2015) is a consultation document enabling people both inside and outside Parliament to give the government feedback on its policy proposals. This is followed by a White Paper (DBIS 2016a, which sets out more definitive proposals for legislation. It also provides a basis for further discussion and allows final changes to be made before a Bill is formally presented to the Parliament, where, following its passage, it becomes an Act. The Higher Education and Research Act became law on the 27 April 2017.

<sup>6</sup>In addition to the consultation concerning the overarching policy and legislative agenda for the higher education sector, the government held a technical consultation specifically dealing with the design of the TEF (DBIS 2016b). This informed the detailed specification of the framework (DFE 2016).

workshops, fieldwork and site visits. The emphasis is on teaching that provides an appropriate level of contact, stimulation and challenge, and which encourages student engagement and effort. The effectiveness of course design, and assessment and feedback, in developing students' knowledge, skills and understanding are also considered. The extent to which a provider recognises, encourages and rewards excellent teaching is also included in this aspect.

*Learning Environment:* includes the effectiveness of resources such as libraries, laboratories and design studios, work experience, opportunities for peer-to-peer interaction and extra-curricular activities in supporting students' learning and the development of independent study and research skills. The emphasis is on a personalised academic experience which maximises retention, progression and attainment. The extent to which beneficial linkages are made for students between teaching and learning, and scholarship, research or professional practice (one or more of these) is also considered.

*Student Outcomes and Learning Gain:* is focused on the achievement of positive outcomes. Positive outcomes are taken to include:

- acquisition of attributes such as lifelong learning skills and others that allow a graduate to make a strong contribution to society, economy and the environment,
- progression to further study, acquisition of knowledge, skills and attributes necessary to compete for a graduate level job that requires the high level of skills arising from higher education (DfE 2016, p. 19).

Taken together, the three aspects are designed to provide a balanced view of learning and teaching quality and to enable diverse forms of teaching and learning excellence to be identified. It is not the intention of the TEF to constrain or prescribe the form that excellence should take.

## ***Methodology and Metrics***

Assessments are made against the criteria, based on both core and split metrics supplemented by a written submission; and carried out by assessors and panellists, comprised of experts in teaching and learning, widening participation specialists, students and employer representatives. The “splitting” of metrics by key variables reveals the extent to which positive outcomes are achieved for all students, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The recommendations of each group of assessors are received by a central TEF Panel, which decides the outcome for each HEI (HEFCE 2016a). Four ratings are available: Gold, Silver, Bronze, and Provisional.<sup>7</sup> The TEF only assesses undergraduate education, but it is envisioned it will eventually be extended to postgraduate taught courses.

The first full TEF (known as “Year Two”, as it followed an introductory year) assessed institutional performance in the 2016/17 academic year and drew upon

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<sup>7</sup>Provisional is an outcome for providers who meet quality requirements but do not yet have sufficient data for one of the three awards.

three main metrics: The *National Student Survey*<sup>8</sup> (*NSS*), used to measure teaching quality, assessment and feedback provision, and academic support; the non-continuation data from the *Higher Education Statistics Agency*; and the number of graduates in employment/further study or highly-skilled employment/further study from the *Destination of Leavers from Higher Education Survey (DLHE)* (DfE 2016, p. 18).

These metrics are not beyond reproach. The response of *The Royal Statistical Society* to the TEF technical consultation identified several limitations of the metrics and criteria adopted. For example, they point out that innovative forms of teaching, which challenge pre-conceptions or force students to engage in new ways, often score low student satisfaction ratings, despite these methods often being highly effective in enhancing student learning (RSS 2016, p. 1). This questions the validity of using student satisfaction data, such as the *NSS*, as a measure of teaching quality. Criticisms of the *NSS* more broadly include a study by Lenton (2015) which suggests raw scores should not be used as a method of ranking, while Bennett and Kane (2014) find students ascribe disparate meanings to the wording of particular questions which undermines the comparability of the results.<sup>9</sup>

The development of the TEF has followed its own “learning curve”, as the Year Three specification was revised following the lessons learned from Year Two (DfE 2017a). For example, an analysis of metrics resulted in the weighting given to the *NSS* in the assessment being halved (DfE 2017b). The Year Three specification indicates an increased emphasis on student outcomes (DfE 2017c).

The initial design of the TEF was constrained by the metrics available. The results, therefore, only reflect what is captured by three metrics which represent a limited cross-section of the total teaching mission. The problem with any metric-driven methodology is how it privileges things that can be measured in numbers. This can provide an incomplete or distorted perspective. This problem is exacerbated if the number of metrics used is small.

This limitation will be reduced in future years by the incorporation of additional metrics. Alongside the implementation of the TEF, work was undertaken developing new metrics which assess additional aspects of the teaching mission. Possibly the most innovative, and potentially the most transformative, is *Learning Gain*, which measures:

the difference between the skills, competencies, content knowledge and personal development demonstrated by students at two points in time. This allows for a comparison of academic abilities and how participation in higher education has contributed to such intellectual development (McGrath et al. 2015).

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<sup>8</sup>The National Student Survey (*NSS*) of course experience satisfaction was introduced in 2005. The survey is sent to final year students at all UK HEIs. Through a series of questions, it collects feedback from undergraduate students on their experiences of various aspects of their courses (Cheng and Marsh, 2010).

<sup>9</sup>It should be noted that following a review several questions in the *NSS* were revised in 2017 to make it more relevant and robust (HEFCE 2016b).

There is a myriad of ways in which *Learning Gain* can be applied and measured, presenting methodological challenges. A series of projects will scope out how new metrics can be developed to achieve this, such as looking at how non-subject specific learning gain may be measured at scale (HEFCE 2017a; Kandiko Howson 2016).

A new input metric being piloted is *Teaching Intensity* (Johnson 2017a). This will be assessed using a method that weights the number of contact hours taught by the student-staff ratio of each taught hour. This will produce a “Gross Teaching Quotient” (GTQ) score to allow comparisons within subject groups (DfE 2017d, p. 63). However, academic research questions the relationship between class size and student satisfaction (Gannaway et al. 2017); and challenges the notion that contact hours are a valid measure of teaching quality, finding that indicators which measure the engagement which occurs within those hours has greater potential for capturing teaching excellence (HEA 2016).

Further supplementary metrics include *Longitudinal Educational Outcomes*<sup>10</sup> (*LEO*), which reveals earnings one, three and five years after graduation, by degree subject studied and HEI attended (DfE 2017e). A limitation of *LEO* is that it is a retrospective metric in a dynamic labour market, where the earnings of past graduates may not be a good predictor of future graduate salaries. There is also a new metric to identify *Grade Inflation* overtime. The number of first-class degrees awarded in the UK has increased considerably in recent years (Coughlan 2017); which the government regards as a pressing problem that needs to be addressed (Johnson 2017b). However, previous studies of efficiency—which consider the conversion of inputs to outputs—have disputed the extent to which genuine grade inflation is actually present (see Bachan 2017; Johnes and Soo 2017).

## ***Results of the Teaching Excellence Framework***

The results of the first full TEF were released in June 2017. They produced an unfamiliar hierarchy of institutions and made a distinctive contribution to the rankings debate hitherto driven by research. The complete focus on the teaching mission removed the advantage enjoyed by the longest established universities, with their income and esteem derived from research.

Participation in the TEF is voluntary, but over 80% of the sector chose to take part. Of the 295 participating providers, 134 were HEIs, 106 were further education

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<sup>10</sup>LEO provides information on salary outcomes not captured by the long-running DLHE survey. The former uses the historic tax records of all graduates working (except those registered self-employed) or claiming benefits in the UK. The latter, that not all graduates respond to, involves the self-reporting of activities on a single day six months after graduation.

colleges offering higher education, and 55 were alternative providers.<sup>11</sup> On this new “level teaching playing field”, 60 higher education providers were rated Gold, 115 Silver, 53 Bronze and 65 Provisional (HEFCE 2017b). Several universities, based on their metrics alone, would have achieved a lower rating than their actual award. This is because their performance in the written submission component helped elevate them to a higher rating. This also indicates the judgment of the panel in making their assessment is a consequential part of the process.

A *Higher Education Academy*<sup>12</sup> report found the content of submissions varied widely. Because this was the first year of the exercise, there were no successful submissions from previous rounds for institutions to benchmark. Some submissions concentrated on qualitatively describing the context of their provision while others directly addressed the TEF metrics. Submissions awarded Gold were more likely to be structured around the TEF criteria (Moore et al. 2017).

Gold was obtained by universities with a wide range of histories. Among the Russell Group of “research intensive universities”, eight out of 21 institutions were awarded the Gold rating, 10 got Silver, three got Bronze. The results didn’t correlate with institutional age or type, research income, or the socio-economic background of the student cohort; although, there was a slight correlation by entry tariff, where institutions with higher entry requirements did slightly better but this wasn’t statistically significant (DfE 2017f).

## Analysis

### *Between Quality Assurance and Market Reconfiguration*

As a framework to assess teaching quality, the TEF features many debates familiar to scholars and practitioners of quality assurance—as it seeks to assess, assure and enhance. Two of the government’s four stated objectives for the TEF—raising the esteem of teaching and helping to recognise and reward excellent teaching—are both closely allied to quality assurance activities that already take place within institutions.

The TEF can be seen as an annexe to, but not a replacement of, the UK’s long-standing Quality Assessment<sup>13</sup> arrangements, which ensure providers meet baseline expectations for academic quality and standards. These procedures were

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<sup>11</sup>In UK higher education “alternative providers” are institutions which are *not* in direct receipt of recurrent funding from public funding bodies. This group includes the private sector, some charities, for-profit, and not-for-profit entities.

<sup>12</sup>The Higher Education Academy (HEA) is a UK professional body which promotes teaching and learning excellence.

<sup>13</sup>In the UK Quality Assessment arrangements are underpinned by the UK Quality Code, which sets out the expectations that all providers of HEIs are required to meet. These procedures involve institutional audits and confer degree awarding powers.

revised alongside the early development of the TEF (HEFCE 2016c); which ensures the mutual co-existence of the two schemes that draw on some of the same data (HEFCE 2016d, pp. 9–10). We can see the boundary between transparency tools and quality assurance in the UK is not as clear-cut as it once was. This interconnected quality and transparency agenda acknowledges recent developments in the quality debate (the greater emphasis on student outcomes and accountability to stakeholders, for example) while also providing the transparency of a ranking system through the TEF with its simple scores.

However, ideas typically found in the quality assurance literature do not fully explain the agendas surrounding the implementation of the TEF. For example, the other two of the government's stated objectives for the TEF—informing student choice and better meeting the needs of employers—are part of a wider set of government priorities. There is also the issue of the means (the form of evaluation used, the incentives unleashed, and the financial and reputational rewards) by which the TEF seeks to achieve its four stated objectives and deliver any additional government goals.

To fully understand the TEF, we need to appreciate how it is situated relative to established quality assurance agendas, on the one hand, and wider government ambitions to reconfigure the higher education sector, on the other. The latter is more effectively explained by the literature on approaches to governance (for example, Moran 2003; Jordana and Levi-Faur 2004). This is because the TEF, as a new transparency tool, was not developed in a political vacuum to merely improve teaching quality. Rather, it is an integral part of a reform process which seeks to reconfigure the higher education marketplace in two respects: first, to change the dynamics within the market, and second, to change the parameters of the market itself.

The first point refers to changing consumer behaviour through subjecting HEIs to greater scrutiny to obtain better product information, which applicants can use to make an informed choice. The second point refers to removing longstanding barriers to market entry to allow profit-making providers into the higher education sector to compete alongside existing universities. These new alternative providers will offer students additional choices. Both of these moves seek to foster greater competition between institutions.

These points also show how these changes move well beyond earlier incarnations of NPM reform which UK higher education has experienced since the 1980s (Ferlie et al. 2008; Paradeise et al. 2009). This can be seen in the desire to broaden opportunity for the profit-making sector and create an environment favourable for private investment; the willingness to end long-standing public sector monopolies and professional regulatory capture; and a fervent belief in the power of competition to deliver better services at lower costs.

The TEF can be understood as part of the new regulatory governance arrangements, where, according to policymakers, the “market needs to be re-oriented and regulated proportionately—with an explicit primary focus on the needs of students, to give them choices about where they want to study, as well as what and how” (DBIS 2016a, p. 11). The TEF is, therefore, designed to bring transparency to all



HEIs in a more liberalised higher education market which includes a greater plurality of providers. The TEF achieves this re-orientation and regulation role through using both “punishments and rewards” to induce behaviour change. Success in the TEF results in direct benefits, including the reputation rewards of receiving a highly publicised badge of excellence, and the financial rewards of being allowed to raise fees. It will also inform consumer choices, conferring further benefits. Flowing from this, the government envisages dynamics whereby:

those institutions and courses that do best within the TEF framework attract more student applications and, through their greater ability to raise fees, reinvest in the quality of their teaching and grow their capacity to teach more students. ...Those institutions that receive a lower assessment either seek to raise their teaching standards in order to maintain student numbers and/or raise fees (DBIS 2015, p. 84).

The government also foresees a situation where institutions may need to differentiate themselves as a lower cost or specialist provider or even leave the market entirely.

### *Influencing Institutions*

The TEF has attracted criticism from many educationalists on the grounds it doesn't accurately measure teaching quality. For example, Gibbs (2017) argues the assessment method, a small panel of experts making quality judgments, is not well founded. Furthermore, Rust (2017) argues the metrics used to measure retention, employment outcomes, and student satisfaction within the TEF do not assess teaching excellence with any validity. Arguments such as these underscore a common criticism levelled at the TEF—teaching quality is not measured directly but by proxies.

These factors are critical in determining the effectiveness of the TEF as an accurate *measurement* tool. However, as a *transparency* tool, there is another perspective from which to analyse the TEF. This considers how the framework influences the performance of individual institutions, and the higher education system as a whole, to deliver the intended benefits of the reforms. This is concerned with whether the TEF provides the right signals and incentives in the context within which it operates.

There is early evidence the TEF is making progress on realising two of its stated objectives: raising esteem for teaching, and recognising and rewarding excellent teaching. The presence of a high-profile national evaluation programme has raised the perceived importance of teaching within the academy, and, crucially, among university leaders and strategic planners. For example, at a high-level conference on research-based education in June 2017 (UCL 2017), the Vice-Provost (Education) of *Imperial College London* said the TEF had forced leaders of research-intensive institutions to start paying close attention to the quality of teaching for the first time, and support these efforts with real money, thus placing “teaching at the centre, where it should be” (Bothwell 2017). Moreover, research by *Universities*

UK<sup>14</sup> (2017) found many leadership teams were paying more attention to core TEF metrics and monitoring their performance to track student success. Changes such as these have cascading consequences on the nature of academic leadership within HEIs.

Considering the third objective—to better inform students’ choices about what and where to study—there are indicative reports the TEF does influence applicant behaviour. For example, research commissioned by a consortium of UK students’ unions which surveyed 9000 students found 50% would have reconsidered or not applied to their university if they had known it would be rated Bronze (Trendence UK 2017). In the international student market, there are reports that Gold rated HEIs are attracting more applicant interest (Kennedy 2017). A survey of 3335 international students interested in studying in the UK revealed applicants would select a university with a Gold TEF award over one placed in the UK top 25 in a ranking; although respondents were more likely to choose a university with a high ranking above one with a Silver or Bronze award. This survey also revealed some misunderstanding of the TEF results: 24.5% of students aware of the TEF believed that a Bronze award means teaching quality is “unsatisfactory”, which is not the case (Raybould 2017).

Regarding this objective, one contention is the Olympic medal inspired awards reduce the whole exercise down to only three ratings. Although easy to understand, these may be too crude to adequately inform choice or have the reputation effects to provide clear signals to incentivise improved performance. Another issue is the underlying assumption that more information is beneficial, which may or may not be true—it depends on how relevant it is and how it is used. The UK Government has commissioned new research to identify the information needs of applicants and the usability of the TEF. This will contribute to the future development of the framework.<sup>15</sup>

The fourth objective of the TEF—to make higher education better serve the needs of employers, business, industry and the professions—will require a longer-term assessment of to what extent, and in what ways, universities have pivoted towards serving external stakeholders—and the consequences of this.

### *Incentives Alignment*

The examples in the previous section suggest the incentives emanating from the TEF are effective. However, the examples above are all instances where the

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<sup>14</sup>Universities UK is a sector advocacy organisation; its members are Vice-Chancellors and Principals of UK universities.

<sup>15</sup>The UK government commissioned primary research to identify the factors which students believe should be included in an assessment of teaching quality (in its broadest sense), and how important they are to students in terms of their selection of HEI and the quality of their undergraduate student experience.

incentives are straightforward—others are multifaceted and don't neatly align. Considering the effects on competition and prices, the incentives structures are complex. For example, the TEF is designed to realise the government's ambition to finance teaching on a *quality*, not *quantity* basis, as is the case for research. However, in practice, funding teaching on a quality basis works differently. When universities perform well in the Research Excellence Framework, they get more public research income. Alternatively, universities that achieved an award in the first TEF were allowed<sup>16</sup> to generate more income by raising their undergraduate fees<sup>17</sup>—thus increasing the indebtedness of their future students. The relationship between good performance and financial reward is therefore questionable.

The initial intention was that in future years HEIs with a higher award would be permitted to increase their undergraduate fees by more than those with a lower award.<sup>18</sup> Here, “performance related prices” would produce differentiated fees between institutions. However, following consultation (DBIS Commons Select Committee 2016), attaching such significant financial rewards to the results was shelved until the TEF had been subject to a robust assessment following its implementation (DBIS 2016a, p. 44).

Moreover, linking the TEF results to fees assumed the government would allow fees to rise every year by at least inflation.<sup>19</sup> The financial incentives associated with the TEF, therefore, became enmeshed with the tuition fee debate. Fee increases are politically unpopular in England and were frozen by the Prime Minister in October 2017, pending a review (May 2017). A review of fees and funding may change the environment in which the TEF operates. This means the financial rewards attached to the TEF may need to be reconfigured. Although, the government minister responsible for higher education identified there are a “variety of ways” of linking funding to the TEF (Morgan 2017).

There is also the issue of how the TEF fosters competition, and through this, influences prices and efficiency. In England, there is competition between HEIs for the quantity and quality of students, not on price. This is because domestic undergraduates don't pay their fees at the point of use; rather, the government pays, and the students are given a loan which they pay back after graduation contingent on their income (Bolton 2016). This results in “low price sensitivity” and no real price competition. Here, undergraduate education remains a *prestige*, not a *price*, market; where universities are reluctant to lower prices as this may undermine their prestige and ability to attract the best students. The TEF, therefore, provides product information to inform choice in a quasi-market *without* variable price signals.

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<sup>16</sup>Undergraduate fees for domestic students in England are capped, where the price cap is controlled by the UK Parliament.

<sup>17</sup>Universities that achieved a TEF award were allowed to raise their maximum home undergraduate fee from £9000 to £9250 per year—this was an inflationary uplift.

<sup>18</sup>For example, a HEI with a Gold award would have higher fees per year than one rated Silver.

<sup>19</sup>This was the Conservative Government's position after the General Election of May 2015 and during the policy development and legislative process resulting in the April 2017 Higher Education and Research Act.

Because there is no price competition, HEIs are subject to minimal pressure to increase efficiency or reduce student fees.

Factors such as those outlined here identify the complexity when simultaneously incentivising so many things through one framework. They also question the extent to which the TEF contains a coherent set of incentives which align to improve outcomes and whether all the benefits of the reforms, as purported by NPM doctrines, will materialise.

### ***Universities as “Institutions” and Subjects as “Nested Institutions”***

The first full TEF operated at the level of each higher education provider. The submission, assessment and results were for HEIs as a whole, with no internal breakdown within them. If we assume universities are internally homogenous, this is fine. But if we believe that universities are in fact internally diverse, this is a large limitation on the effectiveness of the TEF as a transparency tool.

Returning to the ideas within the New Institutional Economics, we can see the university (or any HEI) as an “institution”. This institution will have its own long-term, stable—yet internally evolving—collection of rules, logics, activities and identities (Meyer et al. 2008; Olsen 2007). These not only shape the activities that take place within it but also its performance. However, we can also see the university as containing a series of “nested institutions”; where there are various subject areas and organisational divisions “nesting” within the larger institutional structure. A study of nested institutions focuses on the inter-relationships among systems at different levels. The core idea of “nested institutions” is that the behaviour of units in any subsystem is inexorably affected by the structure of the larger system within which the subsystem is nested. In the theory, there may be full conformity between the encompassing and the encompassed institution. Alternatively, a nested institution may deviate from the rules and order established by the overarching institution. It may also behave and perform differently from other institutions nesting alongside it in the same overarching institution (Blavoukos and Bourantonis 2017).

The theory of nested institutions informs us that an analysis at either the overarching institution or subsystem level alone may fail to provide an accurate and comprehensive account. In the context of the university, there may be varying degrees of good and bad practice within one institution. If it received one grade, reflecting the aggregate performance, this lack of granularity could make the TEF a “blunt tool”—by not recognising excellence or identifying areas of poor performance. It also doesn’t provide sufficiently detailed information to inform student choice as there is no break down by subject areas or comparable courses, one of the main rationales for the TEFs introduction.

The UK government does believe there are differences both *between* and *within* institutions. To address this, the TEF will move to the subject level from 2020. This means the framework will assess sub-institutional level performance. This approach, as explained by the literature on nested institutions, is clearly superior. But to operationalise such an evaluation creates many methodological difficulties. For example, the internal composition of each university—faculties, schools, departments, etc.—does not follow the same subject groupings, making comparisons between institutions along these lines impossible. Moreover, there are around 38,000 undergraduate courses in the UK, meaning assessment at individual course level is not practical. To make the data manageable, courses will have to be placed into a small number of subject groups; however, there will have to be sufficient granularity to inform student choices.

Policymakers in the UK are proceeding through piloting the TEF exercise at the subject level and testing the usability of various subject group classifications (DfE 2017d). The development and implication of the subject level TEF will have a large bearing on the future success of the TEF as a transparency tool. This section illustrates the methodological difficulties in selecting the “unit of analysis”, and developing an effective tool to provide accurate transparency at that level.

## Conclusion

To conclude, the TEF can be understood as a multi-purpose instrument which seeks to provide accountability (by providing performance data to inform applicant choice and fee rises) and drive improvement (through raising the importance of teaching and learning within HEIs).

Considering the effectiveness of the TEF as a transparency tool, some of the difficulties outlined may be reduced or resolved as the TEF evolves—through the implementation of new metrics, changes to the weighting of the various components, and the move to sub-institutional level—while others may not. We can also conclude the long-term sustainability of the TEF depends on how it can influence institutional performance and how it works within the new regulatory governance arrangements.

This chapter considers the development of the TEF up to the publication of the evaluation of the TEF Year Two in 2017. It is too early for an analysis of the full effects of the new framework. From its initial inception, the government saw the TEF as a venture that would come to fruition over the longer term. It was the government’s expectation that the impact of the TEF would grow over time, as institutions “respond to its stronger incentives to focus on and improve the quality of teaching they offer, and as students are able to exercise better informed choices” (DBIS 2015, p. 85). Moreover, in accordance with standard practice for all new UK government policy initiatives, a series of evaluations will be undertaken to gauge of the extent to which the TEF has “impacted students’ choices and teaching practices” in reality (DfE 2016, p. 56).

From this study of the TEF, the following underlying issues of relevance to the wider EHEA have been distilled. These include methodological challenges of wider applicability. First, there is a tension when implementing onto autonomous institutions a national framework designed to provide public scrutiny. A balance needs to be struck between two imperatives. On the one side, the state will act as industry regulator in the interests of the consumers, graduate employers, and taxpayers. On the other, is the need to respect academic freedom and the role of HEIs in assuring their own quality.

Second, there is a difficulty in striking the right balance when producing results. It needs to be simple enough for the public—who are not higher education specialists—to sufficiently comprehend and use it to inform their choices. Yet, it also needs to be detailed enough to be meaningful and have credibility and the confidence of those within the academy. This presents a trade-off. Related to this, is the need to produce more granular data at the sub-institutional level.

Third, the development of a new framework to assess the teaching mission of the university requires not only defining what teaching excellence is and working out how to measure it, but also having a political and policy context which enables this agenda to be operationalised. The suitability of the TEF as a benchmark model for other systems in the EHEA will depend on a number of factors, including: the extent to which there is a perceived need to improve product information and/or teaching quality; the presence and scope for competition in the sector; and the maturity of the quality assurance arrangements in a given higher education system.

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# Learning Outcomes Policies for Transparency: Impacts and Promising Practices in European Higher Education Regulation



Mary Catharine Lennon

## Introduction

The introduction of “evidence-based medicine” in the 1980s sparked a revolution in medical practice and training when carefully designed controlled-trials were used to assess the efficacy of existing medical practices. En masse, the studies began producing results that were at odds with years of practice; practice that was largely based on tradition, anecdotes, bias and other psychological “traps”.

The new model was met with resistance and hostility by the medical community as it undermined leadership and authority, and often contracted training, knowledge and firm beliefs of the establishment. It challenged the long-held tradition of “eminence-based medicine”, where a doctor’s prominence in all matters was assumed, whose advice was never questioned, and whose practice was considered an art form as much as a science. The clashes in the field were significant: evidence at odds with instinct proved to be a tough pill to swallow.

Higher education has long been in the domain of “eminence-based practice”, where classically trained professors, elite institutions and historical reverence guide most practices inside and outside of the classroom. Education is largely considered an art; with interpersonal actions in the classroom evoking sentiments of a mystical “black box” of teaching and learning upon which no outsider should tread.

Hence, the recent introduction of transparency tools based on evaluation and assessment science into educational practices is as unpalatable to the higher education community today as it was to the medical community 40 years ago. Similarly, unpleasant to the educational community is the notion that business practices are present in higher education and that there are producers, providers, and consumers: that there is, in fact, a “market for learning”, and that the traditional “sage on the

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stage” has decreasing value in this market. In one of the oldest pillars of society, it is understandable that these changes create fear, scepticism and opposition.

Nonetheless, it was in the difficult days of the medical practice paradigm shift when a leading researcher responded most pointedly to criticisms of evidence-based practice: “when patients start complaining about the objective of evidence-based medicine, then one should take the criticisms seriously, until then, consider it vested interests playing out” (Freakonomics 2017). In the realm of higher education, we must keep student learning as the focus of all activities, and ensure that student needs trump all vested interests.

## **Accountability, Quality Assurance and Learning Outcomes**

Through the Bologna Process, the EU aimed to develop the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010; progress toward this goal included initiatives supporting broad agreements on learning outcomes, increasing standardisation of curriculum for the purposes of comparability, and devising common methods for reporting on skills, and competencies acquired through studies. In “Beyond 2020”, a taking stock report of the Bologna Process reconfirmed these goals and highlighted the strong accomplishments of the Process and reiterated the goals of transparency to foster competitiveness and attractiveness of Europe and to support student mobility and employability (Benelux Bologna Secretariat 2009).

Accountability and quality assurance are highlighted in the 2020 report as playing an emerging role in supporting the quality of teaching and learning as well as “providing information about quality and standards as well as an objective and developmental commentary” (Benelux Bologna Secretariat 2009: 6), and in 2012, Hazelkorn unpacked accountability and quality assurance as instruments of transparency. Ultimately, quality assurance agencies (QAA’s) are responsible for supporting transparency by providing reliable and comparable information on educational quality. They hold the responsibility to ensure students are receiving quality education and that the institutions are operating to expected standards.

In a 2014 study, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) examined the role of quality assurance reports as tools of transparency (Bach et al. 2014). Through a survey of QAA’s, it explored the “usability” of the documents for students, employers and higher education institutions. One survey question asked what information provided in QAA reports was needed by the different groups (i.e. students, employers, etc.) in order to make decisions. 16 possible options were presented including: Content of study programmes, Accreditation status, Strategic planning, Internal Quality Assurance system, Qualifications of teaching staff, Student support system, Number of grants/publication/citations, Reputation of teaching staff, Employability/employment of graduates, Application and admission standards, Condition of infrastructure, Ability to respond to diverse student needs, History and tradition, Financial resources, Institutions position in league tables, and Other.

Note that not one relates to education quality. A possible reason it was not included as an option is because educational quality is not explicitly captured in the ENQA reports. In fact, despite the goal of supporting, improving and increasing transparency of educational quality, quality assurance systems are still struggling to be able to capture it fairly (Dill 2014; Krzykowski and Kinser 2014; Lennon 2016).

Teichler and Shomburg (2013) suggest that incorporating learning outcomes into accountability regimes provides quantifiable information on the quality of education. Learning outcomes activities aim to provide clearly articulated expectations of student knowledge, skills and abilities, with associated demonstrations of achievement that can be used as indicators of educational quality. They can be understood externally, used comparatively, and are appropriate for accountability and quality assurance frameworks.

Coates provides an analysis of the challenges and opportunities for transparency in higher education in his 2016 book “The Market for Learning”, and he speaks particularly to the importance of finding valuable indicators of quality. The challenge is seen most clearly in the struggles of learning outcomes as a suitable means to provide transparent information on educational quality. While learning outcomes have been touted to make educational quality transparent, the realities of their effectiveness as a transparency tool has not been verified.

The next section of this paper reviews the way in which the literature proposes the usefulness of learning outcomes, and the proceeding section examines the activities of the European Quality Assurance agencies as they integrate learning outcomes into their systems. The purpose is to understand what information learning outcomes are currently providing on educational quality.

## **Proposed Benefits of Learning Outcomes**

When defined, learning outcomes support a clear understanding of educational outcomes to students, employers and the public at large. They create a transparency of what occurs in classrooms into identifiable capacities for students. Learning outcomes remove the “black box” of education by clarifying exactly what skills will be gained (Hattie 2009a). For students, they provide information about educational pathways by describing the key elements of a program or credential, which enhances the ability to make sound educational decisions (Banta and Blaich 2010). Telling potential students what skills they will achieve upon graduation allows them to make informed choices about their educational options. Bouder (2003; in Young 2003) suggests that established learning outcomes can be instruments of transparent communication, providing students with a map of various credential options and where they may lead.

Learning outcomes can also support system level coordination. In many cases, language used in sectors differs—be it colleges or universities, or between sectors and disciplines—where a range of terms are used to describe similar concepts or, alternatively, the same word can be used for different purposes. Simply finding a

common language to articulate student capacities and then identifying the level of mastery expected in each credential enhances understanding of the intentions of the sectors and helps to find precisely where the similarities and differences lie (Lennon et al. 2014; Lokhoff et al. 2010).

When learning outcomes are mapped and embedded, it allows for improved coordination in student progression, credit transfer and articulation agreements (Allais 2010). This is possible because learning outcomes more readily “translate the aims of a course or programme of study into a set of competencies” making it easier to give credit for learning acquired in another institution, removing barriers to student mobility, and supporting lifelong learning (Roberts 2008: 4). When established, learning outcomes provide confidence that the student has achieved certain expectations, thus lowering the need for blind trust in other educational providers. Similarly, they help to protect students from rogue providers in increasingly complex systems (Middlehurst 2011).

Transparent learning outcomes also support employability. When students are knowledgeable about their capacities, they can recognise the applicability and transferability of their credential to a variety of employment options and also possess the language to describe their skills (European Commission 2014). Learning outcomes support employers in their hiring processes, as they can consider the types of skills they require an employee to possess and identify the corresponding credential or program (Allais 2010). This is particularly valuable given the variety of educational credentials available; what Allais refers to as the “jungle of qualifications” (2010: 49).

This transparency can then be used to inform both education and the labour market about mismatches. There is considerable discussion about a disconnection between the abilities of students and the needs of employers (see, for example, Allen and de Weert 2007; Lennon 2010; Miner 2010). Whether these concerns are founded or not (Handel 2003), and whether or not one believes that it is the role of education to prepare students for the labour market, articulating the abilities graduates do have is a way to begin conversations to identify gaps in expectations (Roberts 2008).

When learning outcomes are established, it is also possible to internationally coordinate and compare educational programming (Lokhoff et al. 2010; Wagenaar 2013). It is particularly useful in cases where the system design of credential offerings, nomenclature, length and institutional types differ. Coordination, either through restructuring (as in the case of the EU), or in identifying compatibility (as in the case of Canada) supports the integration and coordination of national systems in order to “improve the transparency, access, progression and quality of qualifications in relation to the labour market and civil society” (European Commission 2008: 11).

Hence, the literature suggests that learning outcomes demystify the processes and outcomes of education to the benefit of the student, program, institution, national governments and international community. The logical end to this is that it will both improve educational quality and support national economies. Clarifying what is expected of graduates, ensuring programs provide the opportunities to gain

the skills, and then measuring and demonstrating success—of both students and programs—is expected to significantly impact education systems and nations (Allais 2007, 2010; Allais et al. 2009a, b; Young 2007).

## Study Methodology

This paper presents select data from a broader study of international quality assurance agencies activities in learning outcomes.<sup>1</sup> The study employed a survey, case studies and meta-evaluation to collect information on policy activities and outcomes. In 2015, members of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation International Quality Group (CIQG) were invited to participate in a short survey. The respondents were geographically diverse coming from 43 different countries around the world (N = 65) with the majority originating in Europe (31%), Asia (21%) and North America (19%). The intention of the survey was to collect information on the state of learning outcomes policies and activities on an international scale and uncover policy goals, activities, and any evaluations that may have occurred.

The second phase of research, identified agencies that had conducted evaluations of their learning outcomes policies or activities and examined the results of their evaluations as case studies. Nine organisations cases were available for analysis and were coded to determine their structural and policy choices in learning outcomes initiatives and whether the evaluation determines positive, negative or neutral results.

In the third phase of research, those nine research evaluations (“cases”) were considered through a meta-evaluation. A meta-evaluation is a process by which findings from existing evaluations are pooled (Pawson and Tilley 1997; Rossi et al. 2004). The meta-evaluation was applied to the case study findings in order to distil common patterns of impact (positive, neutral/undetermined or negative).

This report focuses on the European participants and cases of the study. The purpose is to distil unique characteristics of the European quality assurance experiences that might support better policy development in the region.

## European Experience with Learning Outcomes Policies

### *Survey Results*

The 20 European agencies that completed the survey came from Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, France, Germany, Kosovo, Latvia, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, and

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<sup>1</sup>The full study employed and then triangulated findings from a global survey, case study analyses, and a meta-evaluation in order to find evidence of how learning outcomes policies are being used in higher education regulatory schemes and what, if any, impact the policies have had. See: Lennon (2016).

the United Kingdom. Under the European Higher Education Area umbrella that employs the European Qualifications Framework, 55% of the agencies indicate they operate under a National Qualifications Framework (NQF), and the rest were still under development (The global average of jurisdictions having a National Qualification Framework was 33%). Yet, only 25% of the European agencies use the NQF as a tool for learning outcomes in the institutions, where another 25% are developing their own internal learning outcomes within the agency, and 40% ask the institutions to develop their own statements. This is in line with the global patterns.

When asked about their goals for learning outcomes policies, the European members were more focused on labour market alignment and transparency than their global counterparts and were less focused on the teaching and learning aspects of learning outcomes (see Fig. 1). When dealing with the institutions under their jurisdiction, over 40% of the European QAA's require evidence of student achievement, compared to 28% for the rest of the world. 25% of the European agencies use standard assessments, and another 15% use classroom-based assessments as evidence. This is generally in line with the global pattern, however, the other QAA's are more focused on the use of e-portfolios and badges. This is likely due to the existence of Europe-wide Europass, which serves to make credentials transparent to employers.

When asked if they undertake evaluations of their learning outcomes policies and strategies, 45% of the European countries indicated that they are actively engaged in this type of work. Globally, the bulk of evaluations are focussed on the institutional impact of learning outcomes, with surprisingly few considering the financial implications of the activities (see Fig. 2). Within the European countries, nearly all the evaluations focus on the institutional level, with 33% of the research focused on institutional impact, and 22% focused on institutional activities and interviews with administration, faculty, and staff respectively. This focus on the institutional level is interesting considering that the stated goals of the labour market alignment and transparency were more common.

### ***Meta-Evaluation Results***

Eight European countries had reports/publications that evaluated cases of learning outcomes strategies that were evaluated as case studies and then pooled into a meta-evaluation in this research. The reports include the "Evaluation of the academic infrastructure: Final report" by the UK's Quality Assurance Agency (QAA 2010) which separately examines the system level frameworks for qualification (QAA FHEQ), subject benchmark statements (QAA SBS), and program specific statements (QAA PS). Each is examined separately in this analysis. The report "Learning outcomes in external quality assurance approaches: Investigating and discussing Nordic practices and developments" by the Nordic Quality Assurance Network in Higher Education provides case studies of Denmark, Norway, Finland, and Sweden (Hansen et al. 2013), which are addressed separately here.



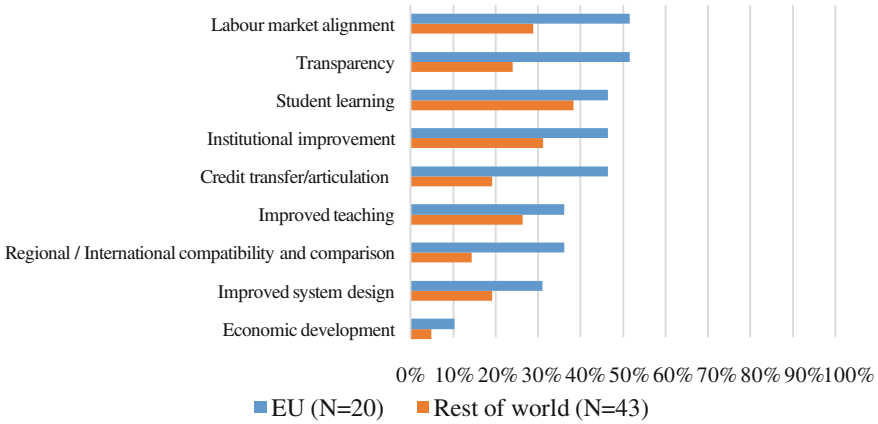


Fig. 1 Goals for learning outcomes policies/strategies

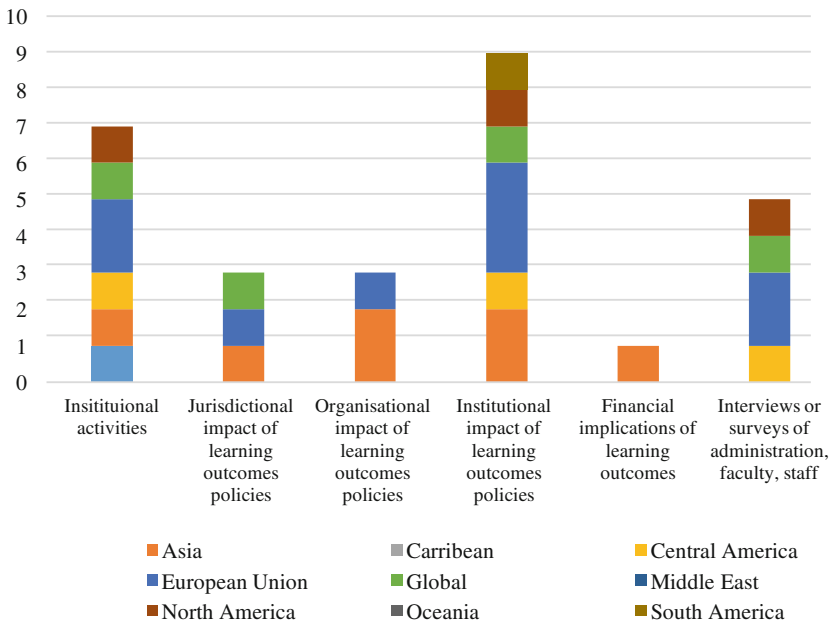


Fig. 2 Regional evaluation activities

Furthermore, because the reports examined quality assurance activities across entire countries (some of which have more than one agency), the cases are presented as NOQA Denmark, NOQA Norway, NOQA Finland, and NOQA Sweden. Finally, an unpublished document from the Foundation of Higher Education Quality Evaluation Centre (AIKNC) provides a report on the Latvian experiences of introducing learning outcomes into their higher education sectors (Dzelme, nd),

For a comprehensive analysis of the case studies and analysis of these learning outcomes evaluations see “In Search of Quality: Evaluating the Impact of Learning Outcomes Policies in Higher Education Regulation” (Lennon 2016).

A review of the eight research cases finds a wide range of organisational and policy features. Table 1 below shows the number of cases that discussed each factor as a goal or element of their policy. The characteristics are divided into two sections: structural features and policy choices. The structural features are fixed organisational factors. The policy choices are the targets and are the areas where it is possible to evaluate success.

There are some characteristics that may have an influence on the findings but are not possible to be included as factors for analysis. For example, most of the policies have existed for less than 10 years (the exception being UK QAA which has had policies in place since 1997), and it is difficult to ascertain policy implications and impacts of educational policies as change is often invisible, incremental, and slow (Kis 2005: 26). Also, two of the research evaluations were formative and six were summative. While literature suggests summative research provides better insight into impact, formative research can provide valuable information particularly when policies have not matured (Sursock 2011). Of the eight research evaluations, all but one of the agencies worked with credential-level expectations, and seven focused on the program level. These foci are reflected in the level of expectation targeted, where six focused on learning outcomes at the national/jurisdictional level and eight worked on learning outcomes at the program level. The goals of the policies varied, though a third aimed to support “institutional improvement/quality”.

As the research was conducted by regulatory agencies on their own policies, it is understandable that seven studies discussed the impact on quality assurance as an “actor”. The one case that did not discuss the factor was the QAA PS which is a program-level learning outcomes policy (though embedded in a broader policy). The range of target audiences demonstrates the variety of ways learning outcomes are intended to support success. It is also shown that the majority of research has been conducted on policies that have worked to articulate and implement learning outcomes rather than measure them.

### *Impact of Learning Outcomes Policies*

Trying to understand if the policies were successful at achieving the impact they intended, the case studies were coded to determine if a certain feature was a target and then identified whether that target was positively or negatively impacted, or if the implications were neutral. This section first examines the overall success of the policies. The “success” of the policies is considered through the relative number of positive, neutral and negative implications. The section then moves on to observe if, and how factors were impacted by learning outcomes policies and the relative success of policies containing that factor.

**Table 1** Characteristics of case studies

Structural features		Policy choices					Strategy type	
Focus of regulation	Level of expectation	Goals	Actors	Target audience				
Credential	7	3	5	5	3	7	Articulation	
Sector	0	7	3	4	4	5	Implementation	
Institution	2	1	5	2	2	2	Measurement	
Discipline	5	8	5	7	5			
Program	7	2	4	1	4			
Generic Skills	2	2	2	1	5			

Figure 3 shows the implications of learning outcomes policies in each research case. Of the eight cases, QAA SBS and NOQA Denmark had more positive implications where AINKC, NOQA Finland and NOQA Sweden had a neutral impact on over half of their targets. Summed across all cases, “neutral or undetermined” was the most frequent result of the policy evaluations ( $n = 35$ ).

The (N) associated with each case represents the number of policy targets evaluated in the research case ranging from 6 to 18. A correlational analysis was used to examine the relationship between the number of targets and the number of positive, neutral and negative implications. The results indicate a positive but weak correlation between the number of targets and number of positive implications (Spearman’s Rho 0.69), but no relationship with the number of negative or neutral implications.

This finding suggests that the more targets a policy was intending to impact the more likely the policy were to be successful. The NOQA Denmark policy, for example, positively impacted 55% of the targets. This is somewhat at odds with the policy evaluation literature that suggests that a limited number of clear and focused targets produces better results (Rossi et al. 2004). One possible explanation for this finding is that the research cases were more likely to report on the positive findings than report on negative or neutral impacts. Another explanation is that it could simply be that with the higher number of targets the greater likelihood to achieve at least one, even if the overall success rate relatively low.

### *Impact of Structural Features*

In order to understand if structural factors impacted the success of policies, an examination was conducted on the relative proportion of implication types reported for cases (N) that had that feature.

The type of expectation in the learning outcomes policy is a structural component that is not embedded within the policy but is established through part of the organisational mandate and/or overriding policies (such as the EQF-LL). Figure 4 shows the proportional impact of the level of expectation associated with the policies—ranging from those that run across international boundaries to those that are very specifically targeting a student in one course. It shows that, when combined, the five cases that targeted students (either across courses or within courses) had positive implications in over 40% of the factors addressed. NOQA Denmark and Sweden, for example, targeted students both in and across courses and were successful in achieving over 40% of all its targets. Alternatively, the six that focused on program level outcomes had a positive impact in 30% of the cases.

A similar examination of the data on the focus of the expectation found the negligible influence of the focus of the learning outcomes in the policy: whether generic, at the credential or program level. This finding is somewhat unexpected as literature has suggested that focusing on generic skills is difficult and that targeting discipline specific learning outcomes can be successful (Benjamin 2013; Lennon and Frank 2014; Lennon and Jonker 2014; Tremblay et al. 2012).

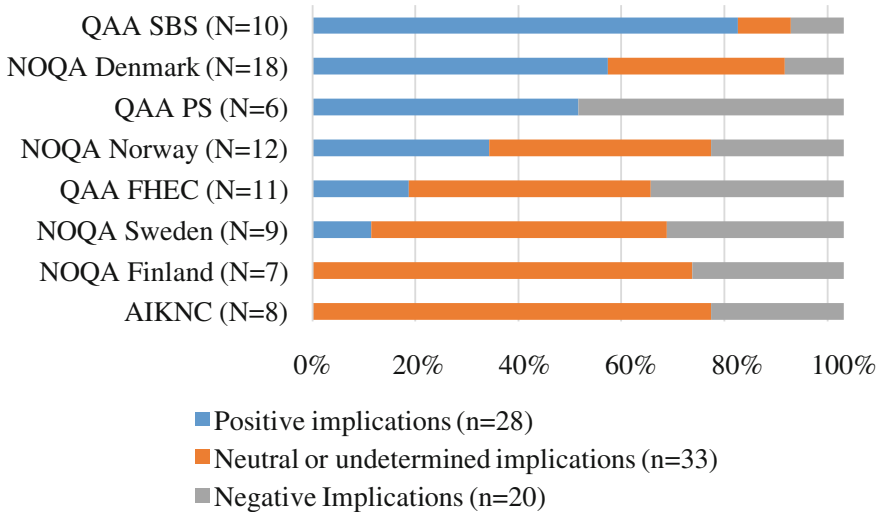


Fig. 3 Impact of learning outcomes policies

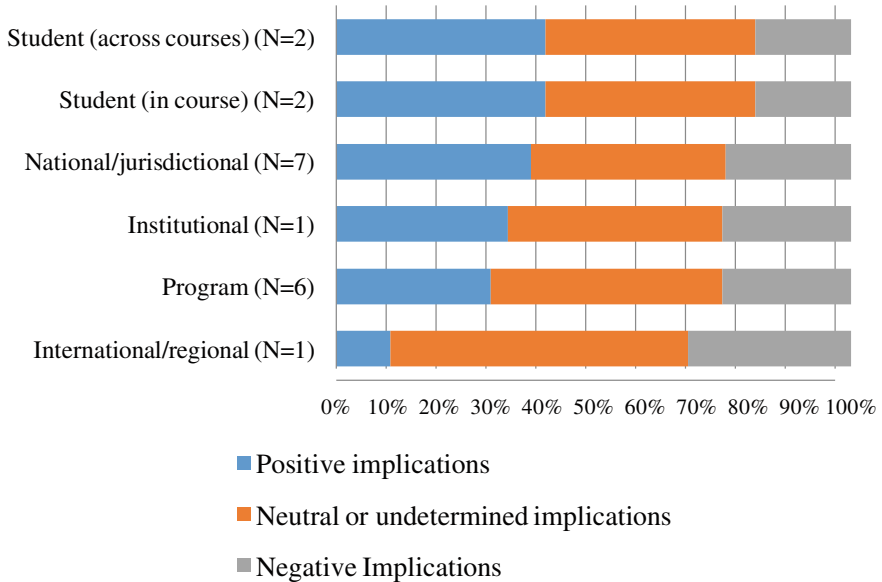


Fig. 4 Proportional impact by level of expectation

### Impact of Policy Choices

In order to understand where the policies had an impact, this section examines the number and type of implications reported on each policy choice, as well as the proportional impact of policies that targeted that feature. Figure 5, for example, shows the number of instances where the goal of the policy was influenced in a positive, neutral or undetermined, or negative way. It shows that all of the policies that targeted teaching and learning (N = 3) were evaluated to have had a positive impact on teaching and learning. Alternatively, of those that targeted learning outcomes policies towards improving system design, three had negative results and one was neutral. Examining the results in this way provides insight into goal areas where policies may have more promise.

Another way to examine the impact of policy choice is to see how successful policies containing that policy choice were overall. Figure 6 shows that those four policies targeted at teaching and learning achieved a positive impact in 50% of cases in all of the features they targeted. Alternatively, the policies that focused on international coordination and comparison were successful in 31% of their targets. Together, Figs. 5 and 6 suggest that those policies targeted at teaching and learning were overall more successful at both improving teaching and learning and producing successful results overall. These findings correspond to existing literature that has found a direct effect of learning outcomes on student success (Hattie 2009a, b). In two cases, the policies that targeted transparency were successful in impacting their targets, while in two they were not, and the third case was unable to determine any impact.

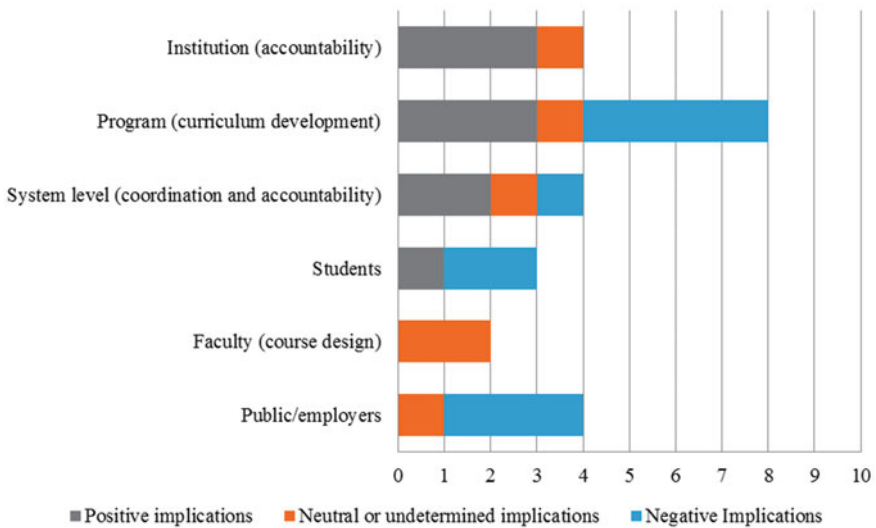


Fig. 5 Impact of learning outcomes policy on goals

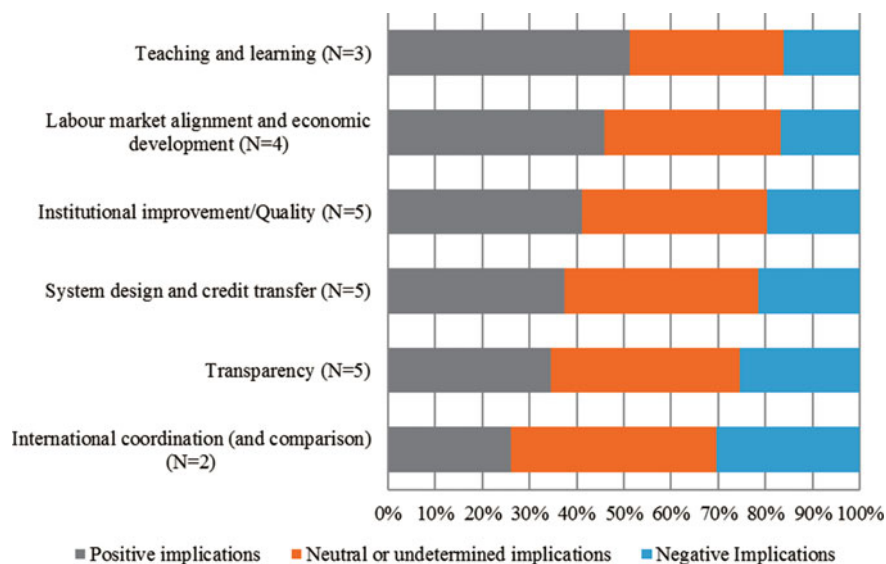
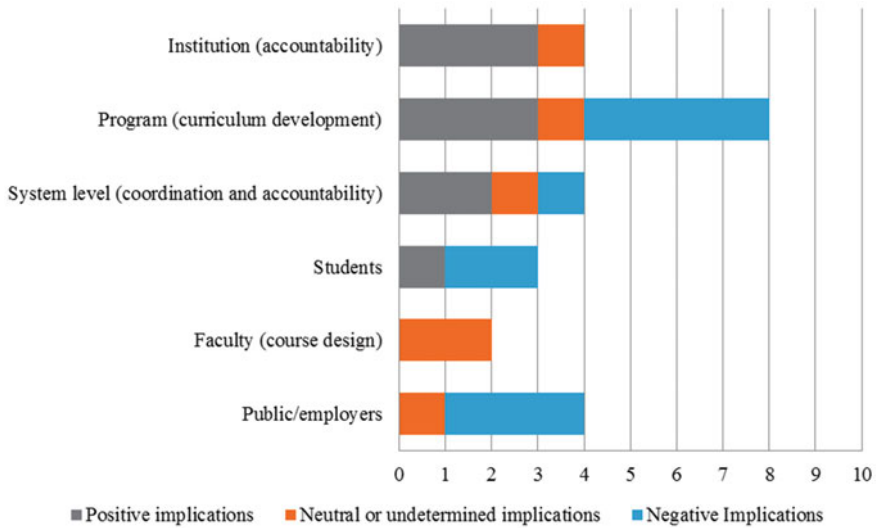


Fig. 6 Proportion of total impact by goal

Positive implications of learning outcomes on transparency were found in the QAA Frameworks of Higher Education (FHEQ), as they achieved a clarification of the structure and nomenclature of awards that are available. NOQA Denmark specifically examined the use of learning outcomes as a transparency tool. Learning outcomes were found useful for students both as a signal of what they should expect from their program and also in protecting students, as the activities identified programs that are not meeting standards. Also, “the method has succeeded in identifying programmes where the learning outcomes were not sufficiently supported by the structure and content of the programme or by sufficient resources at the institution” (Hansen et al. 2013: 21). Findings on the value of learning outcomes as a tool for employers and the labour market were less positive, suggesting that there were significant challenges in mapping programs to the labour market. This led to the suggestion that there should be more employer engagement in the assignment and assessment of required learning outcomes.

The one case that identified a negative implication for transparency was the QAA Program Specific Statements (PS) where the primary goal of articulating learning outcomes was to support student and employer understanding of the courses. The evaluation determined that “in many cases programme specifications were not considered to be the most effective way for providing information for students or for employers (QAA 2010: 7). The conclusion was that the information students required to inform choice was available in other forms that were more appropriate, more user-friendly and less expensive.

The Latvian Foundation Higher Education Quality Evaluation Centre (AIKNC) did not report any positive or negative impacts on transparency. The program under



**Fig. 7** Impact on the target audience

evaluation was trying to link their program and institutional learning outcomes to the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF-LL) and the Qualification Framework for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA). The findings of the formative research suggested that they were having difficulties in developing transparent learning outcomes that support the entire system because of the lack of cohesion between their national frameworks between vocational education and training and higher education. The author was positive about the potential of learning outcomes but did not comment on the impact on transparency.

Moving on, an examination of the impact on the target audience of the policy finds fairly neutral results: where there were a few cases that supported institutional accountability, there were more cases that found negative implications on program curriculum development (see Fig. 7). Overall, the research cases study analysis identified 10 instances of negative impact on the policy target, six neutral and nine positive. This suggests there is a limited positive impact on the target audience of the policy. A proportional evaluation also identified the negligible influence of target audience on overall success.

## Summary

This paper presents the results of a survey, case studies and meta-evaluation of the existing research on learning outcomes policies in European higher education regulation. Using evidence collected from eight research evaluations, the analysis presented examples of characteristics, structural features and policy choices.



Nearly every possible type of goal, strategies and policy choice found in the literature (as discussed above) were found in the eight cases: the policies under examination were designed to target different levels, focuses, and audiences. The goals of the policies varied, though five of the eight policies aimed to support “transparency”. This suggests that, within the sample of research cases, there was no pattern in what quality assurance policies are intending to do or how they are doing it.

Examining the overall research results has also shown the policies have been relatively unsuccessful in positively impacting their chosen targets, more often providing no change or a negative outcome on the intended objective. How the presence of each target impacted the overall success of a policy was also considered, and again, the results were largely negligible. While the policies that targeted teaching and learning seemed to achieve a positive impact more frequently, at best they were successful in 50% of the time in all of the features they targeted and statistically there was no difference. Overall results found that no policy choice had a higher success rate on either the target or the policy intention overall.

Summed across all cases, “neutral or undetermined” was the most frequent result of the policy evaluations. There are no significant or obvious patterns in how learning outcomes policies are impacting their targeted goal, or if there are certain policy choices that are producing more favourable impacts. Overall, the combined results of the evaluations suggest that learning outcomes policies are not having their intended impact, or at least they have not yet been found to have the positive outcomes desired.

## Implications

The results of the research findings unveil that policies on learning outcomes in higher education regulation are not having the intended impact. This is a significant finding considering the amount of time, effort and political will being put into learning outcomes policies as a result of the Bologna process within national governments, quality assurance agencies as well as the institutions. At each of these levels, there is continued investment into articulating learning outcomes, implementing them into programming, and demonstrating that they have been achieved. The true financial cost of these activities is not easily ascertained and, to date, there is no publically available information or research on the topic; however, this study suggests that the impact of these activities is limited. The finding calls into question the value of learning outcomes as a means to contribute to higher education quality, regulation and transparency.

Yet, before discarding the entire field of learning outcomes as a concept, it is more practical to first consider that the failure is a policy issue. There is a simple policy cycle by which any policy is formulated, implemented and evaluated (Cerych and Sabatier 1986; Coates and Lennon 2014; Inwood 2004). Findings from

this research have identified issues with learning outcomes policies at each of the three stages, where policies were misdirected in concept in formulation, misapplied in implementation, or misaligned in the planned activities and evaluation.

### *Policies are misdirected*

One possible explanation for the relative neutrality of the policy impact is that the goals and expectations were misdirected: that there was a fundamental disconnect between the desired and the possible outcomes such that the goals could never be achieved through the policy. Figure 5, for example, illustrates that learning outcomes policies targeted at improving System Design and Credit Transfer were never successful. Being one of the three most common goals, this finding suggests that there may be issues with the concept behind the goal choice.

The case studies shed some light on how goal choice may influence the success rates. The difference in the success of QAA SBS and QAA FHEQ policies provides a clear example of how two policies with different goals had different outcomes. The policies were similar in many ways: they came from the same jurisdiction, had the same structural features and each had a similar number of policy choices and targets. The FHEQ was established as a qualifications framework with goals to improve “Transparency,” “System design and credit transfer” as well as “International coordination and comparison”. Overall, the policy had less than a 20% success rate. The QAA SBS focused on subject-based issues of the “Teaching and learning”, “Institutional improvement/quality”, “System design and credit transfer”, and “Labour market alignment and economic development”. The policy was successful in positively impacting 80% of its targets.

The different outcomes of the two policies are remarkable, and yet are somewhat consistent with other research. Allais, for example, has contended that national qualifications frameworks are not achieving their system-level goals of improving qualification transparency or credit transfer decision-making (Allais 2010). Hattie, on the other hand, presented a meta-evaluation to show the positive impact of learning outcomes on teaching and learning (2009b).

Hence, although the findings in this research are only descriptive, and there were no statistically significant differences in the types of policy goals, it is reasonable to suggest that the goals of the learning outcomes policies should be seriously considered prior to any planning or implementation. It is vital to ensure goals reflect the reality of what could be reasonably achievable.

### *Policies are misaligned*

Literature suggests that any policy should have an established goal, long-term targets, short-term targets, benchmarks, and evaluations appropriate to capture change (Patton 1998; Rossi et al. 2004). There are, of course, variations on this, but the basic cycle is a feedback loop. In fact, it mimics the role of learning outcomes—establish what the expectations are, incorporate them into the programing and measure whether students have gained the expected knowledge, skills and competencies. When one of those elements is misaligned, the cycle cannot work. For example, if learning outcomes are written but not implemented, there will likely be

no change in student achievement. Similarly, there is no valuable information gained if the student achievement is measured but expectations and indications of success are not clearly defined.

Furthermore, not only do the right steps have to be taken but the right decisions must be made when designing the policy: the policy choices must be able to lead to the desired outcomes. Examples from the case studies find this is not always happening. For example, NOQA Denmark noted that where the goal was to use learning outcomes as a transparency tool for employers and the labour market, the strategy did not involve employers or develop ways of demonstrating achievement to the labour market (focusing instead on curriculum mapping). In another example, QAA PS failed to achieve the goal of supporting transparency for students and employers, perhaps because it focused on writing program-specific outcomes for curriculum rather than focusing on outward facing activities of demonstrating achievement through something like an e-portfolio or learning passport.

### *Policies are misapplied*

Even the best-planned policy can be misapplied and have implementation issues hinder success. For example, the NOQA Denmark research found it was a challenge for institutions to integrate and map the learning outcomes, particularly to the labour market. Similarly, the NOQA Finland case found it was difficult for the programs to develop internal learning outcomes and align their programming with the NQF regulations. Moreover, even the auditors tasked with judging the quality of the learning outcomes in Finland felt unequipped to evaluate the progress or provide constructive feedback.

The case study findings noting the challenges of implementation are corroborated through the global survey of regulatory agencies where the most frequent argument against learning outcomes was that it was a burdensome administrative task and there was a lack of operational support.

## **Concluding Thoughts**

Reflecting again on the parallel experience of medicine nearly forty years ago, the goal of evidence-based practice is reasonable. Today, students, parents, employers, and the public at large seek transparent measures of educational quality. The need for fair evaluations of educational quality is justifiable, and the assumption that learning outcomes are a means to do so is understandable. The belief that clarifying educational expectations supports the achievement of those expectations is logical.

This study presents an initial foray into the evaluation of the learning outcomes policies in Europe. While only establishing a baseline using eight cases, it suggests that at this time there are no clear promising practices in learning outcomes policies for transparency or any other goal.

The primary discovery of this study is that learning outcomes policies in regulatory agencies are not having the intended effect because the policies themselves

had issues in development, implementation or in the alignment of goals and activities. Thus, rather than dismissing the concept of learning outcomes as ineffective, it is more reasonable to consider learning outcomes as a policy problem, where there needs to be significantly more work done on evaluating learning outcomes strategies and activities. To truly understand the value of learning outcomes, it is necessary to continue to establish what role learning outcomes can play in providing transparent information on educational quality as well as the cost-benefit ratio of the activities. Thus, there is a good deal of work to be done before we are able to provide “evidence-based education”, but the ground is beginning to shift.

As witnessed in medicine, it is not a simple transition to evidence-based practice, either in shifting the conceptual boundaries or in the trial and error of ad hoc activities. In the case of learning outcomes, it may take some time before there are demonstrable promising practices established through systematic evaluations.

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# Is Higher Education Ambivalent Towards Inclusion of Non-Formal Qualifications in National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs)?



## A Policy-Learning Analysis of Seven Country Reports

Anne Murphy and Horacy Dębowski

### Abbreviations

ENQA	European association for quality assurance in higher education
EQF	European qualifications framework
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
OECD	Organisation for economic cooperation and development
QAA	Quality assurance authority
QQI	Qualifications and Quality Ireland
RNFIL	Recognition of non-formal and informal learning
RPL	Recognition of prior learning
SCQFP	Scottish credit and qualifications framework partnership
SQA	Scottish Qualifications Authority
VNFIL	Validation of non-formal and informal learning

### Introduction

There is some legitimacy in arguing that NQFs are sufficiently too-recent to expect to find a robust body of critical publications which explores resistance to them or which questions their underlying assumptions (Fernie and Pilcher 2009). It is evident that most literature about NQFs is narrative, descriptive, evaluative, or

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advocacy, is aspirational and optimistic, with very little critique, except perhaps in the cases of the NQFs of South Africa, New Zealand and Australia (Raffe 2012) and in the cases of impact evaluations in Ireland and the UK. This paper seeks to address this dearth of critique in a small way and to contribute to evidence-based research about one very focused aspect of the actual functioning of NQFs in national contexts: how non-formal qualifications are included in or excluded from NQFs, and what this reality might mean for the expectation that NQFs and the Bologna framework for higher education can actually provide greater transparency, readability and comparability of qualifications for learners and for the labour market.

The paper is relevant for the higher education sector in particular since, together with the formal school and VET systems, it populates the rigid spine of most NQF architectures and is less likely to accommodate disturbance of that position to accommodate new non-formal providers and new types of qualifications representative of market qualifications, post-secondary education or adult education.

Readers should consider the paper as a minor contribution to opening a wider critical debate around the areas of tension with regard to control of NQFs, particularly at higher education level, mindful that comparative analysis of data from the seven country reports included later below was still at an initial stage at the time writing.

### ***Global Data Versus Local Realities***

According to the *Global Inventory of Regional and National Qualifications Frameworks* produced by UNESCO, the European Training Foundation and Cedefop in 2015, one-hundred and ninety-three states had already developed NQFs based on a learning outcomes paradigm. In the Introduction to the Inventory, the authors comment on this figure by summarising the dominant meta-policy discourse around the purpose of NQFs, as follows:

Given the diversity of country contexts, it is remarkable how much consensus exists around the world that learning outcomes based qualification frameworks are appropriate tools for the reform and expansion of educational and training provision in ways that will raise skills levels, improve labour market productivity and contribute to sustainable development.

However, there are competing discourses around the purpose, implementation and impacts of NQFs assumed in this comment and, indeed, there are competing discourses within the inventory itself. There are also divergent conclusions around precisely how many of the 193 NQFs in the inventory have moved beyond the “legal document” stage. Deij and Graham conclude in their thematic chapter in the inventory that in most cases NQFs remain empty of qualifications. If their conclusion also accurately reflects the state-of-play with regard to NQFs at the end of 2017, then any analysis of the attitudes of higher education towards NQFs on a global level would have little validity or acceptability as evidence-based research.



For the purpose of useful comparability in this paper, the global scope of NQFs is delimited to EU member states where the Bologna framework, the EQF-LLL and an NQF have at least been worked through to a stage where articulation across the NQF and the meta frameworks has been established, even if an NQF may not be inclusive of all types and sectors of education and training at this time. While policy learning from early NQF adopters such as South Africa, New Zealand and Australia inform the conceptual understanding for this paper, their data are not explicitly included.

### *Questions Posed in the Paper and the Matter of Transparency*

So, two broad questions are posed in this paper and some evidence offered in response. The two questions are:

- i. Is there any evidence that higher education is actually ambivalent to the development and implementation of inclusive NQFs?
- ii. Is higher education ambivalent to, or indeed hostile to, the “opening up” of NQFs by including “non-formal qualifications” gained outside of formal school, VET and university sectors?

The paper addresses the first question by drawing on relevant policy documents and critical publications from the HE sector itself and from analysis by critical commentators on frameworks generally.

The second question is more complex as it assumes a shared understanding of concepts, terminology and legally-based operational systems. It was not possible to explicitly conduct primary research of sufficient depth and breadth for this paper to offer credible primary data to answer this question fully. Instead, the authors drew both from published literature and from data generated for seven EU Country Reports produced by the Erasmus+ Project—“NQF-IN”—*Developing organisational and financial models for inclusion of non-formal qualifications in NQFs* in which they were both involved as designers of the methodology for the reports and as authors of the reports for Ireland and Poland respectively (Murphy 2017; Sławiński et al. 2017).

As the methodology for producing the Country Reports did not include direct exploration of HE’s attitudes to the inclusion of non-formal qualifications in NQFs as a discrete topic of research, a proximal validity was assumed for this paper by drawing out data that exposed the local reality and by reproducing relevant data accurately from the reports themselves with permission from the original authors, followed by identification of themes and issues relevant to the transparency of qualifications, or their degree of an opacity, as an indicator of ambivalence or hostility.

For the purpose of this paper, the working definition of “non-formal qualification” is a qualification achieved outside of state-supported education and training systems. This definition includes, *inter alia*, qualifications provided by private

providers, commercial companies, voluntary/not-for-profit organisations, regulated sectors, and Ministries of Government.

### *Structure of the Paper*

The paper is organised into three further parts. The first part discusses the policy backdrop to considering non-formal qualifications as a discrete sector vis-à-vis qualifications frameworks and includes selected academic critique of both policy directions and academic practice in this regard.

In the second part relevant data from the Erasmus+ Research Project “NQF-IN” are presented and analysed in relation to the two questions posed by the paper.

The final part tentatively draws out the most obvious policy challenges for the inclusion of non-formal qualifications in NQFs and how these challenges might require additional responses from higher education generally. It also suggests where additional research could usefully contribute.

### *Relevant Policy Themes and Academic Issues*

The themes selected of immediate relevance are: differentiation in the architecture of NQFs; limiting epistemic access; flaws in RPL/VNFIL nomenclatures underpinning policy; learning outcomes as a barrier to inclusion; the reality of the non-formal sector.

### **Policy Matters: Embedded Differentiation and Credentialising Powers**

The reality that communicative frameworks with sub-frameworks start from what already exists and intend to make greater sense of complex contexts is unquestioned in this paper. Perhaps one of the unintended consequences of communicative frameworks is greater embedding of what already exists in “soft laws” (Young 2010), including the locus of power in deciding what, if any, reforms will follow. Communicative frameworks may also be less self-critical, thereby warding off resistance to established practices, assumptions and sense of entitlement among the poser elites.

Fernie and Pilcher argued provocatively in 2009 that the university sector in Scotland—where the “communicative” SCQF is long-established—willingly engages in reforming activity when it is more symbolic than substantive, particularly if their control of its own sector, and indirectly of the school sector, is not

being diminished by decision-makers outside their sector. Thus, the sector's preference at that time to engage with ERHEA quality frameworks than with local framework bodies which may seek to impose innovations and more diverse stakeholder involvement: described by Young (2010) as illustrative of the "inescapable conservative role of higher education".

Young argues that differentiation will continue in spite of EQF rhetoric around the equalising impact of meta-framework levels and titles. We also argue that, in this regard, the credentialising power of the HE sector is under no threat while differentiation continues.

### *Epistemic Access Versus Widening Participation*

Ideological tensions around who should have access to the social and economic capital of higher education qualifications are not new. Dual systems which strictly regulate access to higher education persist in the EU despite the rhetoric of homogeneity around a contextual equivalence of learning, levelling of qualifications, and removal of boundaries between different forms of knowledge as promoted by the EQF meta-framework (Karseth and Solbrekke 2010; Young 2010).

Including non-formal qualifications in NQFs as epistemically equal to higher education qualifications continues to be robustly debated and "re-contextualised". By identifying the precise legal and regulatory practices for "management" of non-formal qualifications *vis-à-vis* NQF and Qualifications Registers in seven countries for this paper, it is possible to begin to question assumptions and to gain meaningful insights into the uniqueness of each context and the sensitivities among the main players, perhaps with the potential to generalise from the particular.

### *Unfortunate Nomenclatures Underpinning Policies for Inclusion in NQFs*

Of immediate relevance to the topic of this paper, including epistemic and territorial aspects, is how RPL/VNFIL/RVA (recognition of prior learning/validation of non-formal learning/recognition, validation and accreditation) is conceptualised and relevant policies encouraged, without unsettling the distribution of power in the architecture of NQFs.

European Union (EU) member states are expected to have national policies in place regarding validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) by 2018 under the 2012 European Council Recommendation, December 2012 (2012/C 398/01). The process of developing these policies and making the necessary organisational and financial arrangements to implement them thereafter requires consultation with and agreement among a wide range of stakeholders. From the

perspective of this paper, it includes decisions regarding how non-formal qualifications achieved outside state-supported education and training will interface with the sub-frameworks of national frameworks of qualifications (NQFs), thereby opening up frameworks beyond qualifications achieved within the formal sectors. It will also involve consideration of where non-formal qualifications interface with the three-cycle Bologna structure in higher education in general, as well as how the nomenclature *recognition of prior learning* (RPL) might need to be re-considered as a much wider policy instrument across the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) with inevitable consequences for quality assurance systems in individual higher education institutions as well as for the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).

Since 2012, there has been considerable stakeholder positioning and debate in anticipation of the 2018 policy development deadline. From the analysis of relevant policy documents and academic literature it is evident that there are a number of powerful policy influencers determining the likely direction of VNFIL, as well as cautionary voices arguing for greater clarity with regard to how non-formal qualifications are defined and quality assured for inclusion in NQFs, together with calls for conceptual and operation separation of “non-formal learning” from “informal learning” in policy instruments. There are calls too for accurate data about and understanding of the precise reality of how non-formal qualifications achieved outside state-supported systems are currently managed within early generation and newer NQFs in Europe.

### ***The Narrative and Ideologies of Lifelong Learning and RPL/VNFIL Policies***

The genesis of policies to value learning and knowledge acquired outside formal education and training is frequently attributed to the ideologically humanistic positions of the UNESCO Faure Report (1972) *Learning to Be* and the Delors Report (1996) *Learning: The treasure within* which, to some degree, influenced World Bank (WB) policy interest in education and the liberal, adult education, lifelong learning movements of the late 1980s and 1990s. That era also witnessed the movement for accreditation of experiential learning (APEL) across both vocational and higher education levels. Elfert (2016) argues that both the Faure and Delors reports were “unfailures”: paradoxically failing as political and social movements in their time but sustained as prophetic visions for future generations. She further argues that UNESCO gave up on its vision of lifelong learning and shifted to more utilitarian ideals as evidenced in the 2015 report: “*Rethinking Education: Towards a Global, Common Good?*”.

She also argues that there have been too many competing international organisations in the lifelong learning policy space, including the OECD and World Bank, which are influencing governments, in particular neo-liberal directions, with regard

to non-formal and informal learning provision. Singh (2009) likewise notes a significantly growing divide between lifelong learning policies in the global North and global South to the extent that currently there is less policy-borrowing by the South where the non-formal and informal sectors are more significant than the formal education and training sectors. Likewise, Wheelahan (2011) warns countries of the global South against unquestioned replication of qualifications framework models from Anglophone countries where there is both conceptual and policy differentiation between formal qualifications and non-formal qualifications.

In Europe, there is evidence of conceptual, policy and linguistic divergence regarding the “status” of non-formal learning and appropriate recognition systems among bodies which champion vocational qualifications such as Cedefop, European Training Foundation (ETF), International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the European Qualifications Framework (ETF) on the one hand, the private/market qualifications sector on the other hand, with higher education interfacing with both in different contexts. These divergences are evident in publications such as inventories, research project reports, and conference proceedings.

A central locus of contestation is the increasing reliance of qualifications frameworks and recognition systems on the learning outcomes paradigm.

### *The Learning Outcomes Debate*

Policy, explanatory, promotional and critical literature surrounding the use of learning outcomes to define and design qualifications and qualifications frameworks is indeed vast. For the purpose of this paper, it is probably sufficient to note the ideological and educational objections articulated by academics and which are likely to influence VNFIL policies, and how inclusion of non-formal qualifications in national frameworks is regarded by the higher education sector—assuming that the sector articulates a coherent and unified worldview in this regard. The critical issues which incite polemic debate include the following: learning outcomes reflecting marketisation of education (Allais 2007), the neglect of knowledge (Allais 2014; Hussey and Smith 2002, 2008), the negative impact on student learning (Noonan 2016), managerial instrumentalism at the expense of the learning process and yielding of autonomy to “European competence creep” (Bohlinger 2012; Elken 2016; Falkner et al. 2004, 2005; Gallagher 2002; Pollack 2000a, b), assumption of transparency (Cort 2010; Elken 2015), standardisation creep (Maassen and Musselin 2009), unsustainable distance between learning outcomes design and real world teaching and learning contexts (Blackmur 2007; Kerry et al. 2014), using learning outcomes as performance indicators (Stewart 2010), abstract level of graduate learning outcomes and rapid obsolescence (THEM 2012).

## ***Persistence of the Non-formal/Informal Learning (VNFIL) Nomenclature***

The nomenclature “VNFIL” belies the conceptual and linguistic reality that non-formal “qualifications” differ in all aspects from non-formal and informal/experiential learning. In higher education, it is normal practice to distinguish between certificated prior learning and non-certificated, experiential learning when evaluating applications for access or award of credits. (FIN 2011). Likewise, the concept of experiential learning has been well theorised and woven into university assessment and pedagogical practices (Geoghegan 2005).

However, there has been enduring and uncritical use of the combined “non-formal and informal” terms permeating significant policy literature emanating from Cedefop, the EQF, the ILO and OECD, and in how inventories of policies and practices are designed and reported. Of relevance to this paper is Villalba and Bjornavold (2017) who argue that the definitional “norm” of the nomenclature *non-formal and informal learning* has already been achieved, as has consensus on how such learning is to be validated. They argue that the terms and processes for VNFIL have passed through the phase of “norm emergence” and “norm cascade” in Europe and have now reached the “tipping point” toward “norm internalisation.” i.e. the definition and the validation process are “fully accepted and are no longer part of the public debate”. This assumption, however, is not universally supported either in the broader policy literature or in the findings from the NQF-In country reports discussed later below.

## ***The Reality of Non-formal Qualifications as a Discrete Sector***

Singh and Duvekot (2013) describe a complex landscape of non-formal learning and its relationship with qualifications frameworks across country reports for Africa, the Arab region, Asia and Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean. They conclude that Europe is more concerned with non-formal qualifications that relate to the labour market than are other regions, reflecting the European policy interest in frameworks as managerial instruments to organise human resources, mobility of labour and economic capital. This reflects the emerging definition of non-formal learning and related qualifications promoted by the OECD as “learning activities that take place outside the formal system such as those carried out within companies, by professional associations, or independently by self-motivated adult learners”. Likewise, the EU Parliamentary Assembly, as far back as 1999, recognised the discrete nature of the non-formal education and training sector and the need for supportive policies at national levels:

“The Assembly recognises that formal educational systems alone cannot respond to the challenges of modern society and therefore welcomes its reinforcement by non-formal educational practices. The Assembly recommends that governments and appropriate

authorities of member states recognise non-formal education as a de facto partner in the lifelong learning process and make it accessible for all.” 15 December Document 8595.

The focus on non-formal learning in workplaces was explicitly researched in the Leonardo da Vinci project *Managing European diversity in lifelong learning: the many perspectives of the validation of prior learning in the European workplace* and reported in Dovecot et al. (2007) with over two-hundred case studies from eleven countries.

Of immediate relevance to this paper was the Dublin 2013 Conference “*Quality Assurance in Qualifications Frameworks*” organised by Qualifications and Quality Ireland (QQI) during the Irish Presidency of the EU, and the 2014 EQF conference “*Making learning visible*” in Birmingham UK. The Dublin conference explicitly posed the question to experts and participants: “*Are national and centralised public quality assurance and qualifications bodies too closely linked to the formal education and training systems, and does that diminish their capacity to operate validation systems in a sufficiently flexible manner?*” While the recorded discussion on this question shed significant light on the range of competing ideologies and views from higher education, it is worthwhile noting the eleven conclusions and areas for follow-up from the conference, three of which relate to the wider use of learning outcomes. The ninth conclusion/recommendation has two elements, the first of which is: “*Member states should design or extend their NQFs to accommodate quality assured qualifications arising from outside the formal systems.*” What is noteworthy is that the terminology infers “non-formal qualifications” and excludes informal learning as an integrated element.

The 2014 EQF Birmingham conference proceedings include multiple case-study presentations from the non-formal qualifications sector, both private and not-for-profit, illustrating if, why/why not, and how they have arranged to have their qualifications included in qualifications frameworks.

The ENQA conference “How European QA agencies deal with recognition: findings from the ENQA working group VII on QA and Recognition”, held in Dublin in June 2017, is also remarkable in that its focus was entirely towards managing internal systems arising from Bologna-related recognition of degrees and periods of study. There is no reference to the 2108 deadline for VNFIL policies or to implications for widening the scope of national frameworks (Chaparro 2017). This stance to an extent reflects the many models of NQF which involve higher education exclusively, or VET exclusively, and reflects the complexity of the landscape in the EHEA together with the slow pace of development of comprehensive, integrated NQFs.

## Results of the NQF-iN Project

The NQF-IN project produced seven EU Country Reports regarding how non-formal qualifications are included in national qualifications frameworks (NQF-IN 2017). Three are first generation frameworks countries: Ireland, Scotland, France. Four have only recently adopted their NQFs or are at the advanced stage of implementation: Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary and Croatia. Analysis of the reports is at an early stage at the time of writing.

From the perspective of higher education's involvement in the inclusion process, if any, analysis of the country reports for this paper was based on the following questions:

- Are NQF levels open to all types of qualifications or are they confined only to formal education qualifications (general education, VET, HE)?
- Can non-formal qualifications sit at the same levels as HE qualifications (i.e. on NQF levels equivalent to bachelors, masters and doctorate degrees)?

**Table 1** Different approaches to defining “formal” and “non-formal” qualifications

	Awarded within the formal education system (general, VET, HE) and regulated by laws or by-laws	Awarded by public institutions (outside formal education sector) or bodies accredited by these institutions, normally regulated by laws or by-laws	Awarded by companies, sectoral organisations, crafts chambers— not normally regulated by laws	Awarded by private training institutions (including international organisations) Not normally regulated by national laws	Included in the NQF and/ or the National Register of Qualifications
Formal qualification (also called: state/ government qualifications)	Yes	Yes or No	Yes or No	No	Yes or No
Non-formal qualification (also called: private market qualifications)	Yes or No	Yes or No	Yes or No	No	Yes or No



- What is the process of including non-formal qualifications in the national register?
- How is the quality of non-formal qualifications assured?

## ***Working Definitions***

There are different terms used across Europe to define qualifications awarded outside the traditional school system. For the purpose of comparative analysis Table 1 offers a synopsis of approaches to the definitions of “formal qualifications” and “non-formal qualification” used across the different national qualifications system:

Having analysed the processes used for inclusion of non-formal qualifications adopted in the NQF-IN partner countries, it is evident that the main criterion to distinguish different types of qualifications is the legal basis of the qualifications in the national qualifications system and inclusion in the register of qualifications. For example, if the process of awarding a qualification is regulated by legal acts, then this qualification will fall into the category of *state regulated qualifications*. Other qualifications also exist, whose awarding process is not regulated by legal acts. These qualifications are usually awarded according to the principle of “the freedom of economic activities”. These qualifications would fall into the category of *non-state regulated qualifications*. Within the category of *state regulated qualifications*, it is essential to distinguish *state regulated qualifications awarded in the education system* and *state regulated qualifications awarded outside the education system*, as the process of including these types of qualifications might differ.

Three generic types of qualifications can be distinguished across the country reports.

***Qualifications Type A*** are regulated qualifications awarded in the formal, state-supervised education system either by public or private providers. The key characteristic of this type of qualification is that its functioning is governed by education laws.

Examples include certificates for completion of secondary school, the *matura* qualification, or a bachelor degree.

***Qualifications Type B*** are state regulated qualifications awarded outside the education system regulated by legal acts or directly by ministries or government agencies but are not qualifications awarded in the formal education (school) system.

Examples are tax consultant, gas installer, building energy regulator.

***Qualifications Type C*** are non-state regulated qualifications whose functioning is not regulated by legal acts. These qualifications are usually awarded by private providers or voluntary bodies.

Examples could be tour guiding, certificate of risk management in banking, tennis coach.

### *What Qualifications Might Be Included in the NQF?*

Essentially, both Types B and C could be defined as non-formal qualifications, though Type B is rarely included in the nomenclature of “non-formal and informal learning” for validation and NQF inclusion purposes in policy literature or in inventories of practice (Cedefop, ETF, UNESCO 2015, p 10).

In the NQF-IN project countries, three inclusion model solutions can be distinguished:

**Inclusion Model 1:** NQFs are mostly populated by Type A and Type C qualifications. This is the case of Ireland and Scotland and, to some extent, in the Czech Republic.

**Inclusion Model 2:** NQFs include some Type A and Type C with a majority of type B qualifications as is the case of France and Poland.

**Inclusion Model 3:** NQFs include all the school/college qualifications—type A qualifications and some type B qualifications. At present, Hungary falls into this category, and there are plans to develop procedures to include other Type B and Type C qualifications.

It should be noted that a fourth inclusion model could be distinguished in which NQFs are limited only to school/college qualifications—type A qualifications. According to the Global Inventory of Regional and National Qualifications Frameworks (UNESCO, ETF, Cedefop 2015) that is the dominant model across the countries implementing NQFs.

### *Are Non-formal Qualifications Blocked from Higher Levels of NQF? Does HE Have a Monopoly for Higher Levels of the NQF?*

In the seven study countries there are some barriers with regard to assigning non-formal qualifications to higher levels of the NQF. This is not unusual as a number of countries working on the adoption of NQFs higher levels excludes non-formal qualifications (Cedefop 2015). With regard to relations between higher education qualifications and non-formal education qualifications, solutions in France, Poland are worth noting.

In the **French** system, only vocational qualifications may, technically, be included in the NQF register. Therefore, general education qualifications such as the general *baccalauréat* are normally excluded from the NQF. When implementing the French NQF there was a debate as to whether all higher education diplomas deemed to be vocational qualifications in nature should be included, and if those qualifications of a more academic nature (the general bachelor degree, for example) should be excluded. Initially, it seemed that there would be no place for university level qualifications in the French NQF. Eventually, the Commission Nationale de la Certification Professionnelle (CNCP)—the central French institution

responsible for governing of the NQF—reached an agreement with representatives from the Ministry of Higher Education which did not want to see any distinction made between different higher education qualifications. As a result, bachelor level higher education qualifications can be included in the French NQF.

In **Poland**, the Ministry of Higher Education and Science was fearful that allowing assignment of non-formal education qualification to higher levels of the NQF might encourage students to abandon the acquisition of skills in the formal education system in favour of smaller, specialised non-formal qualifications that have been assigned high NQF levels. For example, a learner might choose to take a non-formal qualification as a financial broker and drop out of the university system. The non-formal sector was seen as a threat to Polish higher education institutions. To counter this perception of the Ministry of Higher Education and Science, NQF levels of all full formal qualifications in the Polish qualifications system have different graphic emblems for the level of the qualification on certificates and diplomas (Sławiński and Dębowski 2013). Whether this differentiation illustrates university gatekeeping and hegemonic positioning or not is an interesting question. Additionally, the NQF Law in Poland says that qualifications awarded outside of higher education that are assigned to level 6 and above can be consulted with the Ministry of Higher Education and Science to ensure that the level has been adequately defined. At first, the Ministry of Higher Education and Science wanted to have the power of approving all non-formal sector qualifications which were assigned to level 6 and above, but there was no governmental consent to introduce this solution.

The **Scottish** NQF is an example of a framework which does not pose any restrictions to the levels of non-formal qualifications. Non-formal qualifications can be placed at any appropriate level from 1 to 12 as long as they meet the level descriptor for that level and also meet the four criteria as described in the SCQF Handbook regarding: (a) learning outcomes, (b) duration of the programme (at least 10 notional learning hours), (c) are subject to internal and external quality assurance, (d) and are formally assessed. In Scotland, there is no restriction as to the type of organisation which can apply to a CRB to get a programme credit rated. As a result, programmes owned by employers, trade unions, community groups, professional bodies and others might all be included in the NQF and may sit on the same levels as higher education diplomas.

### *The Process of Including Non-formal Qualifications in the National Register?*

Including non-formal qualifications in NQFs, especially type C qualifications, is usually organised following an application by the provider. This means that inclusion is not automatic and legally-based as is the case for Type A and some Type B qualifications. In the NQF-IN project countries, the process of inclusion is

centralised. In all countries, general rules for the process of inclusion are set at national level. However, the degrees of centrality vary. Three generic models of governance and organisation of the process of inclusion can be distinguished.

***Institutional model 1:*** One central institution is responsible for accepting applications, for analysing them, and for making the decision whether to include qualification in the NQF or not. This is the case of Ireland where Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) is the state agency responsible for including qualifications in the NQF database. Similarly, the central institution CNCP operates in France. CNCP analyses requests for including qualifications in the French registry of qualifications and makes recommendations to the relevant Ministry which then makes the final decision. It should be noted, however, that French solutions envisage situations in which providers operating at the regional level submit the request for inclusion to the regional institutions which conduct the first assessments. Even if the request was submitted regionally, the procedure moves to CNCP which gives the formal recommendation to the Ministry.

***Institutional Model 2:*** Submitting bodies approach one intermediary institution which delegates submission requests to different institutions responsible for analysing proposals based on their area of expertise. Poland is an example of this process where all requests to include market qualifications are submitted to the institution operating the NQF registry. Currently, it is the Polish Enterprise Development Agency (PARP). PARP assesses the formal aspects of the application and then electronically transmits a completed application to the relevant ministry. The ministry reviews the submitted application and makes a determination.

***Institutional Model 3:*** Submitting bodies might approach different institutions which will assess their application in the process called “third party credit rating”. This is the case in Scotland where providers may select a credit rating body based on their preferences.<sup>11</sup> The credit rating body assesses the submitted application and if the decision is positive, relevant information is passed to the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership (SCQFP) which manages the Scottish Register.

### ***Quality Assurance of Non-formal Qualifications***

With regards to quality assurance of non-formal qualifications included in the NQF, there is a diversity of institutional arrangements among NQF-IN project countries with different institutions involved in this process.

In **Scotland**, SCQF Partnership along with Credit Rating Bodies are responsible for ensuring the quality and integrity of the SCQF. Principles relating to quality

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<sup>11</sup> It is important to stress that not all credit rating is third party credit rating as there are a number institutions of in Scotland which can credit rating their own qualifications, e.g. Scottish Qualifications Authority, Institute of Chartered Accountants in Scotland, Scottish Police College.

assurance for all qualifications (including non-formal education qualifications) in Scotland are defined in the SCQF Handbook developed by SCQF Partnership. The method of application of these principles varies from sector to sector but all Credit Rating Bodies are required to operate quality assurance systems that include robust checks carried out by an independent body or someone who is not employed by, or part of, the institution or organisation. As the system of credit rating is a devolved one, it is important that there is a quality assurance system to monitor this process. This is carried out by a number of agencies: Education Scotland for further education colleges; Quality Assurance Authority (QAA) Scotland for Higher Education Institutions and Universities; SCQFP for other Approved CRBs; Scottish Government and an independent auditor in the case of Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA). All of these quality assurance arrangements include regular evaluation of the organisations, their learning programmes and their quality assurance systems.

In Ireland, Quality & Qualifications Ireland (QQI) is the national agency responsible for assuring the quality of qualifications included in NQF. Under the 2012 Qualifications and Quality (Education and Training) Act, QQI had become both an awarding body and a quality assurance regulator across the ten levels without a demarcation now between further education and higher education. Quality assurance requirements are intended initially for approval of a provider's competence and capacity to meet those requirements. If a provider successfully proves that competence and capacity, then the provider is free to apply for approval to offer programmes leading to qualifications/awards. All providers of QQI qualifications/awards must apply for access/permission to provide such programmes. Guidance is available on the process and how to apply for permission to submit programmes for validation. Feedback from stakeholders indicated strongly that a single, unitary set of QA guidelines across all ten levels would favour HE providers unfairly. Consequently, there are now four sets of QA guidelines in Ireland: statutory QA guideline; core guidelines for all providers; sector-specific guidelines; topic-specific guidelines.

In **France**, quality assurance is located at the provider level. The Ministry of Education along with CNCP is responsible only for the coordination of this process and assurance of general guidance. Organisations which own and award qualifications are responsible for their quality. The CNCP's remit does not include carrying out rigorous quality control checks. CNCP ensures that, when the application for the inclusion of a qualification is submitted, it contains all documents relating to the charters, conventions and regulations regarding quality assurance, together with the conditions for issue of the qualifications in question. In this way, and only in this way, CNCP can act as a quality assurance body for qualifications which are not yet included in the register. So, the procedure for inclusion in the register is akin to a quality assurance check and there is no "external" dedicated quality assurance procedure covering the issuing of diplomas, degrees or other qualifications. It might be said that the functioning of the French qualifications system is based on a firm assumption that all those institutions and bodies, including assessors, fully comply with expectations, standards and regulations. So, it is a kind of "contractual" quality

assurance based on a priori commitments. It should be added, however, that the procedure of including qualifications in the French register is rather demanding—an awarding body, among others, must prove that a qualification is in demand on the labour market by providing details of employment obtained by learners from the groups of graduates for the last three years. This criterion provides a means of determining the relevance of qualification on the labour market and serves as an *ex-ante* quality check: if there is no demand on the market for this qualification (either because of lack of labour market relevance or poor quality of provider) it cannot be submitted to the registry.

In **Poland**, the system of quality assurance for non-formal education qualifications included in the NQF had to be developed from scratch. New systemic solutions for ensuring the quality of qualifications came into force with the Integrated Qualification Systems Act of 22 December 2015. The Act does not impact on the principles or mechanisms of quality assurance in the formal general, vocational and higher education systems.

Quality assurance of non-formal sector qualifications consists of overseeing the validation and certification processes, which are the responsibility of the relevant ministry. Awarding bodies are obliged to submit activity reports to the relevant ministries at least once every two years. Each awarding body functioning outside the formal general, vocational and higher education systems that wants to award qualifications to be included in the NQF must have internal and external quality assurance systems for their validation and certification activities. The ministry coordinating the integrated qualifications system maintains a list of institutions authorised to provide external quality assurance and announces a call for institutions to join this list at least once every three years. The relevant ministry for a given qualification appoints an external quality assurance institution (EQAI) by signing an agreement with the institution.

External quality assurance consists essentially of conducting regular external evaluations of validation and certification in the awarding institution and of its internal quality assurance system.

In the **Czech Republic**, the main coordinator role in the process of assuring the quality of qualifications included in the National Register of Qualifications (NSK) is the Ministry of Education with other ministries responsible for particular fields of activity.

The Ministry of Education coordinates the activity of central administrative bureaux (ministries) in accordance with the law and approves the content and form of all NSK qualifications. Other Ministries and authorising bodies participate in the development of the qualification standards, deciding on granting, extending validity, or revoking the authorisation to award qualifications. Ministries are responsible for the supervision of the authorised bodies, and maintenance of a register of examination results of authorised bodies, including the register of certificates granted. An authorised body can be any individual or organisation that fulfils the criteria set by law. These entities are authorised by the respective ministries according to their field of activity, e.g. Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs

authorises in the area of labour law relations, work safety, employment, pension security, social care.

In the Czech Republic, the important role in quality assurance is played by sectoral councils which bring together employer and employee representatives. The sector councils develop occupational standards which are the basis for qualifications development and are expected to be proactive in suggesting what new standards are needed and where standards should be updated.

In **Hungary**, all qualifications included in the NQF are embraced by the quality assurance system developed at ministerial level and regulated by the relevant legal acts. Non-formal sector providers operating in the adult education sector can have their programmes accredited (so-called vocational programme requirement—VPR) and included in the NQF by way of dedicated procedure managed by the Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry—a public body functioning under the supervision of Ministry of Economy. Each institution licensed to award VPR qualifications needs to perform self-assessment according to the processes and indicators in the internal quality assurance plan which is subjected to the external assessment at least once every four years. The VPR system is a new element of the regulation of adult training in Hungary introduced only some year ago. The aim of introducing the VPRs was to establish uniform requirements and recognition for non-state vocational training to increase transparency and “prestige” of non-formal qualification on the labour market. Currently, there are discussions among stakeholders and experts in Hungary whether this new system is too regulated and whether it poses too much burden for training institutions.

In **Croatia**, the qualifications framework was designed in a way to allow all types and classes of qualifications to be included following the process of accreditation. However, with regard to non-formal sector qualifications, the procedures of inclusion and quality assurance have not been finalised yet. In the Croatian qualifications system, all labour market-oriented qualifications should be based on occupational standards indicating relevant skills and competencies to perform specific occupations. Similarly to the Czech Republic, the Croatian system gives an important role to the sectoral councils which are responsible for the development of occupational and qualification standards and for general harmonisation of the Croatian qualifications with labour market needs. The operations of the sector councils are coordinated by the Ministry of Education.

## **What Can We Conclude About Higher Education's Positionality on Inclusion of Non-formal Qualifications in NQFs?**

It is clear that the landscape of NQFs and meta-frameworks is a complex one with many vested interests and policy agendas. Arising from the selected data in this paper, there are a number of research-worthy conclusions that can be drawn, particularly the four below.

### ***Globalisation, Subsidiarity and Contextual Embeddedness?***

Regardless of the geographical scope of NQFs or meta-frameworks, the most significant determinant for the inclusion of non-formal qualifications is the local context and the degree of centrality of governance.

### ***“Re-differentiation” and “Re-contextualisation” Among Qualifications?***

It could be concluded that higher education in the EHEA countries operates within its own sector without significant distraction by policy developments in other sectors. However, this would overlook the reality that most NQFs are structured around the formal school, university and VET systems and that any other types of provider or qualifications are obliged to operate on less powerful terms. It could also be argued that higher education and the Bologna process have monopolised the design of qualifications frameworks through the Dublin Descriptors and variations thereof in more profound ways than the EQF. There is nothing new of course in these arguments: the hegemonic status of higher education remains largely unquestioned.

However, there is a subtle process of “re-differentiation” of education providers, and thus of qualifications types, going on as a result of how NQFs and the EQF are now operating. Whether this movement will make higher education more open to the non-formal sector or not is unclear at this time.

### ***“Inclusion” in NQFs as Symbolic or Substantive?***

It could be argued that NQFs and the EQF are still more symbolic than stitched into local realities where they claim to be dominant. Additional deep research is required to explore this argument.



## ***Persistence of “Worthy” VNFIL as Access to Epistemic Capital***

With regard to the preparation for the 2018 VNFIL policy deadline, there is no evidence that ENQA is shifting from the conceptual and operational mechanism of RPL—recognition of prior learning—from its own sector-centric epistemological and procedural positionality. This is understandable.

With regard to the inclusion of non-formal qualifications in NQFs, there is some evidence that the higher education sector has undue weight in most countries with regard to naming and levelling of qualifications. This form of epistemic power is not surprising.

### **Endnotes**

Placing these particular issues to one side, there are a number of comments which could usefully be made in relation to the purpose of this paper. Firstly, it is obvious that there is a significant chasm between the policy rhetoric regarding valuing of non-formal learning and the reality of EU practices which leave the higher education sector unchallenged. The diversity and complexity of non-formal sector qualifications across the seven country reports alone are testament to that reality. Secondly, there is no evidence that concepts and terminology around non-formal qualifications and VNFIL have reached a stage of unchallenged consensus, or that the HE sector, in general, is unsettled by them. Whether such clarity in meta-policy documents is likely to emerge is a good question, considering the high level of abstraction that permeates them and considering the ongoing message that quality of credentials is best assured by making no changes to the status quo!

So, the question is: *Does it matter to the higher education sector?* The answer is: *Probably not in general, but it could matter in specific national contexts where access to perceived epistemic capital through credentialising powers is either blocked or enabled!*

This is not to conclude that the sector is deliberately ambivalent, inert or resistant to including non-formal qualifications in NQFs: it is simply an acceptance of the complexity of education and training generally with its epistemic hegemonies and the wisdom of making haste slowly when it comes to extreme paradigm shifts and rapid Europeanisation in education and training. There are good arguments in favour of the subsidiarity principle mindfully applied.

What could be useful at this stage is additional research to establish the reality of how higher education interfaces with the non-formal qualifications sector through partnerships, joint provision or franchises in different countries, and if, in reality, higher education has something to fear from wider formal recognition of the non-formal qualifications sector and is covertly, or indeed overtly, restricting the non-formal sector's wider inclusion in NQFs.

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# Fostering Trust and Transparency Through Quality Assurance



Melinda Szabó and Colin Tüek

## The Pursuit of Trust and Transparency Within the EHEA

The vision that has guided the establishment of the European Higher Education Areas (EHEA) is the establishment of an integrated higher education area, with transparent and readable higher education systems, trustworthy institutions and mobile students and professors ensuring the international competitiveness of the European system of higher education (Bologna Declaration 1999). To set in motion this vision, the signatories of the Bologna Process have declared their willingness to pursue a set of common priorities in their own higher education system. These priorities underpin commitments made to ensure trust and transparency through the adoption of a three-cycle degree structure, a common set of standards for quality assurance and the adoption of a translatable system of qualifications (see also Table 1. Mechanisms for trust and transparency in the EHEA).

- **Quality Assurance** was put at the heart of efforts to build trust and to increase the competitiveness of the EHEA. The key commitments made by countries within the framework of the Bologna Process is the alignment of their system to the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). The ESG play a key role in the enhancement of quality in the European higher education and, in its broader context, support the use of higher education reform tools that include qualification frameworks, ECTS and the Diploma Supplement (DS). The new and revised ESG adopted in 2015

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**Table 1** Mechanisms for trust and transparency in the EHEA

Commitments for trust and transparency		Mechanisms
Three cycle degree structure	Quality of higher education systems	Alignment of higher education systems to the ESG EQAR-registered QA agencies compliant with the ESG European Approach for the QA of Joint Programmes
	(automatic) Recognition of qualifications	NQF and QF-EHEA as “translation devices” for qualifications (including ECTS & Diploma supplement) Implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention The European Area of Recognition (EAR) manual as guidelines for recognition

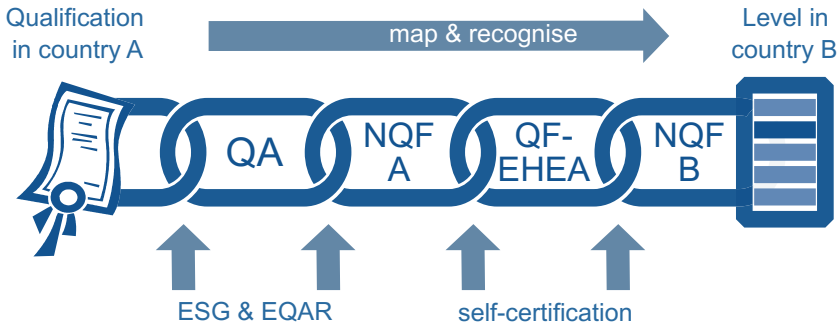
reflect the EHEA’s progress over the last 10 years and have made it more visible what is the “EHEA model” for quality assurance.

- Another mechanism to consolidate transparency and trust between higher education systems is the **Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA (QF-EHEA)** adopted by ministers in Bergen, in 2005. The national qualifications frameworks (NQF) together with the QF-EHEA serve as “translation devices” between different qualification systems and their levels.
- The relationship between qualification frameworks and quality assurance, for instance, is crucial as together they constitute the context in which the **Bologna three-cycle degree structure** is being implemented and should be quality assured.

A stronger emphasis on learning outcomes and recognition of practices has been made much clearer as the new **ESG** make a reference to the QF-EHEA through standard 1.2, which sets out that qualifications should be aligned to the corresponding national qualifications framework (NQF) and, thereby, to the QF-EHEA. This change underlines the important role of QA in ensuring that the assignment of qualifications to a level in the NQF and the QF-EHEA is valid and trustworthy. In this way, external quality assurance systems validate that qualifications offered by higher education institutions are correctly assigned to a level in the national qualifications framework (NQF). This may take the form of reviewing the institutions’ internal QA systems (in the case of institutional accreditation, evaluation or audit) or take place specifically for each study programme (in the case of programme accreditation or evaluation) (Fig. 1).

EHEA countries are also signatories of the **Lisbon Recognition Convention**, which has a subsidiary text on the use of NQFs in the recognition of qualifications for learning and professional purposes. The main principle of the convention is that degrees and periods of study must be recognised unless substantial differences can be proven by those in charge with recognition.

Ministers also set out the ambitious goal to achieve **automatic recognition** of qualifications in the EHEA by 2020 (Bucharest Communiqué 2012, p. 2 and Yerevan Communiqué 2015, p. 1). In its report to the ministers in 2015, the



**Fig. 1** The quality assurance and qualifications chain

Pathfinder Group on Automatic Recognition (p. 7, 23) underlined the importance of quality assurance systems in line with the EHEA’s agreed Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG) for reaching this goal. Ministers agreed to encourage higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies to assess institutional recognition procedures in internal and external quality assurance and to promote the European Area of Recognition (EAR) manual as a set of guidelines for recognition (Bucharest Communiqué 2012, p. 4–5).

The **European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR)** also forms part of the trust-building path, established by the E4<sup>1</sup> organisations at the request of Bologna ministers (2007) to “[further] the development of the European Higher Education Area by enhancing confidence in higher education and by facilitating the mutual recognition of quality assurance decisions”. EQAR’s core function is the management of the EHEA’s official register of quality assurance (QA) agencies that substantially comply with the ESG, providing reliable information on quality assurance provision in Europe and thus enhancing trust and recognition within the EHEA.

EQAR-registered QA agencies are required, as set out in the ESG (see standard 2.6), to publish the full reports of their external quality assurance activities. Making such information easily accessible to the academic community, external partners and other interested individuals can ensure an increase in the transparency of external QA and expedite the recognition of academic qualifications.

Better accessibility of external QA results would be a further helpful tool for the (automatic) recognition of qualifications, as recognition information centres (ENIC-NARICs), higher education institutions and employers need an efficient way to establish whether a higher education institution was subject to external QA in line with the ESG. Enhancing the accessibility of external QA reports and decisions is expected to take place with the development of a database of external QA results in 2018.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>See Glossary.

<sup>2</sup>See further information under the Database of External Quality Assurance (DEQAR) project <http://eqar.eu/topics/deqar.html>.

The ESG not only serve as a common framework for the development of national quality assurance systems in the EHEA but are also regarded by QA agencies as a suitable basis for work across borders (Szabo 2015). At European policy level, ministers agreed to “allow EQAR-registered agencies to perform their activities across the EHEA, while complying with national requirements” (Bucharest Communiqué 2012) and “to enable higher education institutions to use a suitable EQAR registered agency for their external quality assurance process” (Yerevan Communiqué 2015).

The most recent addition to the common EHEA framework is the **European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes**, adopted by ministers at the same time as the revised ESG in 2015 (Yerevan Communiqué 2015). Its “revolutionary” aspect is that ministers agreed that the European Approach should be applied without additional national criteria. That is, joint programmes would benefit from a joint approach to quality assurance based on a common set of European standards. The European Approach further includes an agreed external quality assurance procedure to be implemented by a suitable EQAR-registered agency identified by the cooperating institutions. This should be used where programmes require external evaluation or accreditation at programme level.

Outside the EHEA framework, **other transparency tools** operate in tandem i.e. benchmarking and classification systems, national and global rankings. They differ in purpose, policy orientation and methodology to the EHEA tools while at the same time being part of the transparency and accountability of higher education system. These initiatives are generally set up to provide consumer-oriented information to students and parents by measuring and comparing higher education performance and may be also used as a management and strategic tool by higher education leaders and governing authorities (Hazelkorn 2012).

The most commonly used tools to satisfy the need for information on higher education systems within EHEA are national repositories, portals, databases or platforms. The survey of possible users of a database of quality assurance results,<sup>3</sup> carried out in 2016 by EQAR, showed that respondents most often inform themselves about quality-related information on higher education institutions and programmes referring to national or institutional tools. The 380 respondents named over 70 different databases, repositories or portals which they have consulted (often or very often) for such information. The analysis of the databases showed that such tools were managed by national or quality assurance agencies, and that users generally consult online tools within the national system they are most familiar with. While the results of the survey showed less familiarity with international online tools, about half of respondents have used (at least once) the World Higher Education Database (WHED) and U-Multirank, and less than 40% stated they

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<sup>3</sup>Annex 1. Survey of Users. Database of External Quality Assurance Results Report and Operational Model (2016).



accessed the databases of Anabin, Qrossroads, and Learning Opportunities and Qualifications in Europe.

Admittedly, the existing transparency tools outside the EHEA enhance the information provision on higher education system. However, they do not cover (or expected to) the 48 national higher education systems or recognise the diversity of higher education systems (as they use a set of narrow indicators). The vast majority of these tools do not include information on the external quality assurance of the institutions and programmes they contain and thus are limited in responding to the full extent of users' needs.<sup>4</sup>

## The Governance of the Bologna Process

The intergovernmental policy-making within the Bologna Process is based on consensual agreement among all 48 participating countries. Although the participation in the process is voluntary and it is up to each member state to follow-up on its commitments, the process includes a number of tools and mechanisms to monitor progress towards the agreed objectives.

Comparable to the European Union's open method of coordination (OMC), these ministerial agreements are a form of "soft" law and it is the preferred method of policy-making as it fosters policy learning through the establishment of shared understandings of best practices, processes of national reporting, and peer review while acknowledging the diversity in Europe's higher education systems (Harmsen 2013).

Elements of the "soft" law type tools used within the Bologna Process are the reports and studies by consultative members of the Bologna process. Before each ministerial conference, governments are also asked to report on the implementation of their commitments as part of the stocktaking exercise. Showing the extent to which these commitments have been implemented, the Monitoring Working Group prepares the so-called "Bologna scorecard indicators", "naming and shaming" countries that are still lagging behind. The other follow-up structures of the Bologna Process prepare and coordinate the action needed to advance the goals of the Bologna Process.

The Bologna Process has been successful through its "soft" law approach, as it has fostered consensual dialogue, peer learning and has created a common European "language" of higher education policy without the menace of sanctions (Zgaga 2012). The process nevertheless has seen issues of both accountability and effectiveness (Garben 2010), and its governance seems to be more effective or suitable for purposes of policy formation and less so for aspects of policy monitoring, coordination or implementation (Lažetić 2010). One further criticism is that the "naming and shaming" mechanism provides a low degree of accuracy as it is

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<sup>4</sup>Database of External Quality Assurance Results Report and Operational Model (2016), p. 22.

based on analysis of national action that may “allow for window dressing” (Amaral and Veiga 2012).

## **Indicators for Trust and Transparency in the EHEA**

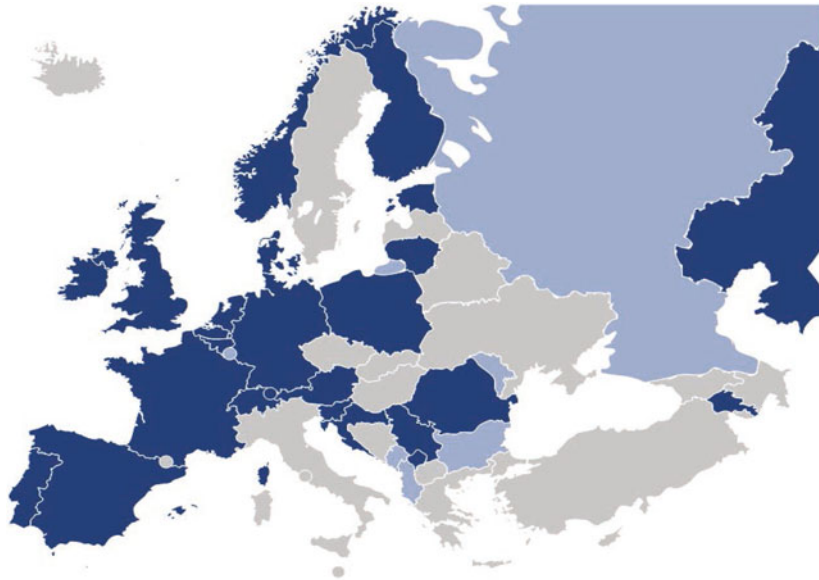
The common European infrastructure for transparency, trust and recognition embrace a shared understanding of principles for quality assurance and recognition (common degree structure and credit system) that form part of EHEA’s key commitments, viewed by Ministers as a way of consolidating the EHEA and a prerequisite to ensure its success (Yerevan Communiqué 2015).

While the main vision and principles of the EHEA have stayed the same throughout the past 17 years, the successive ministerial conferences have added more layers to the process, making it more difficult to assess the real degree of success on how far its objectives were fulfilled.

Conclusions may be drawn on the extent to which trust and transparency have been achieved within the EHEA by examining the level of implementation for each of the processes’ objectives. A number of indicators are proposed and considered in detail: four of the indicators below (indicator 1, 2, 4, 5) are composite indicators based on those used in the 2015 EHEA Implementation Report. Two further indicators were added to reflect the new commitments made in the Yerevan Communiqué 2015 (indicator 6) or recent developments in EHEA, i.e. the set-up of a database of external QA results and reports (indicator 3).

### ***Indicator 1: Stage of Development of QA Systems in Line with the ESG***

Establishing internal and external quality assurance systems in line with the ESG is one of the “key commitments” identified by the Bologna Follow-Up Group in March 2016 (see BFUG 2016). Although most EHEA countries have set up some form of external quality assurance system, there are significant differences in the approach behind them. Currently, 24 EHEA countries fulfil the commitment that external QA is performed by agencies that demonstrably comply with the ESG (see map, dark blue coloured countries Fig. 2), evidenced through registration on EQAR. Six other countries fulfil it partially in that they have only some parts of the higher education system externally quality assured in line with ESG (light blue coloured countries). The remaining EHEA countries (see map, in grey colour, Fig. 2) have yet to fully develop an external quality assurance system in line with the ESG and the key commitment.



- External QA performed regularly by agencies that demonstrably comply with the ESG, registered on EQAR, covering the whole HE system.
- External QA performed regularly by agencies that comply with the ESG, registered on EQAR, covering some of the HE systems.
- External QA is not performed by agencies that comply with the ESG, registered on EQAR

**Fig. 2** Key commitment to external quality assurance

Over the years, there has been a continuous increase of ESG-compliant agencies on the Register and, consequently, an increase in the number of higher education systems that fulfil this requirement (see Table 2). Nine years after it was established, the Register includes 46 QA agencies carrying out external QA on a regular basis in 24 countries (see table below) and a number of other EHEA countries<sup>5</sup> as part of their cross-border external QA. In the past seven years, the Register had almost doubled the number of listed QA agencies (see table below).

About a third of the existing ca. 90 European QA agencies have not yet undergone an ESG review. While some of these agencies have been recently established, others have chosen not to undergo an ESG review (yet) although they have been operating for a considerable time. According to the responses provided to the EQAR Self-Evaluation survey (2015, p. 35), most of the non-registered QA

<sup>5</sup>EQAR-registered agencies have carried out cross-border QA assurance in 30 EHEA countries in 2016. See here: <https://eqar.eu/register/external-qa-activities.html>.

**Table 2** Evolution of the registration of quality assurance agencies on EQAR and coverage of higher education systems

Date	No. of QA agencies	% Increase of QAAs	HE systems in the EHEA where EQAR-registered agencies carry out external QA <i>on a regular basis</i>	HE systems in the EHEA where EQAR-registered agencies carry out external QA <i>sporadically</i>
November 2017	46	+6%	24	No available inf.
December 2016	44	+4%	22	6
December 2015	42	+11%	22	11
December 2014	37	+16%	18	11
December 2013	31	+9%	15	No available inf.
December 2012	28	0	13	
December 2011	28	+14%	14	
December 2010	24	+29%	12	
December 2009	17	n/a	9	

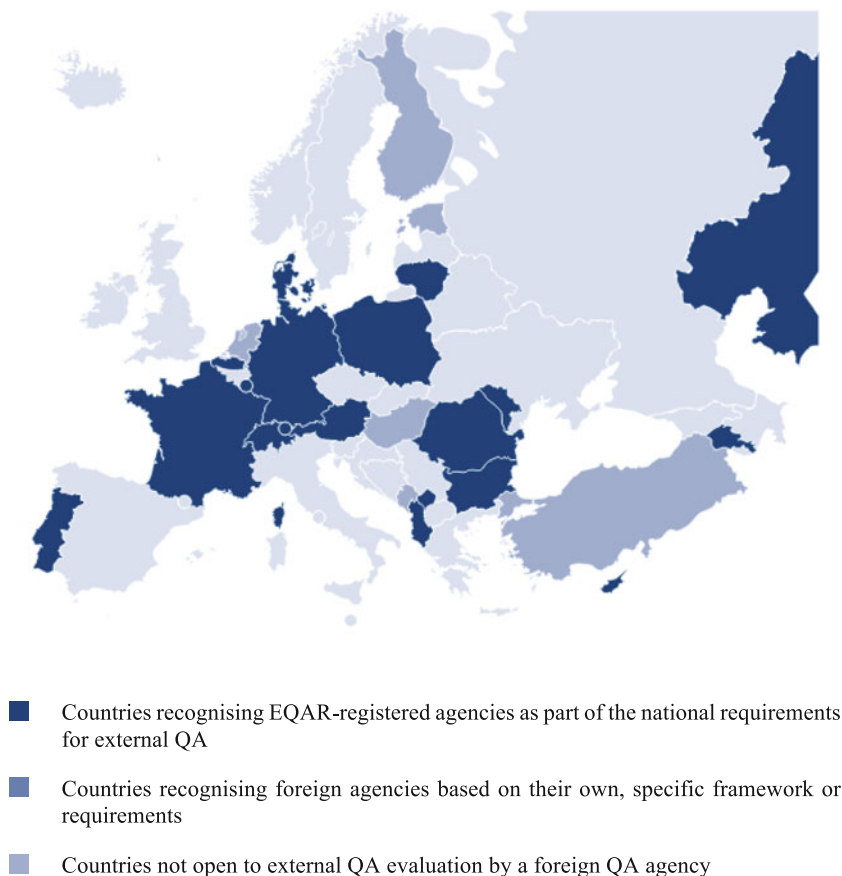
Source EQAR annual reports 2009–2016

agencies surveyed, however, stated that they plan to (re-) apply for inclusion on the Register in the future.

### ***Indicator 2: Allowing HEIs to Choose an EQAR-Registered QA Agency***

One significant measure of trust in other countries' quality assurance systems and agencies is whether governments enable higher education institutions to be evaluated by a quality assurance agency from another country when aware that the agency works in full compliance with the ESG.

The data collected between 2014 and 2016 on the activities of EQAR-registered agencies show that about half of the EQAR-registered agencies carry out reviews across borders and that their cross-border external QA activities have registered an increase of 29% in the total number of cross-border external QA compared to 2014 and a 35% increase compared to 2015. While these activities are growing and taking place in most of the EHEA member countries, only 17 countries (35% of EHEA) have put in place legislative provisions to allow (all or some) higher education institutions to request accreditation, evaluation or audit from a suitable EQAR-registered agency (see dark blue countries in the Fig. 3). Nine other countries (EE, HU, FI, FR, NL, ME, KZ, PT, TR) have also opened their system, although other criteria apply for foreign QA agencies to operate in the country (see Fig. 3 and Annual Update of EQAR-registered agencies, Eurydice & EQAR Survey of EHEA 2017).

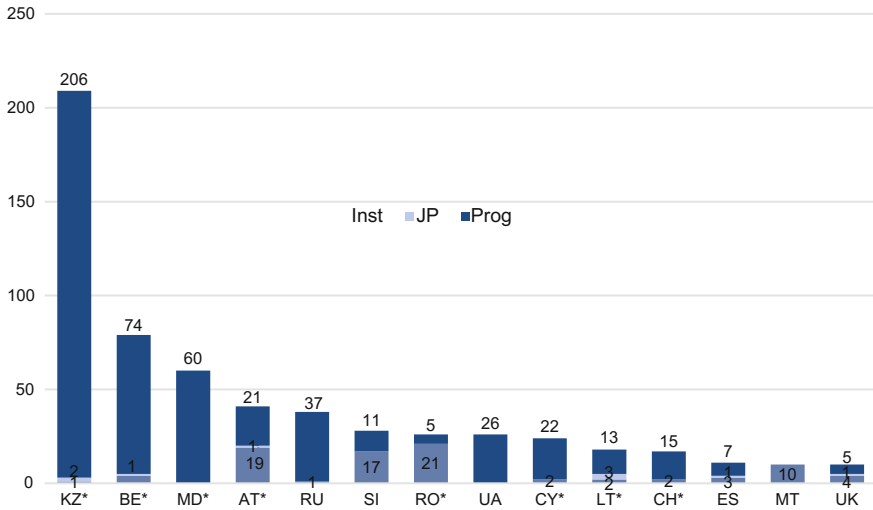


**Fig. 3** Mapping system openness to EQAR-registered agencies

The data collected in the past three years by EQAR shows that most cross-border external QA activities are carried out in countries that recognise the activity of EQAR-registered agencies as part of the regular quality assurance at programme and/or institutional level (e.g. KZ, BE-FL, MD, AT, RO, CY, LT). Nevertheless, cross-border QA also takes place in countries where such recognition does not exist (e.g. RU, SI, UA, UK, MK, BH, TK, FR, LU) (Fig. 4).

Recognising accreditation, evaluation or audit by a foreign QA agency, working based on the same common platform codified in the ESG would avoid the often unproductive duplication of efforts, or even fatigue, where both a national and a foreign agency review the same programme or institution, asking sometimes the same questions, even if for a different purpose (see RIQAA 2014).

EUA's Trends report (2015) states that cross-border EQA activities are increasing due to an increased interest of quality assurance agencies and HEIs' international aspiration, but concluded that "the actors (institutions and agencies)



**Fig. 4** EHEA Countries where EQAR-registered QA agencies carried out cross-border QA activities in the past three years. (\*) Countries that recognise the activity of EQAR-registered QA agencies

are ahead of the policymakers as indicated by the lack of progress in legal frameworks allowing institutions to choose any quality assurance agency that is listed in EQAR”.

### ***Indicator 3: Use of the European Approach for the QA of Joint Programmes***

Another indicator of trust in the EHEA is the use and recognition of the **European Approach for Quality Assurance (QA) of Joint Programme**, based on the principle that one single evaluation using this approach is recognised in all countries where the joint programme is provided. The pre-condition for its use is that EHEA countries allow so in their national legislation, i.e. to recognise external quality assurance in line with the European Approach as sufficient to fulfil the external QA obligations.

So far, the European Approach can only be used in a few countries with obligatory programme accreditation that have made recent legal changes or where existing legal provisions already allow its use (e.g. BE-FL, DK, DE, NL). Discussions are on-going or legislative changes are being drafted in a few additional countries (e.g. HR, SI). In a few EHEA countries (AT, FI, IE, UK), higher education institutions (some or all) do not require external programme level accreditation, thus they may choose to use the European Approach in their internal

QA arrangements in order to “self-accredit” their programmes without a need for legislative changes.

In total, the European Approach is, in principle, available to all institutions in 12 higher education systems and to some institutions in another 13 systems. Since 2015, only a handful of EQAR-registered agencies declared to have actually used the European Approach. In general, joint programmes remain a relatively small phenomenon: only 1% of the EQAR-registered agencies’ programme evaluations/accreditations are of joint programmes, and they have registered a significant decrease in the past years (Annual Update of EQAR-registered agencies).

#### ***Indicator 4: Self-certification of National Qualifications Framework***

According to the Implementation Report, in 2015, 38 countries were in the “green zone” regarding the implementation of national qualifications framework. About half of the EHEA countries have self-certified their compatibility with the QF-EHEA, while other 14 more countries were close to completion. Three countries (AD, SK, and RU) remain stagnant in the first steps of the implementation of the national qualifications frameworks.

EUA’s Trends report (2015) revealed that higher education institutions from countries that have a national qualifications framework generally rated the impact of NQF highest in terms of promoting transparency and comparability between degrees and across education sectors. The Trends report also showed that while some countries had certified their national qualifications, the institutions were not always aware of it although the self-certification process requires that NQF be fully used by institutions in order to be operational.

#### ***Indicator 5: Implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention***

The Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) provides a legal basis for recognition in the EHEA and has helped develop the methodology of credential evaluators through the networks of national recognition information centres (ENIC-NARIC networks). The implementation of the LRC represents a measure of the degree of convergence and trust attained (Bucharest Communiqué, p. 4).

The 2015 Implementation Report (p. 78) assessed the extent to which countries have specified in the national legislation five of the main principles of the LRC: (i) whether applicants have a right to fair assessment; (ii) whether there is recognition if no substantial differences can be proven; (iii) if there is encouragement in the comparison of learning outcomes rather than programme content; (iv) if, in

cases of negative decisions, the competent recognition authority demonstrates the existence of substantial difference and (v) if the applicant has the right to appeal recognition decisions.

The country responses revealed that only 11 systems included all the main principles, with 26 other systems omitting one principle, usually the cases where the competent authority has to demonstrate the existence of substantial differences. The report also underlines that embedding these principles in legislation does not necessarily guarantee good recognition practices, as the higher education institution is generally the one responsible for taking the final decision on recognising foreign qualifications for academic purposes. The data submitted by countries for the 2018 Implementation Report show some further improvements in adopting the LRC principles, with a few more countries making reference in their national legislation and pointing out that quality assurance agencies normally examine recognition practice during their external quality assurance activities.<sup>6</sup>

### ***Indicator 6: Use and Accessibility of Published External QA Reports***

Whilst there are various dimensions to the transparency of external QA, the accessibility of the published reports (on evaluation/accreditation/audit of higher education institutions and programmes) is one important aspect. The public accountability and transparency requirements in quality assurance systems are evolving with more and more published outcomes for quality assurance evaluations of higher education institutions or programmes, even when negative (Implementation report, p. 18). According to the annual update of EQAR-registered agencies, there are over 9000 reviews carried out each year by these agencies that result in the same amount of quality assurance reports. In 2016, the 44 EQAR-registered agencies carried out a total of 9764 external activities of which 6% at institutional, 93% at programme level and 0.3% at joint programme level within 30 of the EHEA member countries.

The information on the external QA of higher education institutions and programmes is currently spread across many quality assurance agencies' websites, most of them national. European databases and tools usually offer only patchy and limited information on quality assurance results and decisions (see Database of External Quality Assurance Results Report and Operational Model 2016).

The survey carried out by EQAR in 2016 with possible users of a database of quality assurance reports and results (EQAR 2016, p. 8) revealed that 42% of respondents consult decisions or reports on the external quality assurance (QA) of higher education institutions or programmes on at least monthly basis, with a third

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<sup>6</sup>The consulted Bologna Implementation Report (2018) was available for consultation in its draft version. To be published in May 2018.



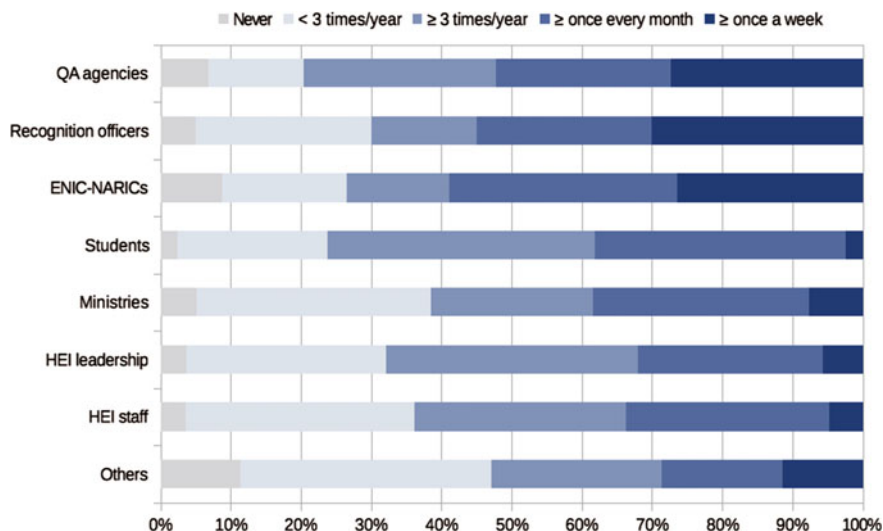


Fig. 5 Frequency in the use of published external QA reports by group

of them at least once a week (see chart below, Fig. 5). There is some variation between the respondent's profile and, not surprisingly, those dealing with recognition of qualifications access reports/decisions most frequently, next to quality assurance agencies themselves.

While only 20% find that external quality assurance (QA) decisions and reports are "difficult to access", 16% find them "easily accessible". By far, most respondents (61%) to EQAR's survey considered that external QA results and decisions are "somewhat accessible".

Among the main issues encountered in searching for such information, respondents mentioned the following:

- Identifying which agency or agencies might have carried out an evaluation, accreditation or audit of the higher education institution of interest;
- Navigating different QA agencies' websites, which vary in structure and user-friendliness;
- Language barriers, as most reports are only available in the local language. The same sometimes applies to the agencies' websites;
- Understanding different national systems and the status and meaning of external QA decisions and reports therein.

A European database that would join all quality assurance results within the scope of the ESG would be able to address some of the users' concerns e.g. to easily identify higher education institutions that have gone through an ESG-type of review, whether that review was voluntary in nature or part of the regular external QA, validity of decision, but not all types of difficulties e.g. language of reports will

generally be the same. Nevertheless, most users would find it useful to have access to a pan-European database of external quality assurance reports and decisions (76% of respondents) as it would help users to navigate the complexity of external quality assurance systems in Europe and expose its results to a wider audience.

Such a database was welcomed by EHEA governments (members of EQAR)<sup>7</sup> and has received co-financing for its implementation from the EU's Erasmus + funded projects. The extent of its success will largely depend on the accuracy and clarity of the information and participation of all registered quality assurance agencies.

## Implications for Trust and Transparency in the EHEA

While the discussed indicators provide some evidence that the support mechanisms for trust and transparency are in place and that the different commitments have been realised, it remains difficult to draw a clear balance sheet of where we stand in terms of trust and transparency between higher education systems.

Generally, at policy level, the key commitments to building trust and transparency have been followed through, although unevenly among countries or within the same higher education system. With all its limitations stemming from the nature of a voluntary process, the EHEA is taking shape—ministers have committed to a European framework to consolidate trust and recognition and developments are visible in a considerable part of the EHEA. There is a clear potential for achieving automatic recognition at system level for many/approximately half of the EHEA countries. For at least some of the EHEA countries, three quarters of qualifications are treated equally as national qualifications (Implementation Report 2015, p. 18). Quality assurance systems are in place in almost all higher education systems although the use of EQAR-registered agencies and the implementation of the ESG are visible in a little over half of the EHEA.

While a number of other transparency tools exist across the EHEA, they are generally built around the idea of excellence and performance indicators that ignore the diversity of higher education systems and institutional missions and do not provide information on the results of quality assurance assessments. Thus, the path at EHEA level should be to ensure the consolidation of the current framework for trust and transparency that values its diversity, enables the use of quality assurance fit for purpose by a suitable EQAR-registered quality assurance agency and rewards activities across teaching, learning and research.

The challenge in ensuring this consolidation lies with the differential implementation of Bologna, ensuing from what sometimes appears to be a “pick and choose” or “a la carte” type of approach. Countries are not incentivised to follow-up

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<sup>7</sup>See EQAR Members' Dialogue 2016 Summary of discussions re. database of external QA reports [https://eqar.eu/fileadmin/eqar\\_internal/MD/MD6/MD6\\_Conclusions\\_Database.pdf](https://eqar.eu/fileadmin/eqar_internal/MD/MD6/MD6_Conclusions_Database.pdf).

on all commitments because the membership of the process is not conditioned on the actual implementation of the agreements (Furlong 2010). Ministers thus recognised the risk that non-implementation in some countries undermines the functioning and credibility of the EHEA as a whole, as indicated by the Yerevan Communiqué (2015). There is a particular risk of deepening the gap between those that have implemented the commitments and those who experience difficulties in doing so. A dangerous consequence in this respect might be that trust concentrates in a few regions and countries with comparable or more compatible systems, instead of spanning the whole EHEA. Following up the Yerevan Communiqué, the Bologna Follow-Up Group commissioned a dedicated advisory group to make proposals as to how to tackle the problem of non-implementation of key commitments. It remains to be seen what changes to the governance of the Bologna Process ministers will consider at their upcoming ministerial conference in Paris, in May 2018.

The specific characteristics of national modes of governance play a role in the extent to which the dynamic higher education sector is shaped. The policy and institutional goals are best shaped through integrative communication processes between policy-makers and higher education institutions (Maassen et al. 2011).

Boer et al. (2016) argue that reform processes in higher education were proven most successful when stakeholders were involved in the earlier stages of the policy development and there was a deliberate action towards reaching consensus. Where such consensus was not achieved, reform initiatives ran counter to the interests of those initiating the reform and problems emerged in the implementation. Thus, driving progress forward requires the participation of all member countries and support from all stakeholders. The actors of the Bologna Process are in a relatively closed arena, essentially engaging a limited community of officials and experts, which may not ensure a good assimilation into national higher education systems. Consolidating the stakeholder engagement, ensuring broad ownership among those who have the responsibility for the operational implementation is of particular relevance especially in areas where there is still a low level of implementation or awareness (Amaral and Veiga 2012).

A further challenge is that higher education reforms are usually filtered through different opportunities and constraints provided by the national and institutional context (Dobbins and Knill 2014). The 2015 Trends report draws attention to a number of issues in realising the Bologna commitments i.e. the hasty introduction of the three-cycle structures in some countries, which did not always lead to meaningful curricular renewal; the use of the Diploma Supplement had been in parts disconnected from the developments in learning outcomes and qualifications framework; where institutions were not involved in consultations on the national qualification system they have fallen short in understanding the importance of learning outcomes and of their role within the qualifications frameworks in facilitating mobility and lifelong learning.

In going forward, it is reasonable to expect that most countries will aim to catch up in the implementation of their key commitments so as to ensure that their higher education system is fully trusted by their international partners, that the qualifications offered are easily recognised and that this will facilitate the mobility of

students and professors within the EHEA. The Bologna Process has acted as an external catalyst in the past, even for some time unpopular internal change and may still do so, at least for those who have entered the process at a later stage.

## Glossary

The E4 group refers to four European stakeholders in higher education: The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the European Students' Union (ESU), the European University Association (EUA) and the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE).

- **European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)** are an agreed set of standards and guidelines for quality assurance in European higher education. They were developed by the “E4 Group” and adopted by the ministers in Bergen in 2005.
- **Joint programmes** are usually inter-institutional arrangements among higher education institutions leading to a → joint degree. Parts of joint programmes undertaken by students at partner institutions are recognised automatically by the other partner institutions. The same is true for joint degrees.
- **Qualifications Framework** is an instrument for the development, classification and recognition of skills, knowledge and competencies along a continuum of agreed levels. It is a way of structuring existing and new qualifications, which are defined by learning outcomes.
- **National qualifications frameworks** describe qualifications in terms of level, workload, learning outcomes and profile. They relate qualifications and other learning achievements in higher education coherently and are internationally understood.
- **Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC)**. The Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region was developed by the Council of Europe and UNESCO and adopted in 1997 in Lisbon. It aims to ensure that holders of a qualification from one European country have that qualification recognised in another.

## Country Codes

AD Andorra	EL Greece	MK the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
AL Albania	ES Spain	MT Malta
AM Armenia	FI Finland	NL Netherlands
AT Austria	FR France	NO Norway
AZ Azerbaijan	GE Georgia	PL Poland
BA Bosnia and Herzegovina	HR Croatia	PT Portugal
	HU Hungary	RO Romania

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BE-De Belgium—German speaking Community	IE Ireland	RS Serbia
BE-FR Belgium—French Community	IS Iceland	RU Russia
BE-NL Belgium—Flemish Community	IT Italy	SE Sweden
BG Bulgaria	KZ Kazakhstan	SI Slovenia
CH Switzerland	LI Liechtenstein	SK Slovakia
CY Cyprus	LT Lithuania	TR Turkey
CZ Czech Republic	LU Luxembourg	UA Ukraine
DE Germany	LV Latvia	UK—United Kingdom England
DK Denmark	MD Moldova	
EE Estonia	ME Montenegro	

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**Part V**  
**Financing and Governance**  
**(Coordinated by Liviu Matei)**



# Governance and Funding of Universities in the European Higher Education Area: Times of Rupture



Liviu Matei

There are notable episodes of “soul-searching” in the history of higher education. One such moment was around the turn of the third millennium in Europe, when the project of a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) was launched.<sup>1</sup> Those were times of sweeping, mainly positive changes, economically and politically. Europe appeared to be transitioning into a new era: the process of European integration was accelerating through the enlargement of the European Union, supported by quite widespread public enthusiasm; the progress of liberal democracy seemed fast and unstoppable almost everywhere on the continent; the economic outlook was better than ever—to the point that the heads of state and government of the then-EU member countries proclaimed in 2000 that, by building a knowledge society, there will be full employment in the Union in a matter of just a few years (European Union 2000).

In this climate, a broad public policy discussion about the role of the universities (and higher education institutions, more generally) emerged. Fundamentally, it focused on the question how should higher education institutions contribute to newly anticipated, some even planned, changes in the society at large in Europe. A part of the discussion was about the very **role** or **mission** of the universities: what

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<sup>1</sup>The Bologna Process, launched with the Bologna Declaration of 1999, is a voluntary intergovernmental process in higher education based on jointly agreed principles, objectives and standards. Currently, there are 48 European states implementing the Bologna Process, which constitute geographically the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). EHEA, formally launched in 2010 as the common European space for higher education, is considered a result of the Bologna Process.

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are, or rather what should they be for in these times of extraordinary historical changes? Another part, however, was more specifically about **how universities should be organised and directed** in order to fulfil their (new) role, about what is usually called, in the language of higher education policy, governance and steering tools (including funding, in particular). This policy discussion, in turn, led to action at the European and the national level, reflected in the elaboration and implementation of new models of governance and steering tools, as it will be discussed in this chapter.

Fewer than 20 years after this transformational moment, we are again traversing a period that incites reflection about the role of the universities and the ways to organise and direct them. We are witnessing once again changes of epic dimensions in the economy, politics and ideologies, geopolitics and demography. As it will be discussed in this chapter, these are different changes than in the early years of the millennium and this time the mood is grim. These changes include a regression of democracy in many countries; economic difficulties, more recent or persisting from the financial crisis of 2007–2008; a refugee crisis of unprecedented proportions; a stalled if not reversed European integration process; the corrosion of powerful public policy narratives that were at work in the early years of the millennium (e.g. knowledge society, European integration, democratic development); and the emergence of new or recycled inauspicious ideologies, such as populism and nationalism.

When the external environment turns turbulent in times of major societal transformations, we see universities and other important higher education stakeholders go “soul-searching”. The language of soul-searching is a signpost of potentially decades-long changes of directions in higher education, most often arising as a result of pressure from outside the sector. As we are now traversing another era of turbulence, will we see the same “soul-searching” language and can that help signpost for us that there could be large shifts once again in higher education policy? How exactly will current transformations and policy discussions surrounding them influence governance? Will policymakers question the prominent role of the University and the “centrality” it has acquired in Europe in the last two-three decades?

The present volume looks at the state of affairs in the EHEA, in search of insight and recommendations for the summit of the ministers in charge of higher education of the EHEA countries to be held in 2018. The section introduced by the present chapter looks specifically into the situation in the area of governance and funding.

As a thematic background paper, the present chapter takes the view that the extraordinary “soul” language about higher education is used in turbulent times, as we are seeing currently in Europe. This language signposts the concerns in the broader public policy arena for the mission (“soul”) of the universities and helps identify and understand the attempts to define new expectations and prescriptions about the organisation and direction of the universities that would be fit for such stormy times.

## **Governance and Funding as Matters of Concern for Public Policy in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)**

Governance is currently a prominent matter of concern for higher education policy in the EHEA. It is also a central topic in the scholarship of higher education. The current volume is a good case in point: there are papers focusing on governance in all its sections, not only the one specifically dedicated to this topic. Governance is the cross-cutting theme of this volume. To understand why governance is such a central matter in higher education and public policy, we need to take a broader look at the current state of higher education in Europe, the narratives around governance in higher education and the relationship with external changes in society.

Governance and funding are secular concepts (money, in particular, is an eminently profane entity everywhere!). Surprisingly, the two concepts are sometimes discussed in ways and contexts that appear influenced by theological perspectives and vocabulary. Such is the case when scholars and policymakers talk about the “soul of the university”. Most often, they do so to explain, if not lament, that universities have “lost their soul” or to ask that they “regain their soul” and put their work and efforts at the service of new major causes or projects. This language appears to occur in moments of vast and purportedly irrevocable changes that are perceived to have just taken place or are expected to happen in the world around the universities, which justifies the dramatic tone of the discourse, occasionally bordering the eschatological.

Other than the language itself, we may argue there is nothing theological here. The “soul of the university” is a metaphor used by policymakers and scholars (sometimes university leaders, too) when they wish to make important points about the mission, role, or purpose of the university in times of change. The phrase is used because it has a strong, dramatic rhetorical resonance, which might, in fact, be quite fit for exceptional historic situations or policy endeavours. Moreover, the use of this language is, at least in part, more precisely about how universities need to organise and direct themselves or need to be organised and directed from the outside, in order to answer prodigious changes in the society, if not promote change themselves.

In any times of massive changes, we should not be surprised to hear talk about the soul of the university, about its salvation, renaissance or rebirth, and underneath or next to that a lot of talk about university governance and steering tools, such as funding. The current times in the EHEA are such times.

Have the European universities lost their soul, though? Do they need to regain it? Why? Is anybody saying that? What does governance of higher education have to do with this? Why is there so much talk—and also reform action—at present in Europe and the EHEA about university governance? Before we try to answer these questions, it might be useful to illustrate recent instances when this type of language occurred in Europe and elsewhere. This helps sketch a useful analytical framework for when looking into the answers.

In the U.S., for example, while the focus on research and excellence has been criticised for a long time by a faction of scholars, policymakers and other interested parties (Grubb and Lazerson 2004), recently it has been described as a case of universities simply losing their souls. The immediate context for this assessment is the perception that current transformations in higher education, in matters of cost and access, for example, but also with regard to the very structure of higher education, are momentous and troubling enough to be defined as a crisis. Docking and Curton (2015) wrote a book on this crisis, very fittingly published in a series on “Transformations in Higher Education” and presenting a plan to “save” the small U. S. liberal college. In another recent book, a former Dean of the Harvard College deplores the fact that the great American universities achieve excellence, true, but do it “without a soul”, neglecting their core mission, which, at least at undergraduate level, it is stated should be education of the youth (turn young people into adults who will take responsibility for society), rather than the production and perpetuation of knowledge (Lewis 2006).

On another continent and in the context of a completely different crisis and attempt to promote earth-shattering transformations to address it, the South African President Thabo Mbeki (who previously served as Vice-President under Nelson Mandela) drafted the blueprint of a continental-wide project of “African renaissance”. When he first presented publicly the project, President Mbeki explicitly places a lot of responsibility on the university for the success of this visionary political undertaking. More specifically, he talks about the need for the African universities to “regain their soul”, or otherwise the entire project—and with it the African continent, are at risk:

I would suggest that the entire continent remains at risk until the African university, in the context of the continental reawakening, regains its soul. (Mbeki 2004a, reprinted in almost exactly the same words in Mbeki 2004b, p. 1)

A similar language was used in Europe around the time when the project of a European Higher Education Area was nascent. The European Commission, usually considered as an uncompromising bureaucratic political institution that avoids anything religious, also uses theological-sounding language invoking salvation and redemption as part of its modernisation agenda for higher education,<sup>2</sup> an otherwise fully secular policy endeavour. The Commission argues in one of the most important documents outlining the parameters of this reform agenda that the EU Member States:

need to create the necessary conditions to enable universities to improve their performance, to modernise themselves and to become more competitive – in short, to become leaders in their own renaissance and to play their part in the creation of the knowledge-based society envisaged under the Lisbon Strategy. (European Union 2006, p. 4)

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<sup>2</sup>[https://ec.europa.eu/education/news/20170622-commission-new-agenda-higher-education\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/education/news/20170622-commission-new-agenda-higher-education_en). Accessed on 5 January 2018.

The document goes on to talk about autonomy—an aspect of governance—and adequate funding—the level of funding as well as funding policies and regulations—as conditions for universities to be able to “regain their souls”, become “masters of their own renaissance” and make a contribution to another ambitious project of continental scope: building a European knowledge society, which is planned, under the Lisbon strategy of the European Union, to be the most socially and economically advanced in the world (Matei 2015). Beyond the obvious rhetorical inflection, however, the focus of this type of discourse is not on elusive notions such as soul or salvation, but on mundane, although exceptionally ambitious, policy objectives and tools to achieve them (including governance and funding). This document is a relatively early one in a series that has accompanied the efforts of the EU Commission to promote sweeping economic, political, social and cultural objectives in the EU and larger Europe, using higher education itself, broadly understood, as a tool and assuming that governance and funding are more particular tools within higher education and higher education policy to achieve such objectives.

The talk about the soul of the university is a talk about its mission in special times, or *vis-à-vis* special, far-reaching political and policy endeavours. Importantly, it is also a talk about governance of higher education in times of major changes, about how universities and higher education systems should be organised and directed so that they pursue a new mission or role, defined in relation to new political or societal ambitions. It was the case in Europe in the early 2000s when the projects of the European Higher Education Area and of European Research Area started.<sup>3</sup> It is again the case currently, although today’s changes are different, in some way even going in the opposite direction compared to those of the early 2000s.

## **Current Evolutions in Europe: The Impact on Governance and Funding**

Noticeable current developments in Europe outside higher education affect its course and will influence its future. This has always been the case, of course. Except that the current period is not just one of business as usual. We are living once again in times of significant change, rupture and junction points feeding into new trajectories.

We cannot analyse and understand the present state of higher education in Europe and gauge its future unless we acknowledge and try to understand the broader historical evolutions we are living through. In such an effort, it would be an misleading to concentrate on just some kind of technical scrutiny of what is going on within higher education itself, be it in governance or other areas. That is because

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<sup>3</sup>The European Research Area (ERA) emerged at about the same time with EHEA as a particular initiative under the Lisbon Agenda, EU’s overarching strategy between 2000 and 2010.

times are changing—and not from within higher education itself. There is still a lot that is continuing from former times, there is some degree of stability, even inertia, and that must be acknowledged and studied as well. For example, while several countries in the East appear to have lost faith in the idea of the knowledge society as a tool for a better future, most countries in the West still bet on it (Matei 2015); populism helps win elections in many countries of the continent, but not all.

Looking back into the last 15–20 years, one can notice that broader aspirations and processes, beyond the sector itself, helped higher education become “central to the European experience”, to borrow a phrase from Scott (1998). Higher education, in particular through the Bologna Process (started in 1999 and leading to the establishment of the European Higher Education Area in 2010) and the Lisbon Strategy of the EU (2000–2010, continued with Europe 2020 strategy after 2010), became a key tool to advance the European construction. European politicians and also, at least to some extent, the European public bet on higher education and transformational initiatives in higher education, such as the Bologna Process, not simply to promote internal reforms here and there, but actually to help build an integrated Europe, economically and politically, a European ethos and perhaps a European demos as well (Matei 2015). It can be stated that those politicians and policymakers who supported Bologna did so not because they were interested that much in higher education but because they were interested in Europe and in the promise that a better integrated and more advanced Europe would help promote economic and social development (including better employment). Higher education became a tool of choice for achieving this vision of Europe. The European Union institutions, mainly the EU Commission, supported higher education forcefully not only at the discourse level but through active initiatives, policies, regulations and funding, in particular after the adoption of the Lisbon strategy. Here too, higher education was not an objective in itself, but a tool, as indicated above in the quote about the role of universities in building a European knowledge society. Most national governments of the continent broadly supported higher education for the same reasons.

This period since 1999–2000 has been one of unprecedented, remarkable development of higher education in Europe (Matei et al. 2018; Scott 2012; Vögtle and Martens 2014). Until recently, higher education thrived in many regards almost everywhere on the continent, supported by the strong policy narratives of the European construction and knowledge societies. The two narratives together called for better-integrated societies, with higher economic competitiveness, better employment landscape, and social cohesion (Matei 2015). This unprecedented flourishing of higher education in Europe was also made possible by what looked like a triumphal March of democracy, started with the fall of the communist regimes of the East after 1989. Democratic expansions on the continent created a favourable milieu for higher education. At the same time, it was a common belief that higher education, in turn, can and must contribute to the advancement of democracy.

The buzzwords that mattered most for higher education and higher education policy during all this time were democracy, Europe, social cohesion, economic development, and jobs. This is what made the Bologna Process and the European

Higher Education Area possible. This is why almost all European countries supported higher education and promoted their own reforms in the sector, including in the area of governance. This is how the “soul” of the university was understood and defined: the university’s mission, or “soul”, was to educate and produce knowledge that would support economically competitive and democratic European countries. Another EU Commission document is a good illustration for this understanding:

Universities have the potential to play a vital role in the Lisbon objective to equip Europe with the skills and competences necessary to succeed in a globalized, knowledge-based economy. (European Union 2006, p. 6)

As it will be discussed below, significant developments in governance and funding have taken place linked to this particular understanding of how universities could or should contribute to the overarching objectives and projects of this period at the European level, as well as nationally.

Now, times are changing, and these changes are having an impact on higher education. In many places where democracy was a genuine commitment not just a slogan, and democratic progress a reality not just discourse, we now witness authoritarianism, populism, or what is called with cynical self-flattery “illiberal democracy” (Rupnik 2017). Where we used to hear talk about Europe, we now hear Brexit and governments calling to “stop Brussels”,<sup>4</sup> even in countries whose citizens had earlier voted in referenda to join the EU. Where we used to hear about policies seeking economic advancement, social solidarity and shared benefits from economic developments, now we hear almost open talk about institutionalised corruption at the state level, captive states or even of mafia states (Harding 2011).

Another significant recent development outside the sector, which brings new challenges, including for governance and funding, has to do with increased migratory fluxes and an escalating refugee crisis in Europe, with huge political, social, and economic implications, beyond innumerable individual tragedies. We are only starting to take the measure of the direct and indirect impact on higher education of this phenomenon.

How will these broader developments taking place outside higher education influence its future on the continent? This requires reflection and research. Will the support for higher education diminish in the years to come in Europe? Will higher education become less central to the European experience, possibly even peripheral in some countries?

These emerging trends are not happening equally in all parts of Europe. European organisations such as the EU and the Council of Europe remain committed to the knowledge society narrative, democracy and, at least in some way, to the European integration—and thus to supporting higher education. Many governments, in different ways, continue to act nationally, based on the conviction that higher education is indeed something to be treasured and nurtured, and that it must

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<sup>4</sup>See [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/publications/stop-brussels-european-commission-responds-hungarian-national-consultation\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/publications/stop-brussels-european-commission-responds-hungarian-national-consultation_en) (accessed on 15 December 2017) for the answer of the EU Commission to the “Stop Brussels” campaign in Hungary.

remain a key matter for public policy. But even in some of those countries, times seem to be changing. Germany, for example, remains one of the champions of betting on higher education to sustain its economic and social model and high standards of living. Newly emerging political forces, however, are at least sceptical about higher education, and many in the country are beginning to realise that. If these new forces, sceptical of higher education, accede to power, how would that play out for higher education in Germany<sup>5</sup>? Will Germany become like Hungary where the government declared officially that higher education is an unnecessary luxury, to be dispensed of (Matthews 2017)?

### **Main Evolutions in the Governance and Funding of Higher Education Since the Start of the Bologna Process and the Launch of the EHEA. Current Challenges and Possible New Evolution Trajectories**

The broader European evolutions of the last 20 years sketched above had an impact on governance and funding in higher education, at the European, national, and institutional level:

- The EHEA, as a new space for dialogue and practice in higher education, is also a new, *sui generis* type of entity, or system, that requires and indeed has developed new governance—that is, new governance concepts, principles, models, tools and practices (Matei and Iwinska in this volume).
- One of the most original, important and influential new developments in governance, at the European level, is the so-called “open method of coordination” (OMC).<sup>6</sup> The OMC is used not only for, by, and within the European Union—where it emerged as a governance principle and tool for the broader Lisbon strategy based on intergovernmental voluntary cooperation and soft law, but for the entire Bologna Process as well (Veiga and Amaral 2006). This governance method became a reference and model for initiatives aiming at regional integration in higher education in other parts of the world as well (Teodoro and Guilherme 2014).
- Funding of higher education has not been an official action line of the Bologna Process and in the EHEA. This was identified as a major “policy gap” (Matei 2012). However, transnational concepts, policy frameworks, as well as actual European-wide funding initiatives have emerged, promoted primarily, if not exclusively, by the European Union and subsumed to broader European

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<sup>5</sup>These were comments made by participants on the margin of the 2017 Die Zeit Conference on University & Education, in response to a presentation on dangers for universities in Europe; see <https://www.ceu.edu/node/20520>. Accessed on 15 January 2018.

<sup>6</sup>[http://ec.europa.eu/invest-in-research/coordination/coordination01\\_en.htm#1](http://ec.europa.eu/invest-in-research/coordination/coordination01_en.htm#1). Accessed on 5 January 2018.



agendas. Talking about “the power of the purse”, Batory and Lindstrom (2011) point at one of the most important and subtle examples of using funding as a steering tool at the European level: how the EU funding for joint transnational degrees has a far reaching impact on the national regulatory frameworks for higher education. At the national level, during this period, we have witnessed many waves of reforms of the funding of higher education, as systematically documented by the Public Funding Observatory,<sup>7</sup> a European-wide monitoring initiative of the European University Association.

- Significant evolutions can be noted in particular areas or aspects of university governance, such as academic freedom and university autonomy. An analytic summary of these evolutions is presented in another section of this volume (Matei and Iwinska in this volume). As part of the advent of the European Higher Education Area, we have witnessed the emergence of a European notion of university autonomy, which has become a consequential reference and model within Europe and globally. We can track back this development directly to the broader political endeavour of building a knowledge society in the European Union, or even for the entire European continent. A European notion of autonomy has emerged based on some kind of European consensus regarding the need for universities to acquire more institutional freedoms so that, in turn, they could be more efficient in delivering the types of services and goods deemed necessary for the advancement of defined European and national policy goals. Many national governments have also promoted reforms in the area of university autonomy (Matei, Iwinska in this volume). Until recently, most of these reforms have been meant to support increased autonomy, at least in certain dimensions, which in turn was expected to support more efficient work of the university, as judged against pre-set criteria defined by the public authorities.
- In the same area of autonomy, however, we witness a reverse trend currently in some countries, along with new developments in the society at large. Some governments have begun restricting autonomy openly. Kováts (in the governance section of this volume) discusses the case of Hungary where constitutional restrictions on autonomy and academic freedom have been imposed after 2010–2013, and the introduction of the chancellor system appears to restrict further, organisationally and operationally, the autonomy of the universities in the country. Two papers in this section discuss other aspects of university autonomy in Europe. The first one is about the Autonomy Scorecard, the latest exercise of monitoring university autonomy covering about 20 systems in Europe (Pruvot and Estermann, in this volume). This paper points to diverging trends in different countries and parts of Europe. A second paper looks at the validity of the concept and methodology on which this important and unprecedented monitoring exercise, first started in 2009–2010, is based (Orosz in this volume).

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<sup>7</sup><http://www.eua.be/activities-services/projects/eua-online-tools/public-funding-observatory-tool.aspx>. Accessed on 5 January 2018.

- Overarching European dynamics and objectives have contributed to European-level developments in governance. These, in turn, have sometimes played a role in triggering national or regional reforms or policy initiatives. The mechanisms by which European principles are translated at the national level involves policy learning, an important characteristic and process in the EHEA. Two such cases are discussed in the present section. Curaj and Holeab (in this volume) examine policy learning in higher education under the umbrella of the EHEA more generally in Romania and in university governance in particular. Toderas and Stavaru (in this volume) discuss the impact of the European processes in the governance of the higher education systems of the Eastern Partnership countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine), looking in particular at the development of public accountability regulations and practices. We may ask whether such processes will be weakened in this part of Europe, and possibly even reversed if the broader European outlook is changed.
- A key policy concern that influenced the evolution of governance and funding was about efficiency. Efficient, or “more efficient” universities was a mantra of this entire period and it remains so. But what is efficiency in the university? A project coordinated by the European University Association (EUA) seems to point out that the concept of efficiency is not only vague in Europe (and elsewhere) but that it basically lacks a clear definition altogether.<sup>8</sup> Its operationalisation and measurement are almost always unconvincing (Kupryianova et al. in this volume). Surprisingly, the same paper shows that there is almost no research on efficiency in the university either. The paper presents the work of an EUA-led team project towards developing a definition and inventorying good practices in efficiency in university in Europe. Another paper in the governance section (Jongbloed et al. in this volume) looks at policy initiatives that bring about new funding tools and principles (performance-contracts based funding), with new understandings of autonomy and efficiency in universities.

## Conclusions

In light of both ongoing and newly emerging developments in Europe that are expected to influence the course of higher education in the immediate future in the area of governance and funding, in particular, several important questions appear to need to be asked:

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<sup>8</sup>EUSTREAM: Universities for Strategic, Efficient, and Autonomous Management, described at <http://www.eua.be/activities-services/projects/current-projects/governance-funding-public-policy/ustream>. Accessed on 5 January 2018.

- What is the future of the European Higher Education Area now that the European integration process is stalled, or perhaps reversed?
- Should the EHEA continue after Brexit? Is that even possible? Will it remain the same? How can this be done?
- Where should the European leadership come from in these times of changes and uncertainty?
- What do governments, the public and those working in higher education themselves need to know about the changing narratives and other societal transformations that are already or will affect higher education? What should we tell them, as researchers?
- How should higher education institutions position themselves in times of changing policy narratives and regression of democracy? This question does not apply in the same way to higher education institutions in all European countries. Some of them are already under severe pressure, some others less so or not at all. It is still an important question, whether we are asking about universities in Turkey (some of which were closed down, what can they do?), in Hungary (where autonomy has all but evaporated already), in Germany, in the UK, or in other countries of Europe.

In search for answers, the papers in this section on governance and funding look both at new and continuing developments. They look at governance and funding as:

- tools for steering in the hands of the government;
- tools for the higher education institutions themselves to go about their business;
- in the case of governance, as a defining characteristic of higher education institutions related to values, principles and institutional identity that needs to be understood and promoted beyond being a simple operational principle or tool.

Many have stated recently that ours is a time for soul-searching in higher education and higher education policy (see for example Finn 2018, in “British Universities in the Brexit Moment”). Reflection and action on governance and funding remain crucial to this exercise.

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# Efficiency of Universities: Drivers, Enablers and Limitations



Veronika Kupriyanova, Thomas Estermann and Norbert Sabic

## Introduction

### *Background and Objectives*

Since the significant economic downturn arising from the global crisis in 2008, there has been increasing interest from policymakers and higher education institutions in Europe about efficiency and effectiveness in the higher education context. The growing attention to these topics has also been triggered by changes in funding modalities and in university governance and accountability frameworks, as well as growing competition among higher education institutions and the evolving student body. Against this background, two important questions arise for higher education practitioners and researchers: first, how could universities achieve their core institutional goals while ensuring the efficiency of their processes and operations, and secondly, what kind of framework conditions could support universities in their quest for efficiency and effectiveness?

To help institutions and policymakers address these questions, the European University Association (EUA), together with its partners, initiated a project called

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Universities for Strategic, Autonomous and Efficient Management (USTREAM).<sup>1</sup> The aim of the project is to elaborate recommendations on ways to enhance efficiency in university management and support the creation of enabling policy frameworks. This paper is based on the selected findings and data collected by the USTREAM project. It explores both system-level and institutional factors that affect the design and implementation of the efficiency agendas, drawing on the efficiency experience of more than 100 higher education institutions across Europe.

### *Methods and Structure of the Study*

This paper relies on the qualitative and quantitative data collected from a number of sources. Desk research and review of theoretical and specialised literature are presented in the first section of the study. This part also outlines a general analytical framework for the study and analysis of efficiency measures. The second section provides an overview of institutional practices and institutional trends in efficiency activities based on an online survey conducted by the USTREAM partners. In total, 68 higher education institutions from 21 countries reported during the autumn of 2016 on their efficiency practices. Most of the respondents were from Poland (9), Czech Republic (7), Ireland (7), Spain (6), and the United Kingdom (6). The majority (17) were small institutions with an annual budget below 20 million euros, less than 7500 students, and staff below 1000. At the other end of the scale, a similar number of institutions (12) had budgets over 100 million euros, more than 25,000 students, and staff above 3000 members. Although there is a fairly equal distribution of institutions based on student numbers and faculty size, institutions with a budget over 100 million euros were slightly overrepresented in our sample.

In addition to the survey, three site visits were organised to Austria, Flanders/Belgium and Poland in order to collect qualitative data. As part of these visits, three focus groups were conducted with the representatives of 10 universities (vice-rectors, finance directors), and three interviews were held with the high-level national policymakers from these countries. This qualitative data was complemented by further institutional and system-level evidence collected during a series of meetings with national rectors' conferences and at a peer learning seminar on national and institutional frameworks for efficiency and effectiveness. The seminar was organised by EUA and Universities UK on 1 and 2 June 2017 in London, with the aim to enable sharing of institutional experiences in efficiency and effectiveness. The event was attended by 32 university leaders and managers from 13 countries across Europe.

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<sup>1</sup>The USTREAM project is co-funded by the Erasmus + Programme of the EU and implemented by the European University Association, Universities UK, the Irish Universities Association and the Central European University. For more details, please see [www.eua.eu/ustream](http://www.eua.eu/ustream).

The final part of the paper summarises the main findings and core conclusions drawn from the data sources mentioned above.

## **Analytical Framework and Approach**

### ***Understanding Efficiency in Higher Education***

#### **The Rise of the Efficiency Discourse**

Efficiency started to be discussed more specifically in higher education following the severe cuts in public expenditure across a number of developed countries during the 1980s (Peters 1992). Combined with the rapidly increasing number of students in the same period, it contributed to a deeper concern for how higher education institutions perform. Efficiency became a central policy concern as governments sought to satisfy the increased demand for higher education with the same or less level of funding. Exacerbated by cases where efficiency was “punished” by public funders through a mirroring reduction in allocated resources, such policy orientations led to a situation where the term acquired a rather negative connotation within the sector. Hence, it is not surprising that efficiency has started to be associated with funding cuts and the related negative effects (e.g. staff layoffs). As a result, concepts such as effectiveness, value for money and qualitative monitoring were proposed as more suitable to the specific character of universities that are driven by spirit, passion and intrinsic motivation.

The value of efficiency has been reinstated with the uptake of new public management principles in higher education (Broucker et al. 2015). In the spirit of the “entrepreneurial university” (Clark 1998), some institutional leaders have lately started to associate efficiency with pragmatic gains that can be achieved from expanded investment opportunities as well as increased opportunities to close the gap between rising costs, new tasks and limited budgets.

#### **Diversity of Approaches**

Despite growing concerns about efficiency in higher education, there is a limited conceptual, methodological, or policy clarity in this area, which is due to several factors. First, applying the concept of efficiency in higher education is generally problematic due to the unique nature of the university mission, linked to its socio-economic goal, types of institutions, method of financing, and the diversity of beneficiaries involved with higher education (Sadlak 1978). Second, both the interest in and understanding of efficiency significantly vary across different higher education systems, institutions and their units. Different perceptions of efficiency reflect so-called internal and external institutional diversity, as institutions have

different cultures, historical backgrounds, frameworks and ways of providing teaching, research and services (Reichert 2009).

The results of the USTREAM survey confirm a great diversity of approaches to efficiency across the systems, institutions and individuals. When asked about how efficiency is understood at the institution, two-thirds of the respondents defined it in relation to either resource management or some form of input-output measure. Less than one-fifth of the respondents referred to efficiency in the value for money terms. For instance, a University in the Czech Republic highlighted the following: “We perceive efficiency as a managerial approach, which enables us to get more and better output using existing resources.” In a similar way, a University in Austria expressed that efficiency is about: “Providing services in teaching and research with a minimum of input to get the best, or at least appropriate, results.” The last example is from a University in the UK: “Efficiency is understood as the process of achieving the best possible results considering the results available, in order to fulfil the needs of the stakeholders and continuously improve the organisation’s performance.”

### **Productivity Versus Value for Money**

Considering the multitude of interpretations, the existing theoretical and practical approaches to efficiency in the higher education context can be roughly divided into two groups:

- (1) **Resource-oriented approach**, focusing on productivity of university operations and the extent to which an activity achieves its goal whilst minimising resource usage

The first group of definitions particularly emphasises the relationship between the obtained outputs compared to the used inputs. According to Hoenach (1982), “faculty, students, and other participants in higher education make choices that determine whether those resources will be used efficiently or inefficiently” (Hoenach 1982, p. 403). Thus, the central question is whether one system or organisation could achieve better results with the same or fewer resources. Hoenach’s definition underscores that efficiency is the responsibility of individuals and organisations participating in higher education and that it should be judged according to the level of inputs used to attain them. Therefore, efficiency requires the detailed measurement of performance, whether on individual, departmental, institutional, or system level. In higher education, productivity is often measured based on the number of students (educated) per faculty member or the number of journal articles published per researcher (Salerno 2011). However, this leads to additional challenges, because assessments and comparisons require a clear knowledge of what those results should have been.



- (2) **Value-based approach**, placing emphasis on the outcomes achieved for end users, including students, employers, local community and society as a whole, for the cost of a product or service.

The second group accommodates a broader set of definitions that focus on both tangible and intangible effects of efficiency which could be experienced by a broad range of actors over different time horizons. In this context, efficiency concerns how resources are utilised in order to promote society's objectives as fully as possible (Lockheed and Hanushek 1994).

The value-based approach has been taken forward in the UK with the establishment of the Modernisation and Efficiency Task Group. Set up by Universities UK in 2011, this task group conducted extensive consultation with the sector and with key public and private sector stakeholders in order to explore what drives efficiency in the sector (Universities UK 2011). In the first step, the group suggested to look beyond short-term savings and view efficiency "as part of a wider strategic objective to enhance the effectiveness of institutions and ensure they continue to deliver high quality teaching and research" (Universities UK 2011). Subsequently, this broader approach linking efficiency and effectiveness evolved towards the concept of value for money in light of the growing accountability of universities towards their students, as fee-paying customers, as well as funders and taxpayers. Thus, value for money incorporates three elements such as **economy** (reducing the costs of inputs), **efficiency** (getting more output for the same or less input) and **effectiveness** (getting better at what universities set out to do). In other words, value for money is viewed as the achievement of economy, efficiency and effectiveness in how the university acquires and uses its resources in order to meet its objectives (Universities UK 2015).

Various examples show that all three elements—economy, efficiency and effectiveness—are equally important in the higher education context. While costs can, for instance, be reduced by closing facilities or the campus at a certain time of the year, such measures are not always effective since they could potentially be disruptive for the achievement of the university's goals. At the same time, universities may be highly efficient in operations but face constraints in terms of dropout or graduates' preparedness for work. Considering the unique combination of the university's tasks, the wrong balance of efficiency and effectiveness can bear significant risks for the institutions.

### *Multifaceted Approach to Efficiency*

As shown above, efficiency is a complex concept, and few conceptual tools are in place to study it in the higher education context. The discussion on efficiency is also challenged by the diversity of approaches and interpretations. Therefore, it is suggested to view the topic through the prism of various levels and dimensions of efficiency that correspond to the core university settings.

## Levels of Efficiency

Efficiency can be dealt with at three different levels presented below:

- System (national or regional) level, which is associated with the framework conditions put in place for efficiency-related activities of universities by national governments;
- Sector level, which involves joint activities pursued by university networks/collaborations/partnerships, often in cooperation with other stakeholders. Cooperation at this level spans across national frameworks of higher education and can involve a large number of actors with varying needs and interests;
- Institutional level (including faculty, departmental, and individual levels), which covers various activities of higher education institutions related to the design and implementation of institutional efficiency agendas.

When it comes to the *system level*, the ability of universities to act strategically and innovate can be enabled by government policies, in particular, through institutional autonomy. The Modernization Agenda of the European Commission (2011) directly links institutional autonomy to efficiency: “The efficiency of higher education institutions and so the effectiveness of public investment can be enhanced by reducing restrictions: on raising private revenue, on capital investment, on the ownership of infrastructure, on the freedom to recruit staff, on accreditation. Investment in professional management can provide strategic vision and leadership while allowing teachers and researchers the necessary academic freedom to concentrate on their core tasks”. The level of organisational, financial, staffing and academic autonomy (Privot and Estermann 2017) underpins the university’s margin for manoeuvre with efficiency. For example, a high degree of organisational autonomy reflected in the capacity to create for-profit legal entities enables university consortia to share housing or other services through a commercial subsidiary. Likewise, greater financial autonomy expressed in the ability to own and sell real estate supports the university’s efforts to redesign campus based on space optimisation or similar initiatives.

As part of financial autonomy, modalities of public funding have a direct impact on institutional efficiency agendas. While public funding arrangements significantly vary across Europe, block grants remain the main method of public funding distribution in most of the countries in Europe (Privot et al. 2015). The EUA Public Funding Observatory 2017 (PFO) has captured significant reductions in public funding to universities in the period between 2008 and 2016. Of 34 higher education systems in Europe, only in three countries, that is Austria, Norway and Sweden, the volume of public funding to universities grew faster than student number between 2008 and 2016. All other countries included in the analysis were found to either make insufficient investments in higher education institutions compared to their student population growth or keep reducing public allocations (Privot et al. 2017).

Whether countries maintain, increase or decrease public investment in the university sector, institutions are pressed to enhance efficiency and deliver more for the resources they get. Thus, policymakers increasingly link funding to institutional performance, e.g. through performance-based funding mechanisms, to increase the overall transparency of spending and incentivize the achievement of specific policy goals (Pruvot et al. 2015). In addition to shifts in public funding modalities, public authorities sometimes justify budget cuts with the need to incentivize institutions to operate more efficiently (Estermann and Kupriyanova 2016).

When it comes to the *institutional level* of efficiency, the role of leadership is essential at all stages. Support from senior management contributes to the development of a culture that highlights individual performance and achievement. The governors can also play an important role by promoting a strategic approach to efficiency and value for money, fostering a culture where innovation and improvement are encouraged and valued, and embedding efficiency into decision-making. For this purpose, data collection and analysis provide a clear steer on what needs to be shown to government and funders and inform the development of institutional systems and approaches.

## Efficiency Dimensions

In addition to the various levels of action, efficiency can be explored through several dimensions as classified in the USTREAM project approach.

- (a) *Operational efficiency* (efficiency in professional, operational and support services)

Operational efficiency is driven by the need to streamline business processes and optimise the use of resources. It combines a broad range of activities or measures performed to ensure the efficient implementation of day-to-day university operations, including facility and space management, procurement, finances, HR management and student support services. Operational efficiency measures can result in internal institutional reorganisation or institutions sharing resources, so optimising their operations. An overview of various operational efficiency measures is presented in Fig. 1.

- (b) *Efficiency in academic matters* (efficiency in research, teaching and learning)

Efficiency in academic matters embraces processes associated with the organisation of teaching and research. Examples include optimisation of the academic offer, digital learning and use of ICT for teaching and learning, and research profiling, among others. The question of academic efficiency arises on all institutional levels, including faculty and departmental levels and concerns the individuals involved in the research and teaching activities. Institutional measures in this area can include the definitions of teaching load, class sizes, and research output requirements.

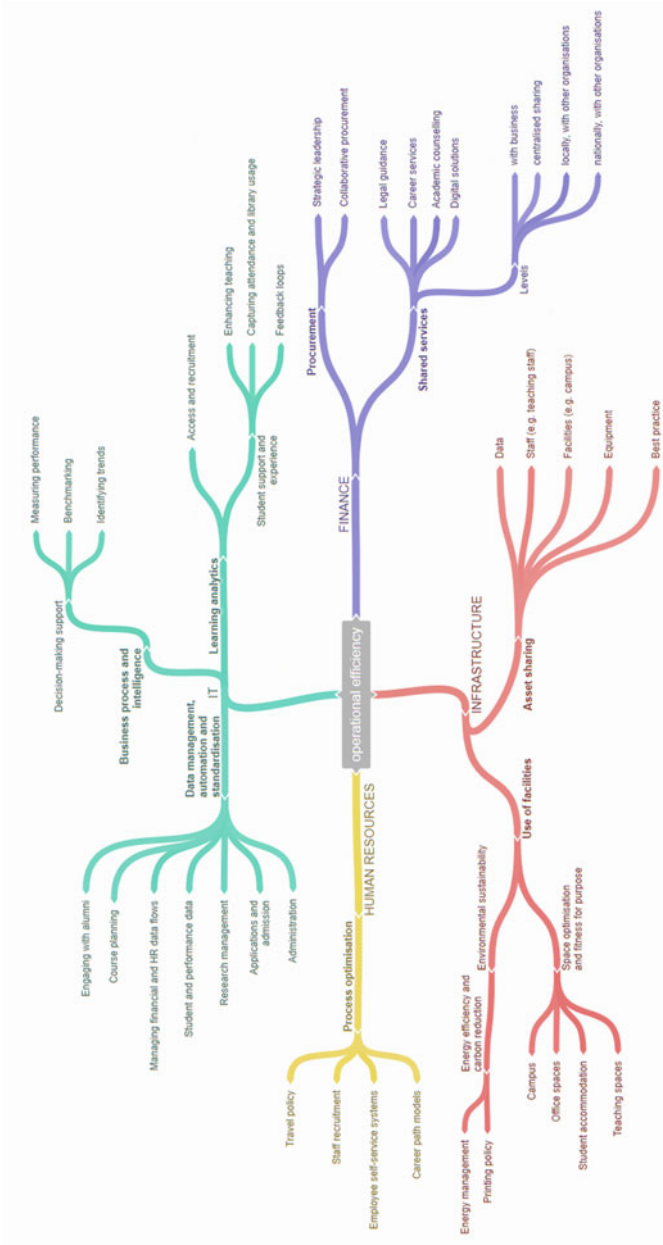


Fig. 1 Overview of operational efficiency application areas

**Table 1** Efficiency matrix—examples of efficiency measures

Level/ dimension	Operational	Academic	Strategic governance
System/ frameworks	Land use, estate ownership and VAT regulations	Programme certification procedures	Institutional autonomy legislation Funding modalities
Sector	Joint procurement Shared services	Sharing of research assets (e.g. equipment, data); sharing of staff (e.g. teaching staff)	Exchange of best practices, peer learning
Institutional	Space use optimisation Centralised procurement Asset sharing within institution	Research profiling Review of the academic offer	“Efficiency culture” Leadership and engagement Value for money reports

(c) *Efficiency in strategic governance*

Efficiency in strategic governance is associated with a broad range of activities related to the articulation of efficiency in the context of the value creation model to underpin performance management and institutional development; accountability and stewardship for institutional capital (financial, intellectual, human, relationship, natural, reputational, etc.); development of institutional “efficiency culture” based on leadership and staff engagement, investment in skills, technology and capacity-building; effective internal communication; engagement of governing bodies; stakeholder perception of value and integrated reporting (e.g. through value for money reports). Most activities in this area have a long-term nature based on a strategic, coherent and sustainable approach to efficiency, effectiveness and value for money which supports the institution-wide development.

Examples of common efficiency measures pursued by the sector are presented in a matrix, crossing three levels and three dimensions of efficiency (Table 1).

The next section provides an overview of efficiency trends and practices from the institutional perspective.

## **Institutional Practices and Trends**

### *Governance and Management of Efficiency*

#### **Key Institutional Actors Involved in Design and Implementation**

Efficiency is a topic reflected in institutional development strategies. In 93% of the cases, efficiency related considerations and activities were outlined in the

**Table 2** Importance of units involved in implementation of efficiency measures

	Not at all important	Slightly important	Moderately important	Very important	Extremely important
<b>Finance department</b>	1%	4%	18%	44%	32%
<b>HR department</b>	0%	6%	25%	46%	22%
<b>Central administration/operations</b>	0%	5%	11%	52%	33%
<b>Faculties or departments</b>	1%	1%	26%	46%	25%
<b>Dedicated office, entity or working group</b>	12%	5%	25%	44%	14%

institutional strategic plans, and 7% of the responding institutions are currently discussing how to address efficiency at the level of the entire institution. The design and strategic planning of efficiency measures typically fall under the responsibility of the rector or vice-rectors (81%), followed by heads of administration (59%), whereas governing bodies, such as councils or boards of trustees (44%), are less involved in the design and planning of efficiency. Other institutional actors involved include deans or vice-deans, heads of department, strategic planning offices and management teams (23%). When it comes to the implementation of efficiency measures, all institutional units seem to have an equally important role, although the reported relevance of a dedicated entity or working group is somehow lower (Table 2).

### Efficiency Targets and Evaluation of Outcomes

In total, 78% of the respondents indicated that their institution evaluates efficiency which in 60% of the cases means an assessment at least once in a year. The identification of efficiency related indicators and their monitoring are most commonly done through the institutions' strategic planning process and annual reports. As a university from Portugal noted, the "monitoring of the strategic plan, namely evaluation of goals, of key performance indicators, results, and the level of implementation of the action plans, through internal audits, external audits, annual self-assessment" is key to assessing whether the university is efficient. Evaluation of efficiency can also be conducted by external bodies. "Every five years, an external commission mandated by the Ministry implements an evaluation on the basis of visits at the university and of a self-assessment report. The self-assessment process is implemented by the university and associates a large number of colleagues and functions." This example from a French case demonstrates the important role public authorities and national regulations can have in the evaluation of institutional efficiency.

Most of the institutions that responded to the survey reported to have performance targets set for teaching and research (79% of all responding institutions), and a similarly high number (76%) reported to have financial targets. Fewer institutions (42%) have defined targets concerning productivity, and only 7% of all respondents

indicated that their institution did not specify any targets to be achieved. Besides the mentioned ones, a couple of institutions have also set efficiency targets in the area of sustainability, organisational reputation, and management. While in the majority of the cases efficiency targets are identified and set by the institutions themselves, some respondents also highlighted the important role that national and regional authorities and even stakeholders play in this process.

### Drivers of Efficiency

As outlined in the analytical framework, efficiency can be enabled or hindered as a consequence of developments at various levels. When asked what drives the efficiency agenda in their home institutions, most of the respondents highlighted external factors that push institutions to look at efficiency such as budget cuts and decreasing resources, new institutional approaches, and national and regional reforms. Nevertheless, internal institutional changes were marked as another important driver of efficiency. The least important in this regard were European policies and provisions (Table 3). Besides the offered choices, several institutions highlighted increased competition, stakeholder influence, and performance contracts as being important drivers of the efficiency agenda.

When it comes to the system level factors, such as public funding, it was observed during the site visits and interviews that, in those systems that experience significant public cuts, universities are often prompted to pursue institutional efficiency programmes focusing on short-term operational gains and savings. At the same time, institutions that are not exposed to funding cuts but experience the accelerated sector growth (e.g. reflected in the rapidly increasing student body) tend

**Table 3** Drivers of efficiency

	Not at all important	Slightly important	Moderately important	Very important	Extremely important
Budget Cuts or decreasing resources	2%	5%	8%	41%	40%
New institutional approaches	3%	3%	18%	48%	23%
National or regional policies and reforms	2%	3%	26%	40%	24%
Internal institutional changes	0%	10%	18%	58%	10%
Increasing demand/growing student enrollment	8%	8%	25%	33%	21%
Increasing accountability to stakeholders and funder	0%	10%	21%	50%	13%
European policies and provisions	11%	23%	34%	21%	7%

to pursue measures with a broader impact aiming to provide an institutional response to the system changes in a longer term.

### ***Implementation of Efficiency Measures: Barriers and Enablers***

The analysis of the applied efficiency measures shows that universities are particularly active in pursuing operational efficiency (mentioned by 89% of respondents), whereas fewer practices are reported concerning academic efficiency (78%) and efficiency through strategic governance (72%).

When looking at the importance of the implemented measures, the survey found that those institutions (56%) that have streamlined the use of ICT in teaching have ranked this efficiency-oriented measure as relatively important. On the other end, 60% of responding institutions optimised their academic offer, yet most of them rated this measure as relatively unimportant. In addition to the offered concrete examples, institutions also emphasized the importance of efficiency-oriented measures in the area of student services and in managerial and administrative processes. Good practices in academic efficiency show benefits gained from encouraging academic community to review the academic offer, provide cost estimates for a course, and engaging students in course design. Mixed outcomes are reported on the use of internal performance-based funding for research and benchmarking.

Institutions that wish to increase their efficiency face numerous challenges. Three barriers stood out to be very or extremely important for at least half of the responding institutions. Among them, the institutional culture and the reluctance to change were rated as the most prominent barriers to implementing efficiency measures. Financial constraints and concerns over quality were also perceived as important obstacles. In contrast, legal barriers and technical obstacles were rated the least important for efficiency measures (Table 4). Besides the outlined ones, participants also mentioned resistance from trade unions, lack of staff motivation, limitations of the organisational structure, and the lack of external pressure for increasing efficiency.

The respondents also rated the importance of factors that enable the implementation of efficiency measures. Four factors were perceived as very or extremely important by more than two-thirds of all responding institutions. These were the commitment of the institution's leadership, institutional autonomy, inclusiveness and participation of all relevant institutional actors, and raising awareness regarding the importance of efficiency. The two factors that most institutions reported to be somewhat less important are external financial support and external expertise (Table 5).



**Table 4** Barriers to efficiency

	Not at all important	Slightly important	Moderately important	Very important	Extremely important
<b>Institutional culture / reluctance to change</b>	3%	5%	20%	38%	34%
<b>Financial constraints</b>	9%	9%	22%	36%	23%
<b>Concerns over quality</b>	6%	12%	27%	43%	12%
<b>Lack of expertise or qualified staff to implement the measures</b>	9%	12%	34%	33%	12%
<b>Technical obstacles</b>	9%	22%	34%	31%	3%
<b>Legal barriers</b>	13%	30%	19%	24%	14%

**Table 5** Enablers of efficiency

	Not at all important	Slightly important	Moderately important	Very important	Extremely important
<b>Commitment of institutional leadership</b>	0%	2%	10%	44%	44%
<b>Institutional autonomy</b>	0%	3%	14%	41%	42%
<b>Inclusiveness and participation of all relevant institutional actors in the process</b>	0%	6%	15%	48%	31%
<b>Raising awareness of efficiency and training for staff</b>	0%	6%	22%	51%	21%
<b>External financial support (e.g., public or private)</b>	3%	20%	27%	34%	16%
<b>External expertise (e.g., through external board members, partners, consulting)</b>	2%	14%	37%	37%	11%
<b>Cooperation with other institutions, peer-learning</b>	0%	25%	30%	40%	5%

### *Impact of Efficiency Measures*

Various institutional actors may react differently to the implemented efficiency measures. As shown in an earlier example, an action that is considered necessary by the management of the institution to increase efficiency might, at the same time, be regarded inefficient or ineffective by other actors. To shed some light on this dilemma, the study asked participants of the online survey to identify the impact of efficiency measures on the institutional goals in the areas of teaching, research, internationalisation, and services, value for community and economy. The results of the survey show that the majority (83%) of the respondents identify significantly positive or some positive impact in this regard. However, this finding has to be considered with caution taking into account possible bias, given that the

respondents primarily come from the offices that are involved in the design and implementation of efficiency measures. Hence, further research on the effects of efficiency on the university is needed particularly in a longer-term outlook.

## Discussion and Conclusions

The analysis of theoretical and practical approaches to efficiency reveals a great diversity in terms of interpretations and perceptions of efficiency as well varying degrees of engagement with the topic. There is a common understanding that the specific nature of higher education requires addressing efficiency in balance with effectiveness and value for money.

Considering the changes in the academic landscapes, efficiency will likely remain one of the relevant topics on the higher education agenda, and it has, therefore, to be viewed pragmatically as a way to achieve the university's goals rather than a response to decreasing public funding. Saying that, it is necessary to stress that efficiency strategies must be supported by sufficient investment in highly skilled staff and modern technology which are needed for their implementation. In that spirit, sustainable public funding as well as greater institutional autonomy underpin the capacity of institutions to improve the efficiency of processes in the long term.

The reinvention of efficiency based on a more balanced approach that looks at various levels and dimensions of efficiency requires a continuous dialogue and communication both internally, within the institution, and with external stakeholders (e.g. by means of peer learning and benchmarking). Such communication is particularly needed to manage expectations about the outcomes that could be achieved through the implementation of various efficiency agendas. In this respect, both institutions and policymakers should be aware of the limits to replicability, transferability and measurability of efficiency measures and therefore engage in an open dialogue on such limitations and preconditions of efficiency in order to avoid any conflicts. Replicability and transferability of efficiency measures can be limited not only by the specific system-level or institutional conditions but also by the nature of measures, which can, for instance, be implemented as "one-time" actions and quickly deplete their saving or optimisation potential.

Measuring the success of efficiency activities can also be problematic considering more intangible and often unexpected effects of efficiency that might be perceptible in a longer run, as well as different ways to calculate the gains or losses. For instance, office rearrangement initiatives aimed at optimising the use of space were found in some cases to improve internal coordination and collaboration, reducing the need for formal meetings. Such effects are difficult to measure or monetise.

Furthermore, the range of drivers that universities can rely on as unique social systems to foster and evaluate progress is broader and more original than economic ones. For instance, intrinsic motivation can be a strong driver for efficiency,

effectiveness and value for money across the entire institution, provided that all institutional actors participated in the efficiency processes, and peer-to-peer exchanges and evaluation provide another way to evaluate success. The meaning of such measures inspired by the university's tradition should be translated for other actors, particularly funders (e.g. ministries of finance), which may not be familiar with the original qualitative approaches applied in the academic context.

Finally, standardisation, which is the starting point of many efficiency programmes, has also its limits for the implementation in the diverse and highly autonomous university context. In this context, both leadership and a continuous engagement of all institutional actors into the process are key to ensure the success of efficiency strategies.

Our study of institutional practices shows that the European higher education sector already demonstrates a high level of maturity in terms of operational efficiency with a variety of practices applied. Examples of good practices in academic efficiency show benefits gained from encouraging the academic community to review the academic offer, or provide cost estimates for a course, as well as from engaging students in course design. The potential in the area of academic efficiency is significant, although due attention should be paid to possible tensions between academic freedom and efficiency. Practical ways to overcome this tension need to be further explored. Further room for progress in the different efficiency settings is associated with streamlining efficiency activities through an improved strategic governance and pursuing a more coordinated cross-institutional approach based on collaboration and peer learning.

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# University Governance: Autonomy, Structures and Inclusiveness



Enora Bennetot Pruvot and Thomas Estermann

## Introduction

The present article draws from the data collected in the framework of the 2017 update of the EUA University Autonomy Scorecard.<sup>1</sup> The Scorecard was first launched in 2011 and offers an institutional perspective on university autonomy in Europe. It allowed for the development of a core set of indicators and a methodology to collect, compare and weight data on the topic. In this context, the regulatory frameworks of 29 higher education systems were analysed in order to assess the degree of autonomy universities operate with. The Scorecard is characterised by a four-pillar structure which allows to concretely assess university autonomy with regard to:

- organisational matters (covering academic and administrative structures, leadership and governance);
- financial matters (covering the ability to raise funds, own buildings, borrow money and set tuition fees);

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<sup>1</sup>EUA's Autonomy Scorecard is composed of a report, published in 2017 (Pruvot and Estermann (2017) *University Autonomy in Europe III: The Scorecard 2017*. EUA, Brussels), as well as a compendium "University Autonomy in Europe III: Country Profiles" and an online tool available at [www.university-autonomy.eu](http://www.university-autonomy.eu).

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- staffing matters (including the ability to recruit independently, promote and develop academic and non-academic staff);
- academic matters (including study fields, student numbers, student selection as well as the structure and content of degrees).

## *Methodology and Data Collection*

The data collection was organised following the original Scorecard methodology, based on questionnaires and interviews, as well as several rounds of validation with national rectors' conferences, during which information was clarified and contextualised. The questionnaires submitted to the National Rectors' Conferences included the responses they gave in 2010 to enhance comparability over time. The questions address the capacity of universities to act on a series of topics, on the basis of the provisions of the relevant regulatory framework. Additional information was collected on the precise composition of university governing bodies. The data validation phase spanned over a year, from late 2015 to late 2016, due to the need to correctly interpret responses to indicators but also understand the broader narrative for each system.

The publication in June 2017 of the updated Scorecard (Pruvot and Estermann 2017) included the new scoring and ranking of systems for each of the four dimensions described above as well as an overview of the related trends and recent developments. Nevertheless, the qualitative data collected in this context allowed for further exploitation. The present paper aims at mobilising this data with the view to generate a more in-depth picture of university governance models in Europe. Additional analysis was therefore carried out on data pertaining to "dimension 1" of the Autonomy Scorecard (organisational autonomy). Further data processing was performed, leading to a refined geographical scope including only those higher education systems for which relevant information was available.<sup>2</sup> The present paper, therefore, encompasses 22 higher education systems, as listed below. Reference is made to other systems analysed under the Scorecard when data is available, with the aim to provide a more comprehensive picture (Tables 1 and 2).

## *Scope of Analysis*

The table below summarises items pertaining to "organisational autonomy" surveyed and presented in the report "University Autonomy in Europe III:

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<sup>2</sup>The higher education systems included in this analysis provided detailed information regarding the university governing bodies. This data was not available for all systems surveyed in the Autonomy Scorecard, as the methodology included specific features only.

**Table 1** Higher education systems included in the analysis

Code	Country/system	Note	Code	Country/ system	Note
AT	Austria		IT	Italy	
BE-FL	Flanders (Belgium)	Included in 2011	LU	Luxembourg	
CZ	Czech Republic	Analysis carried out after release of 2017 update	NL	The Netherlands	
NRW (DE)	North Rhine-Westphalia (Germany)		NO	Norway	
DK	Denmark		PL	Poland	
EE	Estonia		PT	Portugal	
FI	Finland		RS	Serbia	Newly included in the update
HR	Croatia	Newly included in the update	SE	Sweden	
HU	Hungary		SI	Slovenia	Newly included in the update
IE	Ireland		SK	Slovakia	
IS	Iceland		UK	United Kingdom	(England only unless otherwise stated)

The Scorecard 2017” (Pruvot and Estermann 2017) and new data researched in this paper. All data were collected in the framework of the Autonomy Scorecard update but only specific elements were used for the Scorecard (second column). Additional data collected on the composition of governing bodies, their size, the types of external members included, etc., while collected at the same time, was not used for the Scorecard since it did not correspond to the methodology and is instead used for the present analysis (Table 3).

The comparative data presented in this paper is analysed under the lens of institutional autonomy. Few higher education systems allow universities to freely decide on their governance model. The types of bodies, their responsibilities, size and membership may be subject to different degrees of regulation. In exploring these elements, the focus is placed on the links between governance models, representation and inclusiveness in governing bodies and university organisational autonomy.

Table 2 Synthetic view of governance models and composition

System	Governance model	Composition of board-type bodies					Composition of senate-type bodies						
		Academic staff	Non-academic staff	Students	External members	Academic staff	Non-academic staff	Students	External members	Academic staff	Non-academic staff	Students	External members
AT	Dual Traditional	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0
BE-FL	Unitary—Board	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
CZ	Dual asymmetric—Senate	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0
DE-NRW	Dual traditional	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0 <sup>c</sup>
DK	Unitary—Board	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
EE	Unitary—Senate	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
FI	Dual asymmetric—Board	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0
HR	Dual asymmetric—Senate	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0
HU	Dual asymmetric—Board	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0
IE	Unitary—Senate									1	1	1	1
IS	Unitary—Board	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
IT	Dual traditional	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0
LU	Dual asymmetric—Board	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0
NL	Dual asymmetric <sup>a</sup>	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
NO	Unitary—Board	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
PL	Unitary—Senate									1	1	1	0
PT	Unitary—Board	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
RS	Dual traditional	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0

(continued)



**Table 2** (continued)

System	Governance model	Composition of board-type bodies					Composition of senate-type bodies				
		Academic staff	Non-academic staff	Students	External members	External members	Academic staff	Non-academic staff	Students	External members	
SE	Unitary—Board	1	0	1	1						
SI	Dual traditional	1	1	1	1		0	1	0		
SK	Dual traditional	0	0	0	1		0	1	0		
UK	Dual traditional <sup>b</sup>	1	1	1	1		1	1	1		

*NL*<sup>a</sup> Both governing bodies are board-type bodies and their composition is presented in an aggregate way  
*UK*<sup>b</sup> Universities may decide on the type and composition of governing bodies and the elements in the table represent common practice  
*DE-NRW*<sup>c</sup> The law does not include provisions on external members in the senate-type body; in practice, universities do not include them

## Governance Models

While significant diversity in the specifics of governance modalities exists across universities in Europe, general observations can be made about the types of internal bodies governing university activities. When comparing the information collected in the characteristics of these bodies as stated in law (holding formal decision-making powers), the distribution of responsibilities and the dynamics between them (in the cases where there is no single governing structure), it is possible to establish a typology of governance models and thus cluster higher education systems accordingly. Our analysis, therefore, distinguishes:

- Unitary governance models and
- Dual governance models

With the latter sub-divided based on power distribution, between:

- “traditional” model
- “asymmetric” model

The following sections explore this typology in further detail.

### *Unitary Model*

“Unitary model” refers to the governing structures where one governing body exerts decision-making powers at the given university. This body can have the characteristics of either “senate-type” bodies or “board-type” bodies.

Senate and Board-type bodies are defined in relation to each other. Senate-type bodies tend to be primarily competent for academic matters and are characterised by their comparatively larger size and academic-oriented membership. Board-type bodies are usually responsible for strategic institutional decisions, often including financial aspects, and are often of smaller size than senate-type bodies. They are also characterised by a more diverse membership.

In the sample analysed, a minority of higher education systems use unitary governance models. Among them, the unitary models structured around board-type bodies are more frequent (six out of nine). Universities in Estonia, Ireland and Poland use senate-type bodies as the only decision-making structure. It should be noted that several regulatory frameworks exist in Estonia; in addition to the main Act governing activities of four universities, two universities are governed via specific laws that have introduced board-type bodies next to the existing senates, creating dual governance structures.

The composition of governing bodies in Ireland has been a bone of contention, with the university sector having expressed the wish to move away from traditionally large, group representation-based bodies. The argument is that the current regulations do not enable universities to select the right expertise at strategic level. The sector has therefore been advocating for steps in that direction, similar to the changes implemented in the regulatory framework for the Irish Institutes of

**Table 3** Scope of analysis

Topic	2017 Autonomy scorecard	Present analysis
Executive leadership	Selection procedure	
	Appointment	
	Selection criteria	
	Term of office	
	Dismissal procedure	
Internal academic structures	Capacity to determine internal academic structures	
Separate legal entities	Capacity to create independent legal entities	
Governing bodies	Types of governance structures	Composition of governing bodies
		(Internal) members' voting rights
		Size of governing bodies
	Inclusion of external members	
	Selection of external members	External members' profiles

Technology. Finally, Polish university senates stand out as comparatively “closed” governing bodies. They do not include external members who therefore are not represented at all in the university governance, an exception in Europe. Nevertheless, Polish universities have the latitude to establish and decide on the membership of additional advisory bodies.

The other unitary models concentrate decision-making powers in a board-type body. This does not preclude “advisory” bodies that tend to display complementary features to the decision-making body, such as wider academic staff or student representation. In particular, Denmark, Iceland and Portugal make it compulsory for universities to have a “senate” although this body does not possess effective decision-making powers.

With the exception of Finland, all Nordic systems have unitary governance models structured around board-type bodies. It is worth noting though that, in Sweden, some of the historically established universities maintain a senate-type body in addition.

### ***Dual Model***

“Dual models” are characterised by governance structures including both a senate-type body and a board-type body that share decision-making powers. This particular model is more frequently found across Europe (roughly 2/3 of the systems analysed). Based on the distribution of power among the two bodies, two types of dual model can be distinguished. Both types are almost equally present.

## Dual Traditional Model

The “dual traditional” model is based on power division where generally each body has a distinct, but equally important portfolio of responsibilities; the senate-type body is usually in charge of academic affairs while the board-type body is generally tasked with strategic oversight and budget allocation. Both bodies may, nevertheless, also partake in the decision-making process on the same issues. Systems following this particular model include Austria,<sup>3</sup> North Rhine-Westphalia, Italy, the UK, Serbia, Slovakia and Slovenia.

## Dual Asymmetric Model

“Dual asymmetric” models comprise senate-type and board-type bodies, but with a different type of power dynamics leading to one body occupying a distinctly more central position in the decision-making process. The model can be found in the Czech Republic, Croatia, Finland, Hungary, Netherlands and **Luxembourg**. Board-type bodies tend to dominate in this model, while senates are the foci of power in exceptional cases. This model is distinct from unitary governance structures where the governing body may be “assisted” by advisory bodies which do not have formal decision-making capacities.

In France, university governance structures evolved from a unitary model to a dual asymmetric model with the implementation of a new Act passed in 2013, which modified the distribution of competencies among the governing bodies. Under the 2007 regulatory framework, the board combined strategic, management and HR competencies. It was complemented by two bodies of a more consultative nature, the “scientific council” and the “council for academic and student matters”. The 2013 law implemented a change of competencies by focusing the board’s activities on strategic matters and reshaping the two other bodies into two committees (one for research and one for teaching) that together form the “academic council”. This senate-type body now acquired a series of competencies including a focus on staffing matters.

It can be observed that two-thirds of the sample (15 systems) have power localised either in one body (unitary model) only or in one body (either Senate or the Board) while the second entity has a more marginal/limited scope for decision-making (dual asymmetric model) (Table 4). Furthermore, board-type bodies are twice more frequently in a unique or central decision-making capacity than senate-type bodies. There is thus a significant degree of concentration of decision-making capacities in universities across Europe. The next section explores

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<sup>3</sup>A specificity of Austria is that the law defines the rectorate as a collegial governing body on an equal footing with the board/council- and senate-type bodies.

**Table 4** University governance structures<sup>4</sup>

Governing bodies		
System	Senate-type	Board-type
AT	✓	✓
BE-FL	×	✓
CZ	✓	✓
DE-NRW	✓	✓
DK	×	✓
EE	✓	×
FI	✓	✓
HR	✓	✓
HU	✓	✓
IE	✓	×
IS	×	✓
IT	✓	✓
LU	✓	✓
NL <sup>a</sup>	×	✓✓
NO	×	✓
PL	✓	×
PT	×	✓
RS	✓	✓
SE	×	✓
SI	✓	✓
SK	✓	✓
UK <sup>b</sup>	✓	✓

<sup>a</sup>The Dutch model is dual but presents unique characteristics, insofar as it is composed of two board-type bodies

<sup>b</sup>Universities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland can decide on their governance structures freely. Governance models and the operation of governing bodies of universities are guided by the “Higher Education Code of Governance” produced by the Committee of University Chairs. Universities typically have a dual governance structure, with a board/council-type body responsible for all strategic institutional matters and a senate-type body responsible for academic governance

the composition of governing bodies, allowing to assess whether the phenomenon described above has an impact on representativeness and inclusiveness of university governance structures, account taken of the role of regulation and intervention of public authorities in these matters.

<sup>4</sup> The tick marks in bold indicate the “central” governing body in dual asymmetric governance structures.

## Composition of Governing Bodies

### *Size Regulation*

The capacity of universities to populate strategically their governing bodies may be limited in different ways, which can be cumulative: the type of governing body/bodies may be prescribed—still a common feature in most higher education systems of Europe; regulation may apply to the size of the body/bodies; and regulations may apply to the composition of governing bodies.

With regard to the size of the governing bodies, the intervention modalities of public authorities may be of three types:

- “no regulation”: universities are free to decide on the size of their governing bodies;
- “moderate regulation”: public authorities specify either a minimum and/or maximum number of numbers in one or both governing bodies; or stipulate ratios between given groups to be represented in the governing bodies;
- “full regulation”: public authorities specify the exact number of members pertaining to the university governing body.

Where universities may freely decide on the size of their governing bodies, as in England or in North Rhine-Westphalia (for the senate-type body), they generally reflect the size of the institution itself. The systems characterised by “moderate regulation” include systems where the ratio between certain member types is specified and systems that have maximum and/or minimum size provisions. Ratios typically apply to academic staff and/or student representatives. Furthermore, some systems have provisions in terms of minimum and maximum thresholds of certain member types. This includes Poland where it is specified that there should be 50–60% of academic staff and minimum 20% of students. Certain systems have a minimum and/or maximum size of the senate-type body specified in the law. Minimum size is stipulated in Slovakia (min. 15 members), whereas maximum size is particularised in Italy (max. 35 members). Ireland has both minimum (20 members) and maximum (40 members) limits specified in the law. Last, some European systems regulate the size of senate-type bodies tightly by specifying the exact number of each member type. This is notably the case in Luxembourg (29 members), Austria (18 or 26 members), and Hungary (9 members). In the sample, the size of senate-type bodies is subject equally often to “full” or “moderate” regulation (Table 5).

On average composed of about 30 members (in the sample, where regulation on size exists), the senate-type bodies nevertheless show diverse characteristics across Europe. The smallest senate-type body can be observed in Hungary with 9 members. In terms of the upper threshold, one of the largest senate-type bodies is present in Estonia and Ireland with 40 members each. Although not included in the present analysis, Spain is an extreme case with universities allowed to have up to 300 members in their senates. Diversity also characterises the Swiss system, where university senates (that have mostly consultative competencies) range from 25 to around 200 members. Advisory bodies that resemble “senate-type bodies”, but

**Table 5** Size regulation of university governing bodies

Size regulation in governing bodies						
System	Full regulation		Moderate regulation		No regulation	
	Senate	Board	Senate	Board	Senate	Board
AT	✓			✓		
BE-FL				✓		
CZ	✓	✓				
DE-NRW				✓	✓	
DK				✓		
EE	✓					
FI			✓	✓		
HR			✓	✓		
HU	✓	✓				
IE	✓					
IS		✓				
IT			✓	✓		
LU	✓	✓				
NL		✓✓				
NO		✓				
PL			✓			
PT				✓		
RS			✓	✓		
SE		✓				
SI		✓	✓			
SK		✓	✓			
UK					✓	✓

without decision-making power, include considerably more members than the average senate, as is the case in Iceland where there are 90 members in that advisory body. State regulation therefore tends to limit the size of the governing bodies to enhance effective decision-making processes.

University board-type bodies are almost equally often subject to “full” and “moderate” regulation when considering size: either the exact number is specified or both lower and upper limits are imposed. Systems that allow universities to decide freely on the size of their board-type bodies remain the exception. As in England, Flemish universities can decide on the size, with the caveat that there must be 1/3 of external members.

Among those systems that regulate the size of the board-type body, Netherlands has the smallest, with 3–5 members. At the other end, Portuguese universities may have up to 35 board members (with Spain, in par with its large senates, allowing up to 50 members in the board-type body). However, in most cases, the board-type bodies are on average comprised of around 10 members. The governance model must be considered: in unitary structures, the board-type body will tend to be larger than if complemented by a senate-type body.

The analysis reveals further correlations between size regulation of governance models. In “dual asymmetric” models, the same degree of regulation applies to both bodies. In “dual traditional” models, however, the sample splits almost equally among those where the degree of size regulation is similar for both bodies (Italy, Serbia, UK) and those where different degrees of regulation apply (Austria, North Rhine-Westphalia, Slovenia and Slovakia). Unitary governance models consisting of a single senate-type body are always subject to full-size regulation. Unitary models organised around board-type bodies regulate their size either fully or moderately.

Italy provides a recent example of changes in size regulation. Italian universities have dual governance structures with both board- and senate-types of bodies. Both governing bodies have been reduced in size, and there have been changes in their roles and functions with the 2010 law. The board has been reduced from an average of 20 members to a maximum of 11 members while the senate cannot exceed 35 members. Previously, universities could decide on the size but in practice often maintained large governing bodies. The law is seen as having supported improvements in the quality of management, with a more professional, strategy-oriented university board and reduced duplication through a clarification of the respective functions of both governing bodies.

### *Composition Rules of Senate-Type Bodies*

Regulations regarding the composition rules for governing bodies of the European universities are characterised by significant heterogeneity. Certain systems are quite explicit about profiles of members for senate-type and/or board-type bodies; others impose certain restrictions while some provide significant freedom to the universities. Following the typology used for size regulation, we distinguish between “full”, “moderate” and “no regulation”.

While senate-type bodies always include representatives of the academic staff as the largest group, there are different models for other constituencies. On average, the second largest group represented in the senate-type bodies are students (always included), followed by non-academic staff, while very few of the systems include external members in senate-type bodies (Estonia and Ireland, where universities follow unitary governance models, and the UK, where universities may decide on the matter).

Non-academic, i.e. administrative, staff is not represented in the senate-type body in nearly half of the systems of the sample taken up in Table 6. Dual governance structures do not compensate for this; indeed, administrative staff is included in the board-type body only in the case of Slovenia and Slovakia.

The system that imposes the least constraints is the UK where the law does not specify on the membership of the senate. In practice, there are generally academic staff present, students and non-academic staff.

“Moderate” regulation typically applies to student representation in the senate-type body, as in Estonia (minimum 1/5 of student participation) and the Czech Republic (authorised range of 30–50% students).



**Table 6** Groups represented in senate-type bodies

Composition of senate-type bodies				
System	Academic staff	Non-academic staff	Students	External members
AT	✓	✓	✓	×
CZ	✓	×	✓	×
EE <sup>a</sup>	✓	×	✓	✓
FI	✓	✓	✓	×
HR	✓	×	✓	×
HU	✓	✓	✓	×
IEA <sup>a</sup>	✓	✓	✓	✓
IT	✓	✓	✓	×
LU	✓	✓	✓	×
PL <sup>a</sup>	✓	✓	✓	×
RS	✓	×	✓	×
SI	✓	×	✓	×
SK	✓	×	✓	×
UK <sup>b</sup>	✓	✓	✓	✓

<sup>a</sup>unitary senate-based governance models

<sup>b</sup>Not regulated by the law, but present in practice

The rest of the systems clearly specify which member groups need to be included on the senate-type body so that universities only have autonomy in relation to the number of those members. Certain systems, such as Ireland, regulate member composition tightly for each university. However, these parameters differ among Irish universities and are co-created according to the needs and missions of the respective institutions.

### *Composition Rules of Board-Type Bodies*

External stakeholders form a dominant group, present on all board-type bodies covered by the sample. Apart from the UK and two “free” universities in Flanders,<sup>5</sup> all systems specify which types of representatives should be included in the board-type bodies, with little leeway provided to individual institutions. Universities may, in some cases, have the capacity to decide on the extent to which they include external members (which sometimes can, in turn, result in the

<sup>5</sup>Two of the five “statutory” universities are labelled as “free” universities: KU Leuven and Vrije Universiteit Brussel. With respect to autonomy, the free universities only differ from the other universities in that they have greater freedom to decide on the composition and size of their governing boards. The differences between the types of universities are mainly due to historical factors linked to their foundation and their stakeholders.

exclusion of other groups). An example of this can be found in the German state of North Rhine-Westphalia where the law specifies that universities need to have at least 50% of external members while the maximum can be as high as 100%. Students, academic staff and non-academic staff may or may not be included. In some systems, the board-type bodies may include external members only, which can be observed in Austria, the Czech Republic, Netherlands (in the case of the “supervisory” body) and Slovakia. On the opposite end of the spectrum, external members remain a small minority in the university boards of other countries (less than 1/5 in Serbia for instance).

Unitary governance models structured around board-type bodies tend to include all four groups, except for Iceland and Sweden, where regulations do not specifically stipulate the inclusion of non-academic staff in the board (Sweden) or include them in the advisory senate-type body (Iceland).

Aside from the fully external boards listed above, all board-type bodies include at least three out of the four constituencies (Table 7). External members are always present and so is academic staff. Non-academic staff and students are found slightly less frequently (roughly 2/3 of the cases where a board-type body exists).

**Table 7** Composition of board-types at European universities

Composition of board-type bodies				
System	Academic staff	Non-academic staff	Students	External members
AT	×	×	×	✓
BE-FL <sup>a</sup>	✓	✓	✓	✓
CZ	×	×	×	✓
DE-NRW	✓	✓	×	✓
DK <sup>a</sup>	✓	✓	✓	✓
FI	✓	✓	✓	✓
HR	✓	×	✓	✓
HU	✓	✓	×	✓
IS <sup>a</sup>	✓	×	✓	✓
IT	✓	×	✓	✓
LU	✓	×	✓	✓
NL <sup>b</sup>	✓	✓	×	✓
NO <sup>a</sup>	✓	✓	✓	✓
PT <sup>a</sup>	✓	✓	✓	✓
RS	✓	×	✓	✓
SE <sup>a</sup>	✓	×	✓	✓
SI	✓	✓	✓	✓
SK	×	×	×	✓
UK <sup>c</sup>	✓	✓	✓	✓

<sup>a</sup>Unitary board-based governance models

<sup>b</sup>Both “board-type” bodies combined (executive board and supervisory board)

<sup>c</sup>Not regulated by the law, but present in practice

External members are excluded from the university governance in Poland which follows a unitary, senate-based structure. Non-academic staff is fully excluded from university governance structures in the following systems: Czech Republic, Croatia, Slovakia and Serbia, where university governance is “dual traditional”; Sweden and Iceland, with the caveats made above; and Estonia (in the unitary, senate-based model used in four out of six universities).

Students are fully excluded from central governance structures in Dutch universities. Following tensions in 2016, the regulatory framework evolved in 2017, resulting in increased student representation in governing bodies at department/faculty level.

In terms of member participation in the decision-making process, it is important to point out that not all members of the governing bodies have voting rights. It is usually the case that the rectors sit on governing bodies but have no voting rights (as in Croatia), or the head of administration and secretary generals (as in Luxembourg for example), or government officials (as in Flanders). In four systems, certain members on board-type bodies have no right to vote, while in 5 systems there are certain member on the senate-type bodies that cannot vote.

### *Profiles of External Members*

The inclusion of external members in university governance is an important element for accountability purposes, outreach to society and enhanced linkages with other parts of the economy. It plays a role in the ability of universities to develop a strategic profile in an increasingly competitive environment. The Autonomy Scorecard details modes of selection of external members, revealing that the involvement of public authorities in this process remains significant in many higher education systems.

On average, external members account for around 50% of board-type bodies membership (Table 8). Few systems allow universities to fully decide on the type of external members to include—industry/business representatives, NGO representatives, alumni, local/national authorities, academic staff from other universities or representatives of art & culture. The majority either restrict the universities’ ability to determine profiles (6 systems) or give full control to public authorities (9 systems). Some systems that regulate external member participation more closely also sometimes stipulate the requirements/competencies that these members need to possess to qualify for inclusion to the governing bodies. Some of these requirements include previous experience with management, specific knowledge, recognised merit, etc. The law prescribes certain competencies requirements for the external members, although to different extents, in Denmark, Croatia, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Ireland, Luxembourg and Serbia.

The most frequently represented group among external members comes from industry and businesses. Out of 19 systems that have board-type bodies, 17 of them include industry/business representatives. In practice, the share is even higher as

**Table 8** External member distribution in board-types bodies

System	Less than 50% external members	50% and above	100%
AT			✓
BE-FL	✓		
CZ			✓
DE-NRW		✓	
DK		✓	
FI	✓		
HR		✓	
HU		✓	
IS	✓		
IT	✓		
LU		✓	
NL			✓
NO	✓		
PT	✓		
RS	✓		
SE		✓	
SI	✓		
SK			✓
UK		✓	

Denmark and UK do not specify the profiles of external members in university governance, but institutions include them as well. However, at system level, industry and business representatives may not necessarily be the largest group of external members on the governing body. For instance, in Italy, it is more likely to have more government officials as external members on the Board than industry/business representatives.

National and local authorities are the second most represented group in the boards. This might not be a legal requirement but rather a tradition to include a representative of the Ministry of Education (Czech Republic). In Luxembourg, a “government commissioner” is present on the board, without voting rights. Some systems specify what type of public authority is to be present in the governing body (local, regional, national authorities). This is the case, for instance, with Ireland where it is mandatory for some universities to have mayors of the city present in the senate-type body.

The third most represented group of external members includes the academic staff from other universities. There are 14 systems that include this group, among which Sweden, Norway and Luxembourg. Alumni are least often represented but still participate in university governance in 10 systems, including Sweden, Finland and Hungary.

### Governance Models and Inclusiveness

The following chart shows a simplified assessment of the “inclusiveness” of university governance structures across Europe. It does so by exposing the number of different groups included in each governing body, differentiating between academic staff, non-academic staff, students and external members. Unitary systems are given a zero score for the absent governing body. This allows comparing both unitary and dual governance structures simultaneously. A limitation is, nevertheless, the inability of the chart to point to overlaps between governing bodies and full exclusion of certain groups from a given governance structure (as detailed above) (Fig. 1).

The chart shows that unitary systems are on average rather inclusive, with a half including 3 groups and a half including all four groups. Given the small number of unitary senate-based models in the sample, it is not possible to draw conclusions on the relative merits of senate- or board-based unitary models in relation to inclusiveness. Two unitary senate-based models exclude one group—either external members or non-academic staff; three unitary board-based models exclude one group—either students or non-academic staff.

Dual governance models generally have at least three groups represented in each body. However, Eastern European universities are more likely to have more imbalance between the two bodies, and more homogeneous senates (no more than

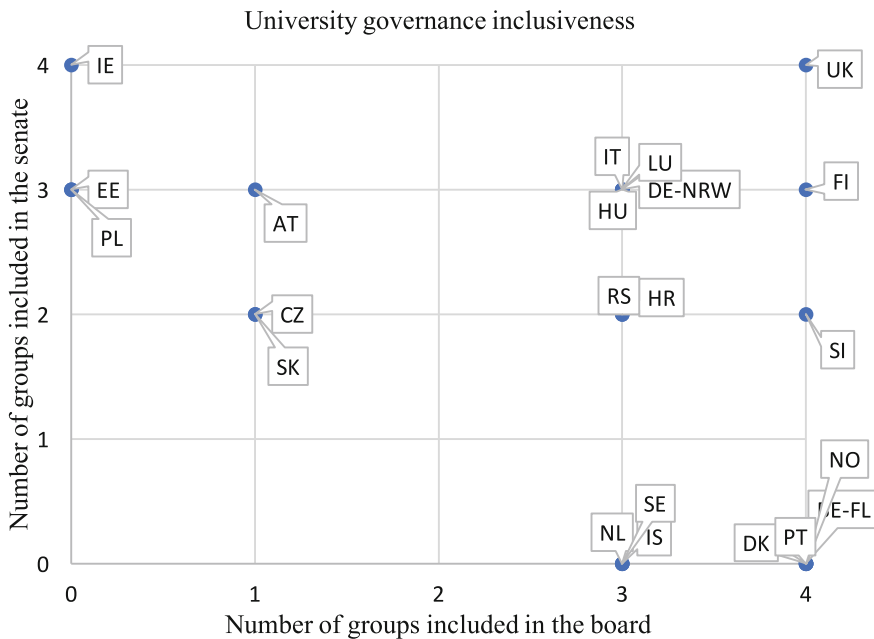


Fig. 1 University governance inclusiveness

two groups represented: academic staff and students). The Czech Republic and Slovakia present special characteristics with a senate in line with the above and a fully external board. Austria also resorts to fully external university boards.

Finally, significant inclusiveness/diversity in governance structures may be achieved through comparatively lower levels of regulation, as in the UK (data for the UK represents common practice as universities enjoy high levels of autonomy in this area).

## Governance Trends

It can be argued that governing modes across European university systems are evolving in the direction of granting board-type bodies more power through different avenues. There are several governance changes and novelties that illustrate this phenomenon. The Estonian system saw two major governance changes in 2012 and 2014 when two out of six universities obtained their own regulatory framework, separate from the general Universities Act. The two universities now have their own acts which they used to form board-type bodies that now not only co-exist with the senate-type bodies but are granted more power share. This means that for these two universities the governance model has changed from unitary to dual-asymmetric model. In the case of the Czech Republic, the Board of Trustees, which previously had no formal powers, now has the competence to approve the university budget, owing to the recent act amendment. In Norway, there have been debates around the modalities of rector selection, with the perspective to entrust boards exclusively with the rector appointment. Norwegian universities are currently able to choose between two models of rector election (via board or via electoral body).

Further governance changes relate to alterations in number and composition of certain governing bodies. In Italy, the number of governing body members has been capped and requirements of certain members have become more regulated. In Austria, a change in composition saw the reduction of what used to be the majority group—full-time professors—to foster the representation of different groups. Changes concern external member regulation as well. In Denmark, the universities now must set up a committee which would nominate external members to the board and in Estonia, external members are to be appointed by the external authority. Sweden is another system that announced a new selection process for the external members.

There is particular evidence of developments in relation to gender equality. In 2014, Austria has made it a legal provision that there be at least 50% of female participation in the governing bodies (rectorate, senate and council). This is part of a larger framework related to the promotion of gender equality in public decision-making bodies in Austria. North Rhine-Westphalia introduced a similar regulation whereby 40% of the council members must be women.

Multiple governance reforms have affected universities' organisational autonomy. Out of 22 systems covered in this study, 12 have undergone (significant) governance changes in the last five years.

The need to increase the efficiency, save resources and minimise the administrative burden seems to have been one of the drivers for governance changes, including the growing number of mergers in several systems.

In several countries, the legal status of universities has changed. Due to the diversity of national legislative frameworks, individual organisational forms are difficult to compare. However, the new status usually offers greater freedom from the state and, in most cases, goes hand in hand with increased participation of external members in the university governing bodies.

Different governance models continue to co-exist, sometimes within the same systems. More systems carry out policy experimentations in the field of organisational autonomy, allowing selected universities to gain greater freedom in re-designing their governance (as in Estonia), testing new appointment models for executive heads (in Norway), or granting more institutions recently developed legal statuses (in Portugal and Sweden).

Recent changes in this field include developments in Estonia, Italy, or Lithuania. In these countries, reflection on the roles and responsibilities of governing bodies brought about the introduction or re-design of board-type bodies in all or some universities of the system. This usually was combined with a more noticeable presence and role of external members in these bodies.

In a majority of European countries, external members participate now in the most important decisions in university governance. In some cases, they have now gained fully equal rights in the board with internal members (as in France). Selection and nomination processes have also been revised to the advantage of the university (Italy, Lithuania and Sweden). The "type" of external members involved in university governing bodies remains an issue in some systems. When they come from public authorities, their involvement may be seen as a way for the state to gain greater influence over internal decision-making processes, thus reducing institutional autonomy, or conversely as a practical way to clear potential subsequent hurdles.

In most Northern European countries, universities can freely select their external members, although in some of these countries, an external authority formally appoints external members who were put forward by the university. In a majority of systems, the government continues to partly or completely control the appointment of external members.

The analysis of the updated Scorecard also shows, importantly, that there is not a single linear progress curve with systems inexorably allowing more autonomy to universities. While there is noticeable progress recorded in the field of organisational autonomy, there are also a series of setbacks, with different kinds of meaning for higher education in general. Although this is an isolated case, developments in Hungary show that there can be direct interventions of the state aimed at re-asserting more control over university activities. In other cases, such as Ireland, it is the continued constrained financial conditions that consolidate a less autonomous

environment for universities over the medium term. Governance is a key factor for universities to perform efficiently and carry out their missions. This includes both a productive relationship with public authorities characterised by an enabling regulatory framework and adequate internal governance models. For the latter, it is essential to achieve the right balance between the necessity to include a broad and diverse university community and the development of structures and processes that support efficient decision-making and, therefore, flexible and responsive management. The overview provided in this paper shows that there is a certain convergence across Europe, despite the existing diversity, to attain this objective.

## Reference

Pruvot, E. B., & Estermann, T. (2017). *University Autonomy in Europe III: The Scorecard 2017*. Brussels: EUA.

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# Interconnected Dimensions of University Autonomy in Europe



**Kata Orosz**

## Introduction

University autonomy is a concept that is difficult to pin down, as its meaning tends to vary across national contexts and over time (Iwinska and Matei n.d.; Pruvot and Estermann 2017; Karran et al. 2017; Nokkala and Bacevic 2014; Piironen 2013; Tapper and Salter 1995; Wright and Ørberg 2008; Yokoyama 2007). Some (e.g., Pruvot and Estermann 2017) define university autonomy as the power of the institution to manage its internal affairs without undue external influence. Karran et al. (2017) consider institutional autonomy to be a dimension of academic freedom, which they describe as the power of faculty and students to teach, research, and contribute to the governance of the university. Others (e.g., Iwinska and Matei n.d.) define university autonomy as a concept that characterizes both the relationship between the university and external actors, as well as the activities that are carried out by university faculty and students. Some studies differentiate between “substantive” and “procedural” autonomy; the first refers to the ability of universities to set goals for themselves, while the latter refers to the ability of universities to decide how they will pursue these goals (Baschung et al. 2011).

While it may not be possible to provide a single definition of university autonomy, there is a consensus in published literature that university autonomy is a multi-dimensional concept (e.g., Aghion et al. 2010; Estermann and Nokkala 2009; Iwinska and Matei n.d.; Oliveira Martins et al. 2009; Volkwein 1986). The numbers and names of dimension vary greatly across published studies. For example, Volkwein (1986) distinguishes only two dimensions of campus autonomy: academic and financial. The European University Association (2017) defines four dimensions of university autonomy: organizational, financial, staffing, and

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academic. Iwinska and Matei (n.d.) describe a total of eight dimensions, based on their review of prior comparative studies of university autonomy: (1) internal governance and organization; (2) curriculum, program design and teaching methods; (3) research and publications; (4) quality assurance and academic standards; (5) student-related issues; (6) staff-related issues (both academic and non-academic university staff); (7) finance and administration; and (8) internationalization-related topics.

When discussing the multiple dimensions of university autonomy, authors have hinted at the existence of interconnections between different dimensions. Karran et al. (2017) created a five-dimensional measure of academic freedom in the 28 EU countries. In calculating the overall score of academic freedom for each country, the authors did not assign different weights to the five dimensions, but rather, they assumed that all five dimensions—institutional autonomy, freedom to teach and research, participation in self-governance, presence of academic tenure, and adherence to international agreements on academic freedom—were equally important for measuring academic freedom. Karran et al. (2017) acknowledge that the “relative importance” of the dimensions may vary but they argue that “individual elements are less important than the fact that they mesh together” (p. 212) and bring up the example of the presence of tenure, which they see as a necessary but not sufficient condition of university self-governance.

The methodological annex of the 2017 EUA scorecard on university autonomy in Europe mentions the “various and intricate connections between the different autonomy areas” (Pruvot and Estermann 2017, p. 64) and stipulates a connection between financial and staffing autonomy, but the authors do not explain what connects these two dimensions conceptually and whether such a connection, in fact, exists in the sample of countries that participated in the EUA survey on autonomy. This paper sets out to address this existing gap in knowledge and to empirically investigate whether different dimensions of university autonomy in Europe are connected. Understanding whether and how different dimensions of university autonomy are connected and how they may influence each other is of paramount interest to policymakers and university leaders, especially in the context of growing public concerns about the declining financial autonomy of European universities (Bothwell 2017; Kováts 2015; Pruvot and Estermann 2017).

## Data and Analytical Approach

This paper uses statistical analyses to empirically test whether different dimensions of university autonomy in European higher education are connected. Specifically, the paper addresses the following research question: Are there relationships between the four dimensions of university autonomy, as defined and operationalized by the European University Association?

The data used in the study comes from the 2017 EUA scorecard (Pruvot and Estermann 2017). The EUA methodology operationalizes university autonomy as

the extent to which public universities are free from “constraint which stems from a legal provision [and] constraints originating from decisions by the ministry or other types of public bodies” (Pruvot and Estermann 2017, p. 11). Autonomy scores in each dimension are based on information from questionnaires and interviews conducted with members of the rectors’ conferences of participating higher education systems, who are asked to assess the legal and ministerial constraints that affect university activities.

The EUA methodology for calculating autonomy scores can be described as criterion-referenced. Karran et al. (2017), who used a methodology like the one developed by EUA in their own study of academic freedom in Europe, describe the benefit of this criterion-referenced approach by emphasizing that it allows researchers to derive “individual scores [for each country], which would show how closely a nation comes to meeting all its commitments” and to track changes in country performance over time (p. 210). The weighted autonomy scores for each country and each dimension are publicly available in the 2017 EUA scorecard as well as on EUA’s University Autonomy in Europe website (<http://www.university-autonomy.eu/>).

The EUA autonomy scores are calculated based on a total of 32 indicators, which are grouped into four dimensions. The scores are calculated using a double system of weighting a country’s score within each of the four dimensions. On the one hand, the EUA methodology weights country scores on individual autonomy indicators through a system of “deductions”. Each country for each of the 32 indicators is, by default, scored at 100% of the scale on which the indicator is measured. (The number of scalar units varies across indicators.) The 100% is interpreted as the total absence of external influence on the institutional activity that is measured by the indicator. Countries get percentage point deductions for each restriction that is placed on the given activity; a value of 0% means that the activity is fully determined externally, without input from the university. Deductions are not uniform: the magnitude of percentage point deduction that corresponds to each type of restriction on the activity was determined by EUA experts. For example, the indicator “Capacity to decide on the overall number of students”—which is one of the indicators that make up the academic autonomy dimension—can take five possible values. One value which stipulates that the overall number of students is the independent decision of universities corresponds to 0-point deduction from the maximum score of 5 that a country can receive on this measure. Two extreme values—one which stipulates that student numbers are “negotiated between universities and an external authority”, and another one which stipulates that student numbers are the “exclusive decision of an external authority” (p. 62)—correspond to 5 points deduction each. The indicator can also take two other values, with restrictions that were perceived to be less restrictive than the two extreme values, which correspond to a deduction of 2 points (or 40% of the default score) each. This system of deductions weights country performance on each indicator based on the perceived severity of the imposition on institutional autonomy that each restriction poses.

In addition, EUA also applies a system of weights to calculate the autonomy scores of each higher education system for each of the four autonomy dimensions. Autonomy scores of a country within a given dimension are indices of the indicators that make up that dimension. Each of the indicators that belong to the same dimension is weighted by the “importance value” of the indicator (Pruvot and Estermann 2017, p. 63), which is the relative importance of the given indicator, as rated by EUA members who participated in the organization’s annual conference in 2010. For example, within the dimension of financial autonomy, any restrictions placed on public universities’ ability to charge tuition fees for non-EU students accounts for 21% of a country’s overall score in the financial autonomy dimension, compared to restrictions placed on the public universities’ ability to borrow money, which accounts for 9% of the financial autonomy score. EUA’s weighting system of deductions and importance values means that legislative or ministerial restrictions placed on certain university activities affect a country’s autonomy scores more than others.

The EUA defines and operationalises four dimensions of university autonomy in Europe: academic, financial, organizational, and staffing autonomy (Pruvot and Estermann 2017). To test whether there are any relationships between each of these four dimensions of university autonomy, I used information on the weighted autonomy scores of 24 European countries that participated in the 2015–2016 EUA survey. Although the 2017 EUA scorecard provides information on a total of 29 higher education systems, I excluded information on higher education systems of sub-national regions from my analysis to keep my analytic sample more homogeneous from a legislative standpoint. The following 24 European countries were included in my analysis: Austria, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom.

I conducted three analytical steps to explore the relationships, if any, between each of the four dimensions of university autonomy, as defined and operationalized by the EUA. First, I plotted autonomy scores and calculated bivariate correlation coefficients of the four dimensions of university autonomy to determine whether there is any indication of a linear relationship between any of the two pairs. In the second step, I conducted ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analyses of all four dimensions combined to test whether the combination of any three dimensions explains the variation in the fourth dimension. Finally, I conducted Fisher’s exact tests to determine whether any of the detected linear relationships between autonomy dimensions are statistically significant. I used STATA 13.0 software for all of the statistical analyses.

## Findings

Descriptive information about the four variables in the analyses—that is, the weighted autonomy scores of the 24 countries that make up the analytic sample—is displayed in Table 1. The statistics show that university autonomy in Europe varies across the four dimensions: on average, European public universities enjoy greater autonomy in terms of staffing decisions (mean = 70.125) and organizational structures (mean = 67.458), than in terms of their finances (mean = 62.458) and control over academic matters (mean = 62.125).

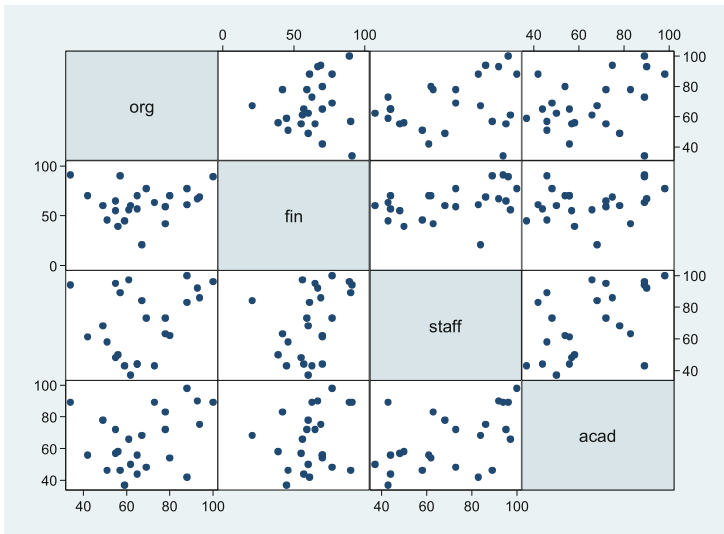
Descriptive statistics also show that, while at least some countries are free of any external influence in terms of organizational structures and staffing decisions (a maximum autonomy score of 100), all of the 24 European countries in the analytic sample have some kind of external limitation in terms of financial and academic matters. Also noteworthy is the fact that none of the countries in the analytic sample exerts full external control over the activities of public universities; the lowest minimum value for university autonomy in any dimension is 21 (on a scale of 0 to 100).

Figure 1 displays each of the four autonomy dimensions plotted against the other three dimensions, in a pairwise manner. The plots do not suggest a clear pattern of linear relationships between the autonomy dimensions, with the exception of staffing and academic autonomy: the plots for these two dimensions display the distinct pattern associated with a positive linear relationship. The calculation of pairwise correlation coefficients paints a picture of a positive linear relationship between each of the four autonomy dimensions, albeit the correlations are small-to-moderate in size. The bivariate correlation coefficients of the pairs, in ascending order: financial and organizational autonomy ( $r = 0.11$ ), financial and academic autonomy ( $r = 0.24$ ), organizational and staffing autonomy ( $r = 0.29$ ), organizational and academic autonomy ( $r = 0.32$ ), financial and staffing autonomy ( $r = 0.40$ ), and staffing and academic autonomy ( $r = 0.50$ ).

Results from the OLS regression analyses are reported in Table 2. The results suggest that the average level of staffing autonomy in the 24 European countries of the analytic sample is explained reasonably well with variation in the autonomy levels in the other three dimensions. In Model 1, variation in organizational, financial, and academic autonomy levels explains one-fourth of the variation in the

**Table 1** Descriptive statistics of the four dimensions of university autonomy

Variable name	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum value	Maximum value
Organizational autonomy	67.458	17.141	34	100
Financial autonomy	62.458	16.626	21	91
Staffing autonomy	70.125	20.970	37	100
Academic autonomy	62.125	18.092	37	98



**Fig. 1** Matrix of pairwise scatterplots of autonomy scores

level of staffing autonomy (adjusted R-squared = 0.25); the result is statistically significant at the 0.05 alpha level ( $F = 0.0308$ ). The beta coefficient for academic autonomy is positive and approaches statistical significance in Model 1. In the “inverse” model—Model 2, in which staffing autonomy is used in combination with financial and organizational autonomy to explain variation in academic autonomy—the coefficient for staffing autonomy is also positive and approaching statistical significance, although the overall model is not statistically significant.

The finding that staffing autonomy and academic autonomy are positively linked is further confirmed by regression analyses in which the two variables were used to predict each other. Results from these analyses show that staffing autonomy explains more than one-fifth of the variation in academic autonomy (adjusted R-squared = 0.22) and vice versa. The results are statistically significant at the 0.05 alpha level ( $F = 0.0120$ ).

There is some indication that financial autonomy may be positively associated with staffing autonomy, but the association is modest—the bivariate correlation is 0.40, the adjusted R-squared of the bivariate regression coefficient is 0.12—and not statistically significant at the conventional alpha level of 0.05. The beta coefficients for financial autonomy and organizational autonomy are negative in the models in which they are used to predict each other (Models 3 and 4), although the results are not statistically significant. Like the results from bivariate correlations, these findings also suggest that there is no evidence of a linear relationship between the financial and organizational dimensions of university autonomy.

In the final analytical step, instead of treating autonomy scores as interval variables, I grouped countries in the analytic sample into categories of high- and

**Table 2** Regression output from analyses of the four dimensions of autonomy

<i>Model 1: Predicting staffing autonomy</i>		
F		0.0308 <sup>a</sup>
Adjusted R-squared		0.2549
Coefficients ( $p > t$ )	Organizational a.	0.168 (0.477)
	Financial a.	0.364 (0.135)
	Academic a.	0.451 (0.059)
<i>Model 2: Predicting academic autonomy</i>		
F		0.0723
Adjusted R-squared		0.1825
Coefficients ( $p > t$ )	Organizational a.	0.201 (0.346)
	Financial a.	0.056 (0.806)
	Staffing a.	0.369 (0.059)
<i>Model 3: Predicting financial autonomy</i>		
F		0.3068
Adjusted R-squared		0.0358
Coefficients ( $p > t$ )	Organizational a.	-0.019 (0.927)
	Academic a.	0.055 (0.806)
	Staffing a.	0.296 (0.135)
<i>Model 4: Predicting organizational autonomy</i>		
F		0.4239
Adjusted R-squared		-0.0032
Coefficients ( $p > t$ )	Financial a.	-0.0217 (0.927)
	Academic a.	0.221 (0.346)
	Staffing a.	0.151 (0.477)

<sup>a</sup>Results that are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

low-autonomy for each dimension. The 2017 EUA scorecard clusters higher education systems by autonomy scores within each dimension. Higher education systems that received a score in the band of 100–81% are rated by the EUA as having high autonomy in the given dimension; systems in the 80–61% band are rated as having medium-high, systems in the 60–41% band as medium-low, and systems with 40% and below as having low level of autonomy in the given dimension (Pruvot and Estermann 2017). The distribution of autonomy scores in each dimension of the 2017 EUA scorecard is clustered around the center: there are only a few countries that are rated as belonging to low autonomy clusters and only a few more that are in the high autonomy clusters. I grouped the countries in the two extreme clusters with countries in the corresponding central clusters for the purposes of my analyses. Therefore, in the discussion of my findings that follows, “countries with high autonomy” refers to countries that were ranked in the high and middle-high clusters of the 2017 EUA scorecard, while “countries with low autonomy” refers to countries that were ranked in the low and middle-low clusters of the 2017 EUA scorecard.

I conducted six sets of Fisher’s exact test to test the statistical significance of the relationships between different dimensions of university autonomy. Fisher’s exact

**Table 3** Results from the analysis of contingency tables of the four autonomy dimensions

Autonomy dimensions	Fisher's exact probability
Organizational and financial	0.675
Organizational and staffing	0.412
Organizational and academic	0.400
Financial and staffing	0.082
Financial and academic	1.000
Staffing and academic	0.027 <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Results that are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

test was developed to be used in the analysis of contingency tables; its use is especially recommended when sample sizes are small (Agresti 1992). The contingency Tables I compiled compared the number of countries with low and high levels of autonomy in one dimension with the number of countries with low and high levels of autonomy in another dimension. Table 3 displays the results from the Fisher's exact test of the six contingency tables. Results from the Fisher's tests indicate that the positive relationship between the dimensions of staffing autonomy and academic autonomy that was identified in the previous analytic steps is statistically significant at the 0.05 alpha level ( $p = 0.027$ ).

## Discussion and Conclusions

The key finding from this study is that the dimensions of financial, organizational, and academic autonomy are not systematically linked to each other in a linear manner in the European context. In the 2017 EUA scorecard, we find examples of countries in which high levels of financial autonomy go hand-in-hand with high levels of organizational autonomy (e.g., the United Kingdom or Estonia); countries in which both organizational and financial autonomy levels are low (e.g., Serbia, Spain); countries in which public universities have low organizational autonomy with high autonomy over finances (e.g., Luxembourg, Slovakia), as well as countries in which institutions have high organizational autonomy with low autonomy over finances (e.g., Norway, Poland).

The lack of evidence of prominent linear relationships between the autonomy levels of European universities in the organizational, financial, and academic dimensions is consistent with empirical evidence on higher education reform worldwide. In studying the introduction of autonomy to Kazakhstan's higher education system, Hartley et al. (2016) found that universities were granted more autonomy in some areas (e.g., curriculum design) and less autonomy in others (e.g., hiring of faculty, keeping surplus). In the case of Hungary, Kováts (2015) found that the passing of the National Higher Education Act of 2011 resulted in the shrinking of university autonomy in the organizational and financial areas, but did not affect the staffing autonomy of universities. These and other studies (e.g., Varghese and Martin 1986.) document how legal frameworks and policies that



regulate public higher education institutions change over time and how legislators and policymakers frequently emphasize increased institutional responsibilities (through granting universities more autonomy) in some areas, while simultaneously maintaining or increasing control in other areas of institutional activity.

The single exception to the overall pattern of no association is the finding that staffing and academic autonomy are significantly positively associated with each other in European higher education. In other words, countries with high levels of staffing autonomy tend to have high levels of academic autonomy, while countries with low levels of staffing autonomy tend to have low levels of academic autonomy. A possible explanation of the moderately, but significantly positive association between staffing autonomy and academic autonomy may be explained by the operationalization of these dimensions by the EUA: the two dimensions are made up by indicators that measure conceptually related items.

Economists of higher education (e.g., Toutkoushian and Paulsen 2016) use the concept of production function to conceptualize the activities of higher education institutions. In this framework, the inputs of the university's production function are the students; the production process involves university employees (faculty and staff), physical facilities and equipment, and the curriculum; and the outputs are the students, "now more learned and developed" (Toutkoushian and Paulsen 2016, p. 301). In the 2017 EUA scorecard, academic autonomy is comprised of seven indicators: (1) capacity to decide on overall student numbers, (2) ability to select students, (3) ability to introduce programs, (4) ability to terminate programs, (5) ability to choose the language of instruction, (6) capacity to select quality assurance mechanisms and providers, and (7) ability to design the content of degree programs. The EUA dimension of staffing autonomy is comprised of four indicators: the ability of universities to decide on (1) the recruitment procedures, (2) the salary, (3) the dismissal, and (4) the promotion of faculty and staff (Pruvot and Estermann 2017).

Mapping the EUA indicators on the conceptual framework of higher education production functions shows that all four indicators of the staffing autonomy dimension, and indicators 3 through 7 of the academic autonomy dimension can be conceptualized as elements of the "production process", whereas the first two indicators of the academic autonomy dimension (which pertain to the number and "quality" of students) can be conceptualized as the "inputs". A possible explanation of the positive relationship between the EUA measures of staffing and academic autonomy could be that they are statically related because both capture information about the same concept—the higher education "production process." Presumably, when policymakers decide that universities should have more (or less) autonomy in *how* they "produce" students, they design policies that affect the entire "production process", from faculty to curriculum and program design, rather than singling out only certain aspects of the "production process."

The hypothesis that the EUA staffing and academic autonomy dimensions are statistically related due to the conceptual similarity of the four staffing autonomy indicators and most of the academic autonomy indicators can be tested by re-grouping all "production process" indicators as a single dimension and treating

the two “input” indicators as a separate dimension. If it is indeed the conceptual similarity that explains the statistical relationship, one would expect that there will be no relationship between the two new dimensions since they would consist of conceptually distinct items.

In conclusion, there is little evidence from the analysis of EUA autonomy scores to suggest that distinct dimensions of university autonomy are systematically linked in European higher education. The statistically significant positive link between academic and staffing autonomy seems to be an artefact of the measurement methodology of the EUA scorecard. However, the finding of no association between different dimensions of university autonomy should not be taken to mean that different configurations of “substantive” autonomy do not have implications for the “procedural” autonomy of European universities (Baschung et al. 2011). For example, universities may have procedural autonomy in how they establish new degree programs, but their substantive autonomy of how many degree programs they can establish will be dependent on whether decisions on the funding for new programs are made internally or externally. A fruitful avenue for future research is to explore the links between substantive and procedural autonomy in European higher education systems.

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# Trust and the Governance of Higher Education: The Introduction of Chancellor System in Hungarian Higher Education



Gergely Kováts

## Introduction: Researching Trust in Higher Education

Since the 1980s, most European higher education systems are in a state of permanent reform. Governments have been launching reform initiatives one after another in funding, governance, quality assurance, study program structure, etc. One of the most important and undervalued factors which affect the success and effectiveness of reform efforts is the level of trust between different actors.

The level of trust is, on the one hand, an important input factor of reform processes because it determines how much we have confidence in the other's competence, goodwill and reliability and how much risk we are ready to take based on the promises made by the other party. At the same time, trust is also an output of reform processes, as experience gained during reforms shapes the level of trust. (Dis)trust is the result of a learning process.

The literature usually emphasizes the benefits of a high level of trust. Different theories provide different explanations. High level of trust reduces the transaction costs of supervision and thus enhance cooperation (institutional economics), increases the predictability of action leading to reduced complexity (system theory), increases the ability to adapt to the changing environment (institutional sociology), and autonomy also requires a certain level of trust (critical management). Trust has been studied extensively in many disciplines closely related to higher education. New Public Management (Bouckaert and Halligan 2008; Rommel and Christiaens 2009; van de Walle 2011; Bouckaert 2012) and business administration (Hurley 2012) are notable examples. The impact of trust on higher education policy and management has drawn less attention. Trow stated already in 1996 that in European higher education "trust is not much discussed because its role in university life is not recognized, or because it is not seen as directly responsible for

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policy and action either by the state or by the institution” (Trow 1996: 312). The situation has not changed much since then, as only a handful of new publications are available currently, mostly from non-European authors. The majority of them focuses on the governance of systems and institutions. For example, Tierney (2006a) provides a case study in a US institution to understand the role of academics in governance. In his study, he contrasts two frameworks to study trust: a cultural framework (built upon a social constructivist paradigm of organisations) and the rational choice framework (based on functionalist views). Tierney argues that “Trust and trustworthiness, then, are necessary but not sufficient criteria for effective academic governance in the twentyfirst century” (Tierney 2006a: 195), but “trust also does not naturally develop in an organization simply because a leader sees its utility. Instead, it needs to be nurtured over time” (Tierney 2006a: 194). In another work, Tierney (2006b) provides other frameworks (“grammars”) to understand trust. He argues that risk-taking is an essential part of being an academics. Universities can fulfil their social roles if their members experiment and innovate, which requires supportive organizational cultures with a high level of trust. Vidovich and Currie (2011) use Tierney’s concepts of trust to analyze changing policy on governance in Australian higher education. They discuss the dynamics of how reforms inspired by new public management, such as the more managerial governance of institutions, can create trust and distrust. While Tierney (2006a) focuses clearly on the institutional level, and Vidovich and Currie (2011) focus on the policy level, in this paper I propose to combine the two approaches by studying how top-down policies affect trust on the institutional level. The introduction of the so-called chancellor system in the Hungarian higher education and its consequences on trust and mistrust will be analysed as a case study. The main research question is whether newly appointed chancellors (responsible for the budget and all the administration in the institution) are trusted by their academic peers, and how the level of trust is influenced by institutional settings and policy measures. In the first part, a short overview is provided about the development of the governance system of Hungarian higher education. The second part describes the position of chancellor and the new dual executive governance system of Hungarian HEIs it brought about. The third part summarizes the factors that influence the decision to trust or not to trust somebody by Hurley (2012). This framework is applied in the analysis of the Hungarian case study in the fourth part. The last section includes the discussion of conclusions and lessons learned.

## **Changing the Governance System in Hungarian Higher Education**

The European higher education has undertaken significant changes over the last 30–40 years. They include a rocky route from elite to mass higher education accompanied by the diversification of institutions and programmes, increased

competition and changing funding patterns. In post-socialist countries, all the reforms started simultaneously after the change of regime in 1989–1990, resulting in a highly unstable and dynamic environment. In Hungary, the pace of change and lack of stability is highlighted by four education laws and over 100 amendments to them in the last 30 years.

The governance of institutions also changed considerably in this period. Similar to the Czech Republic and Poland, the Hungarian higher education system is rooted in the Humboldtian tradition, but in the communist period, Hungary followed the Soviet model (Rüegg and Sadlak 2011). In the 1980s, many characteristics of the Soviet model, especially the lack of institutional autonomy were regularly questioned. Although significant changes took place already before the change of regime, these changes were only truly fulfilled after 1990 when Humboldtian governance traditions were restored. Institutional mergers forced by the government in 1998 reflected a new approach to government policy, focusing on somewhat tighter control, greater accountability and a more frequent application of indirect control mechanism (i.e., competitive student allocation system, performance contracts, boards). The national elections and a change in government in 2010 became a major turning point in higher education policy, as the new government promoted forcefully a more centralized and direct control. The position of the Hungarian higher education decreased in the autonomy scorecard in Europe on three dimensions (organizational, funding and staffing) between 2012 and 2017 (see Table 1).

One notable example was the amendment of the constitution (basic law) in 2013. In 2005, the Constitutional Court of Hungary barred the establishment of governing boards for public universities; a government initiative which would have resulted in the establishment of boards included several external members and had veto power on financial issues. This attempt was declared as unconstitutional because it breached institutional autonomy. To avoid similar opposition, at the initiative of the government, the Constitution (Fundamental Law) was changed in 2013, and now it declares that “Higher education institutions shall be autonomous in terms of the content and the methods of research and teaching; their organisation shall be regulated by an Act. The Government shall, within the framework of an Act, lay down the rules governing the management of public higher education institutions and

**Table 1** Autonomy of Hungarian higher education institutions

	2010			2016		
	Value (%)	Position <sup>a</sup>	Category	Value	Position <sup>a</sup>	Category
Organizational	59	16	Medium-low (3)	56	23	Medium-low (3)
Funding	71	6	Medium-high (2)	39	28	Low (4)
Staffing	66	17	Medium-high (2)	50	22	Medium-low (3)
Academic	47	24	Medium-low (3)	58	16	Medium-low (3)

<sup>a</sup>The number of evaluated countries was 28 (in 2012) and 29 (in 2017)

Source Estermann et al. (2011), and <http://www.university-autonomy.eu/countries/hungary/>

shall supervise their management” (Article X paragraph 3). In 2015, a new type of board (called consistory) was established, with veto power over HEIs strategy and finance. It has five members four of which is appointed by the government. The autonomy and governance of HEIs are also influenced by the introduction of a new position, the chancellor. According to the National Higher Education Act of 2011, chancellors represent the institutions in budgetary issues. Moreover, they are responsible “for the economic, financial, controlling, accounting, employment, legal, management and IT activities of the higher education institution, the asset management of the institution, including the matters of technology, institution utilization, operation, logistics, service, procurement and public procurement, and he directs its operation in this field”. They have veto power on these issues. The chancellor is the employer of all the university personnel, except for academic staff.

The government justified the introduction of the new governance system by citing three arguments. First, the financial position of HEIs weakened significantly after 2010, which was reflected in the increase of their debt. The State Audit Office and the Government Control Office also revealed what they considered several irregularities in Hungarian HEIs (State Audit Office 2015). These facts were presented as signs of incompetent and incapable management. Second, the government considered that bad management was rooted in the inadequate governance structure of HEIs. The rector and the Senate (the main decision-making body of the institution, consisting of academic staff and students) are not competent enough, it was said, on financial and administrative issues. The rector’s accountability is limited because, theoretically, it is the Senate which makes decisions and the rector only executes them. The financial director cannot represent effectively budgetary and regulative interests because his/her position depends on the rector. Third, the government as the maintainer of public HEIs should take more responsibility in stabilizing them and enforce efficient operation and compliance, similarly to the owners of business enterprises.

There are some counterarguments, however, which the government ignored. The deteriorating financial position of institutions overlapped with the significant (cc. 25–30%) reduction of state funding of HEIs (see Berács et al. 2015). For example, the EUA public funding observatory reports that between 2010 and 2013 public funding of higher education in Hungary decreased from 190 billion HUF to 133 billion HUF.<sup>1</sup> Second, the government argued that institutions did not use their autonomy to promote efficient and adequate operation. It is also possible to argue, however, that institutions were not granted enough autonomy because their governance structure was set in stone in rigid and restrictive regulations, and rectors were not empowered and made accountable enough so that they can enforce financial and academic performance. Debts and non-compliant operation can be the result of soft budget constraints and the lack of managerial empowerment.

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.eua.be/publicfundingobservatory>.

## Dual Executive Leadership

The appointment of chancellors resulted in a new leadership configuration where an institution has two interdependent chief executives of equal ranks and with complementary tasks. While the rector is responsible for strategy and academic issues, the chancellor is responsible for the budget and administration.

This dual leadership configuration may appear to be counterintuitive because joint responsibility makes leaders less accountable. The mainstream management theory argues against this idea. For example, Fayol's principle of "unity of command" says that every employee should receive orders from only one superior or on behalf of the superior. There are, however, several historical examples of dual leadership configurations. In the ancient republic of Rome, there were two consuls, and ancient Sparta had two kings. Modern times have also their own examples: Alvarez and Svejnova (2005) identified several business enterprises led by leadership couples or trios. There are other examples in the public sector as well: theatres (Jarvinen et al. 2015), hospitals, museums (de Voogt and Hommes 2007; Antrobus 2011), and schools (Döös 2015) can be managed by leadership couples. So the question is not whether dual executive leadership is possible but what the enabling conditions and critical success factor are.

In the literature, two major streams of argumentation can be found, which explain this leadership configuration. First, sharing power at the top can prevent tyranny and reduce opportunistic behaviour if each leader checks and controls the other's activity. This was the reason of doubling all senior officer positions in the ancient republic of Rome (Sally 2002). Second, power-sharing makes organizations capable of facing increased complexities. This is especially important when organizations face strategic uncertainty and/or internal heterogeneity (Alvarez and Svejnova 2005; Fjellvaer 2010; O'Toole 2002).

Higher education institutions are inherently heterogeneous. As professional bureaucracies (Mintzberg 1991), core tasks are carried out by academic staff who are supported by a large number of administrative staff. The internal heterogeneity (or diversity) of Hungarian HEIs increased in the 2000s. At the beginning of the 1990s, Hungary had a highly fragmented higher education system with many specialised institutions (a heritage of the Soviet system). In 2000, several large comprehensive institutions were created through forced mergers on a wide scale which were followed by other waves of mergers and demergers in the 2010s. The efforts to strengthen the authority of senior management failed, however, which limited the possibilities to streamline institutions and standardize academic and administrative processes. Many institutions that merged into a larger university managed to preserve their own culture, traditions, and structure, usually as separate faculties in the new institution. All in all, internal heterogeneity is high in larger institutions, and it is exacerbated by the growing complexity of academic and administrative regulations. This supports the need for dual executive leadership.

Strategic uncertainty can be defined as the degree of complexity and stability of the environment which influences the definition of goals and the goals-means



**Table 2** Uncertainty of environment in the light of acts on higher education in Hungary

Act on higher education	Number of months in effect until the acceptance of the new act	Number of years in effect until the acceptance of the new act	Total number of amendments	Amendments/ years in effect
1985–1993 <sup>a</sup>	99	8.25	12	1.5
1993–2005	149	12.42	37	3.0
2005–2011	72	6.00	42	7.0
2011	68 <sup>b</sup>	5.67 <sup>b</sup>	43	7.6

<sup>a</sup>This is an act of education which contains the regulation of elementary and higher education

<sup>b</sup>Number of months/years until August 2017

Based on Polónyi (2015)

equation (Alvarez and Svejnova 2005:51). In a complex and unstable environment when institutions depend on several stakeholders, uncertainty is high and institutions should pay attention to many different factors and interests. However, strategic uncertainty will be lower in an environment where institutions depend mostly on one stakeholder. The environment uncertainty has increased in the Hungarian higher education for the last 30 years, which is clearly reflected in the frequent change of legal regulations (See Table 2). The reinforcement of the state control after 2011 and the increasing dependence of institutions on the government make possible the reduction of strategic uncertainty by simply maintaining a good relationship with the government and other authorities. Therefore, introducing the dual executive leadership configuration is less convincing from this perspective. The creation of the position of chancellors, however, can further increase the role of government.

## Decision to Trust: An Analytical Model

Miles and Watkins (2007) identified “the four pillars of effective complementarity,” that are critical success factors of dual executive leadership. These factors are (1) shared vision, (2) common incentives, (3) communication and (4) trust. These factors are strongly interrelated with each other but trust is “the most crucial for a team’s stability.” As Miles and Watkins (2007: 12) argue, “common vision, aligned incentives, and close communication enable purposeful and powerful cooperative action, but they have no value unless team members know that their counterparts can and will further the best interests of the enterprise.” This is because a high level of trust enables cooperation without using cumbersome monitoring processes. On the other hand, low level of trust results in suspicion, caution, and reluctance to cooperate. Hurley (2012) also emphasises the critical role of trust among leadership team members if the task of the team is uncertain, if interdependence among members is high, and member are specialized.

Do academic peers trust the newly appointed chancellors? How are they perceived by their academic colleagues? Hurley's "Decision to Trust Model" provides an excellent analytical framework to study the factors that influence the level of trust towards particular organizational actors (Hurley 2012).

Hurley distinguishes 3 trustor factors and 7 situational factors. Trustor factors are characteristics of those persons who make decisions whether to trust somebody else or not. These factors are risk tolerance, adjustment, and power.

- There is a strong relationship between risk-taking and trust. "By trusting, you make yourself vulnerable to loss" (Hurley 2012: 8). In other words, by trusting, the trustor risks that the trustee will use the opportunity to his/her own advantage. As a result, risk takers are more willing to trust while risk avoiders are less likely to trust.
- Well-adjusted persons have high self-esteem, a realistic view of the world, emotional stability and independence. They are more likely to trust because they have a high level of confidence. Those who are poorly adjusted see the world as a place full of threats, which makes them more suspicious. As a result, "low-adjustment individuals will tend to need more assurance to trust" (Hurley 2012: 47).
- Having the power to punish betrayal can decrease the risk stemming from trusting somebody. People in authority position are more likely to trust. Those without power, however, feel more vulnerable and, therefore, less willing to trust (Table 3).

Situational factors are those contextual factors which influence the relationship between parties. These factors are much easier to influence than trustor factors. Situational factors include the followings:

- Security refers to the level of stakes in the situation. The higher the stakes are, the more difficult to gain trust is.
- "Similarities" refer to the experience that "people tend to more easily trust those who appear similar to them" (Hurley 2012: 30).
- Alignment of interests raises the question whether the trustor has similar interests as the trustees. If similar interests are assumed, then trusting the other party is more likely.
- Benevolent concern: when the trustor thinks that the trustee is willing to put the trustor's interest above the trustee's interest, that is, the trustee is benevolent toward the trustor, trusting decision is more likely. The demonstration of benevolence can increase the level of trust. If we have the perception that the trustee always follows his/her own interest, then we are less likely to trust.
- Capability: the willingness not to break an agreement is not enough to earn trust; the trustor should believe that the trustee is able to successfully fulfil his/her part. Disbelief in the capability of trustees results in less trustful relationships.
- Predictability and integrity raise the question to what extent the trustee is reliable. "Integrity (honouring one's word or practicing what one preaches) increases predictability" (Hurley 2012: 66).

**Table 3** The summary of the decision-to-trust model

Factors		Distrusting characteristic	Trusting characteristic
Trustor factors	Risk tolerance	Low	High
	Adjustment	Low	High
	Power	Low	High
Situational factors	Situational security	Low	High
	Similarities	Few	Many
	Interests	Conflicting	Aligned
	Benevolent concern	Not demonstrated	Demonstrated
	Capability	Low	High
	Predictability/integrity	Low	High
	Communication	Poor	Good

Source Hurley (2012)

- Communication is critical in creating trusting relationships. Hurley thinks that all situational factors (except for situational security) are underpinned by communication because these factors can work through communication. The frequency and openness of communication can counterbalance the lack of other factors while poor communication often leads to “spirals of distrust,” where perceived betrayal further impoverish communication.

While risk tolerance and adjustment are personal traits, power, in my opinion, is closer to situational factors because having the power to retaliate depends on the situation. It is possible, for example, to empower the trustor and provide him/her means to retaliate to gain his/her trust. Therefore, trust can be influenced by manipulating power.

## In Chancellors We Trust?

In this section, four factors—power, similarities, capabilities, and interests—will be analysed to answer the research question, which is whether chancellors are trusted by academic leaders or not. These factors are selected because of two reasons. First, the general institutional setting (e.g., regulations, selection process) has the largest impact on these factors while the other trustor and situational factors are person-specific or institution-specific factors and therefore results are difficult to generalize to the whole higher education sector. Second, studying these factors is supported by the analysis of chancellors’ CVs and data from two anonymous surveys which were conducted in 2015 and 2016 among academic leaders of Hungarian public institutions. Rectors, vice-rectors, deans and vice-deans were asked about their expectations and opinions on chancellors and the chancellor

**Table 4** Response rates of two surveys conducted in 2015 and 2016

	2015			2016		
	Number of respondents	Size of population	Response rate (%)	Number of respondents	Size of population	Response rate (%)
Rector, vice rector	14	86	16.3	19	94	20.2
Dean, vice dean	66	398	16.6	97	396	24.5
Other leader in faculty or central administration	17	41	41.5	–	–	–
Other	13	–	–	10	31	32.3
Not provided	29	–	–	8	–	–
Total	139	525	26.5	134	521	25.7

system. These surveys were not created specifically to test hypotheses regarding trust toward chancellors. Nevertheless, they can provide useful data to test, illustrate or generate hypotheses. The response rate was around 25% in both years (see Table 4).

The results can be considered representative for the type of institutions and the position of respondents. On the other hand, some institutions are overrepresented among respondents, while other (smaller) institutions have no respondents at all. As the experience at the institutional level has a significant impact on the opinion about chancellors, the disproportionate distribution of respondents among institutions might distort results. An additional important caveat is the fact that the completion of questionnaires was voluntary, which could also distort the representativeness of the sample because the questionnaire was more likely to be filled in by those who are emotionally more affected by the chancellor system. Based on the respondents' satisfaction with the chancellor and their agreement with the chancellor system, three major groups of respondents could be identified (Table 5).<sup>2</sup> The “absolute supporters” are satisfied with the chancellor and agree with the major characteristics of the chancellor system. The “opposers” are not satisfied with the chancellor and do not agree with the chancellor system. The third group consists of respondents who are satisfied with their chancellors but do not support the system itself. The proportion of the three major groups in the 2016 surveys can be seen in the following table.

<sup>2</sup>The degree of satisfaction with the chancellor was measured by asking “How satisfied are you with the work of the chancellor in the institution so far?” The attitude towards the chancellor system was captured by aggregating the answers to four questions. Respondents were asked to indicate how much they agree with the following characteristics: (1) institutions are not involved in the selection of chancellors; (2) the rector is not the employer of the chancellor and is not allowed to give him/her instructions; (3) administrative units have to be directed by the chancellor and (4) the employer of all administrative staff is the chancellor.

**Table 5** Satisfaction with the chancellor and agreement with the chancellor system in 2016 (N = 133)

		Satisfaction with the activity of the chancellor			Total (%)
		Supporting (satisfied) (%)	Uncertain/no answer (%)	Opposing (not satisfied) (%)	
Support for the chancellor system	Supporting	12.8	0.0	1.5	14.3
	Uncertain/no answer	6.8	0.0	3.0	9.8
	Opposing	27.8	0.8	47.4	75.9
	Total	47.4	0.8	51.9	100

## Power

Power refers to the trustor's ability to retaliate if the trustee displays an opportunistic behaviour. Most higher education institutions are bottom-heavy organizations (Clark 1983). Academics require a high level of autonomy, and they wish to control many aspects of their own work. The self-governing structure of Hungarian HEIs provided the opportunity for academics to enforce their interests collectively. One of the most important characteristics of the chancellor's position is its independence from academics. Chancellors are selected, appointed and supervised by the government. While chancellors control the administration, they also have veto power on all issues (including academic issues) which affect the budget. The result is an asymmetric relationship with the academic sphere. Although chancellors are required to cooperate with the rector by law and cooperation is necessary to make institutions successful, neither the rector nor the Senate has the power to force the hand of the chancellors directly. On the one hand, this makes chancellors able to represent budgetary and administrative interests effectively. On the other hand, academics have only indirect possibilities to influence chancellors if they perceive that the chancellor acts against the interest of academics. For example, one of the recurring comments in the surveys is that some chancellors use their position for rent-seeking or to provide positions for their favoured ones, that is, they follow opportunistic behaviours. In that case, institutions can turn only to the government, who appoints the chancellors, for conflict resolution. This is not a very powerful way of retaliation for academics and the Senate.

## Similarities

Referring to the social identity theory, Hurley argues that "people with whom we can "identify" or whom we see as similar to us in some fashion have an advantage in gaining our trust" (Hurley 2012: 56). This notion is based on the assumption that involved parties share similar values, visions, and cognitive frames.

**Table 6** The effect of selection from within institutions

		Previous attachment to the institution		
		Yes (the chancellor was the employee of the institution before his/her appointment) (N = 48) (%)	Did not work previously in the institution (N = 78) (%)	Total (N = 126) (%)
Satisfaction with the chancellor's activity	Fully satisfied	25	13	17.5
	Rather satisfied	40	26	31.0
	Rather not satisfied	27	23	24.6
	Not satisfied at all	8	38	27.0
	Total	100	100	100.0

In dual leadership situations having a shared vision and shared values are especially important because in this leadership configuration leaders have to act independently but in harmony with other leaders. Harmonizing goals, values and visions which govern leaders is a time-consuming activity. It is possible to develop mutual understanding while being in a position of power, but it is a quite risky strategy. During the selection of chancellors (and rectors), the quality and quantity of shared experience and similar socialization should be considered to increase the chance of developing a trustful relationship between the two leaders. In Hungary, HEIs do not have the right to participate in the selection process formally. Chancellors were selected by the Ministry of Human Capacities, and they are appointed by the Prime Minister.

The possibility of having a shared vision is also influenced by the demonstrated knowledge about higher education sector. If chancellors know the sector well, they might have a much clear conception of what makes an institution excellent. The analysis of the C.V.s of chancellors appointed in 2014 and early 2015 showed that only 12 chancellors out of 29 had previous experience with the sector, and 14 chancellors had not (there was no information available in the case of 3 chancellors). Not knowing the culture of higher education weakens the trust towards them, and it might affect the perception of their capability as well.

In light of these arguments, it is not surprising that chancellors who worked in the institution before their appointment are perceived more trustworthy, and academic leaders are more satisfied with their performance. In Table (6), it can be seen that academic leaders working with chancellors appointed from within higher education are more satisfied (65%) than those leaders who work with chancellors appointed from outside the sector (39%).

## Alignment of Interests

Alignment of interests focuses on the question whether interests of the trustor and the trustee are conflicting or not. The magnitude of the conflict of interests and the chancellor's demonstrated action against his/her putative self-interest (benevolence) can influence the level of trust towards him/her. Chancellors are in an "in-between" position because they are appointed by the government to represent governmental interests, on one hand, but they also have to promote institutional interests to have a successful organization, on the other. Therefore, they have to balance different interests and mediate between the government and the institution. They have to demonstrate loyalty towards two parties. Incentive structures are key in this situation. Chancellors have a strong relationship with the ministry. They had to report to the ministry every month (rectors were not involved), and the ministry evaluated their performance yearly. The evaluation criteria were not known which provided fertile ground for gossips about the hidden agenda of chancellors. In addition, there were complaints that rectors felt neglected. 2017 was the first year when the rector and the chancellor had to submit a yearly report together but institutions are still not involved in the selection of chancellors.

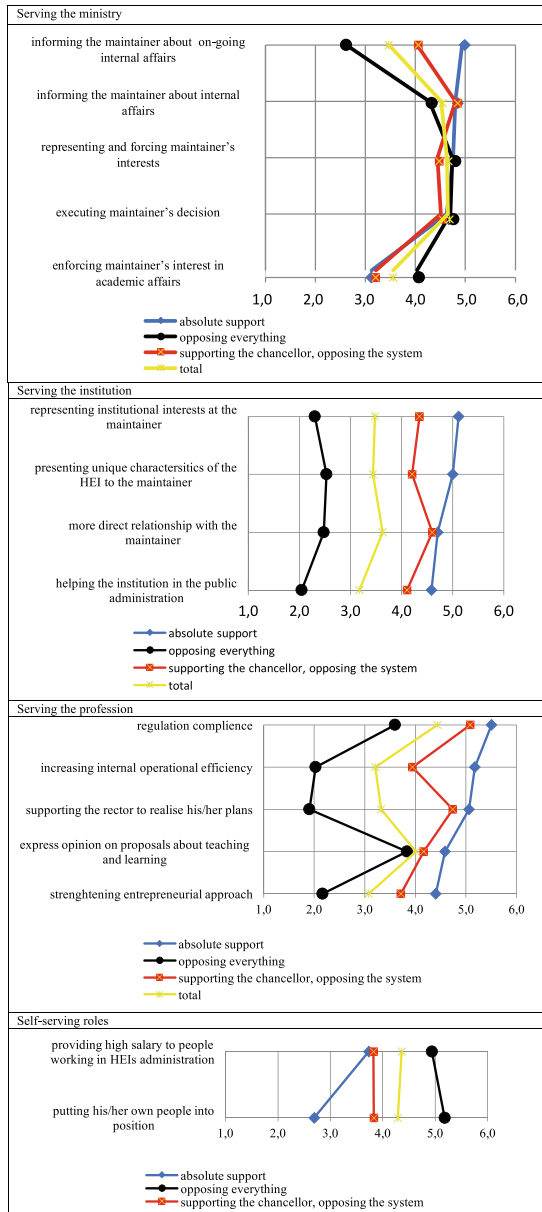
The perception of chancellors can also be influenced by their previous commitments. The analysis of CV's showed that 9 out of 29 chancellors appointed until early 2015 had strong links to the governing party: they were either members of the parliament, a local government body, or fulfilled senior leadership positions in (local) governments before their appointment.

The surveys also produced interesting results regarding how the chancellors' role is perceived. Respondents evaluated the desirability and the realization of different behaviours in a 6-point-scale, where 1 means that the given behaviour is not typical at all, and 6 means that it is very typical. Behaviours could be grouped into four broad categories (they were shown to respondents in a mixed order):

- Institutional roles, where the chancellor represents the interest of the institution, such as "presenting unique characteristics of the HEI to the maintainer" or "helping the institution in the public administration."
- Maintainer roles, where the chancellor represents the interest of the ministry such as "informing the maintainer about on-going internal affairs" or "executing maintainer's decision."
- Expert roles where chancellors represent the interest of the profession such as "strengthening entrepreneurial approach" or "ensures compliance with regulations."
- Self-serving roles where chancellors represent their own interest, e.g., to enlarge their power base.

While the desirability of roles does not differ significantly among respondent groups, the realization of roles is perceived differently (Fig. 1).

**Fig. 1** The perception of the realization of behaviours/roles



Those respondents who are satisfied with their chancellor and support the chancellor system in general (absolute supporters) see their chancellor to fulfil all roles simultaneously, that is, chancellors are able to balance institutional, ministerial and professional expectations successfully. Those who are not satisfied with the chancellor and do not support the chancellor system (“oppose everything”) see



chancellors differently: while they think that chancellors serve the interest of the ministry similar to the absolute supporters, their perception of serving the interest of the institution differs considerably. In other words, this group of respondents sees chancellors more as an agent of the ministry (government) and less as a leader representing and promoting the interest of the institution. This pattern is similar to those groups of respondents who are satisfied with their chancellor but do not support the chancellor system.

### Capabilities

Capabilities describe to what extent chancellors are perceived as being able to perform expected tasks successfully. In the survey, respondents were asked to evaluate several competencies of their chancellors on a 6-point scale (1 means they are not competent at all, while 6 means they are fully competent.) (Fig. 2).

Respondents satisfied with the chancellor see them more competent in almost every aspect than those who are not satisfied with them. The evaluation of ‘political network’ is remarkable. Satisfied respondents think that chancellors are less competent in building/having political networks than in other competencies. That suggests that chancellors act as professionals and not as political actors. Those who are less satisfied think that chancellors perform somewhat better in building political networks than in most other competencies.

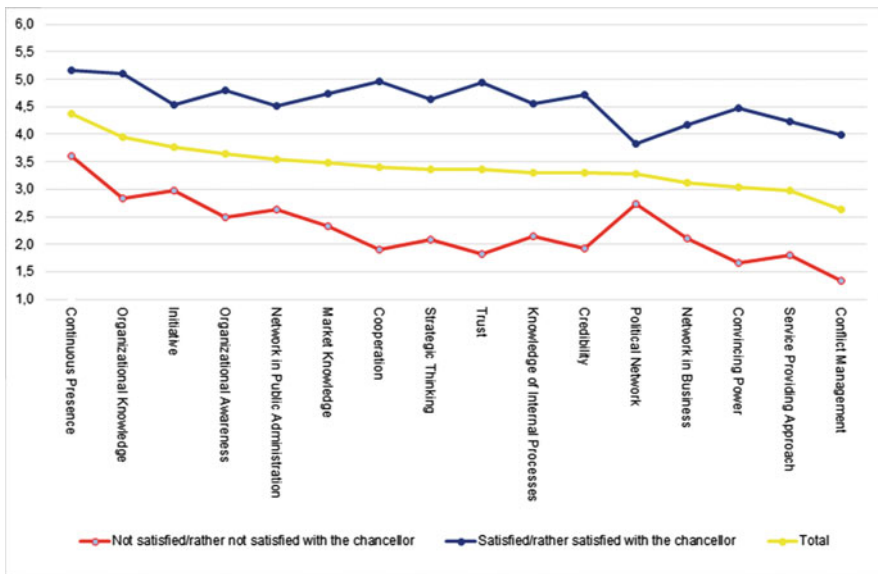


Fig. 2 Perception of chancellors’ competence by different groups of respondents

## Summary and Discussions

Survey results suggest that, in general, there is a strong mistrust towards chancellors. Most respondents are quite critical of the chancellor system, and half of the respondents are not satisfied with the chancellor. They usually perceive chancellors as less competent administrators who act as political agents of the government. This picture is true in the majority of institutions. In most institutions, results are mixed or show a high level of dissatisfaction with the chancellors. In some institutions, however, respondents are more satisfied with their chancellor (who usually comes from within), even if they are still quite critical of the chancellor system itself.

Although the decision-to-trust-model would explain this mistrust by the unfavourable trustor and situational factors, the direction of casualty between the level of trust and situational factors is not clear. Do academics mistrust chancellors because they perceive them as incompetent (as the decision-to-trust-model suggests)? Alternatively, do academics see them incompetent because they mistrust them? The problem is that it is not only the trustor or the trustee who controls the situation but this is also shaped by external actors whose (previous) activities can create hopes, fears, and expectations which affect how the trustee is perceived. For example, it is interesting to see how strong the relationship is between the satisfaction with the chancellor/chancellor system and the perception of the trustfulness of government officials (Table 7).

Even a competent, benevolent and reliable chancellor will face mistrust at the beginning of his/her career if academic leaders had become suspicious previously. Chancellors have to overcome this legitimacy deficit by working consciously on improving situational factors. They should demonstrate predictability, integrity, benevolence, and competence by, for example, having a very transparent decision-making process in which key academic partners are involved, their opinion is

**Table 7** The relationship between trust in government and satisfaction with the chancellor/chancellor system

		To what extent do you trust the promises and statements of the leaders of the Ministry of Human Capacities?				
		No or rather no (%)	Undecided (%)	Yes or rather yes (%)	No answer (%)	Total (%)
Satisfaction with the chancellor and the chancellor system	Absolute support	24	6	65	6	100
	Opposing everything	86	5	10		100
	Supporting the chancellor, opposing the system	43	14	41	3	100
	Total	60	7	31	2	100

considered. It is not just the result of the decision what matters but also the fairness and transparency of the process. Developing a personal connection with the rector (and with other academic leaders) helps the development of shared visions. For example, sharing rooms and/or having a shared secretary with the rector is a possible way to increase the richness and frequency of informal conversations.

There are other possibilities to increase trust toward chancellors. By involving institutions in the selection of chancellors, HEIs have more means to balance asymmetric power relationships and to retaliate opportunistic behaviour. It also helps to select candidates who share values, vision with the rector (similarity). This creates better conditions for a good working relationship between the two executives which is crucial for the performance of institutions. In Germany, for example, where the chancellor position also exists, although it is differently defined, all major stakeholders are involved in the selection of chancellors (Table 8).

An alternative (but less favourable) strategy to involvement is to make the selection process more transparent to institutions. In that case, creating low-risk mechanisms for institutions to voice their concerns regarding the activity of the chancellor (e.g., regular meeting with rectors, etc.) is also important to counter-balance asymmetrical power relations. To earn academics' trust, chancellors should be positioned as autonomous experts who are part of the institutional management team rather than government controlled agents. This is what happened in Germany. As Blümel observed: "In contrast to the formerly widespread model of monocratic leadership, in which the formal status of the Kanzler was characterized by a somewhat ambivalent position working aside the rector, the leadership-team model now compulsory prescribes the administrative head as member of the university-leadership team" (Blümel 2016: 11). As a result, the chancellor "formerly mediating between the university and the state (...) was subsequently transformed into a functional member within an expanded university leadership." (Blümel 2016: 18) All processes which focus exclusively on chancellors increase suspicion towards them because it put emphasis on persons rather than teams. The lesson is that even if an issue clearly belongs to the competence of the chancellor, the institution should be addressed and not the chancellor. The chancellors should not report to the ministry alone but together with the rector (or with the consent of the rector) as they are both responsible for the performance of the institution. If chancellors are evaluated alone (apart from the rector), the evaluation criteria should be transparent to all parties.

Trust also depends on perceived competencies and the knowledge of the higher education industry. In Hungary, there are in-house trainings exclusively for chancellors, but training academic leaders and chancellors together would be a great opportunity to help the development of shared visions and values and to strengthen communication between them.

Finally, the chancellor system was introduced in Hungary when institutions were under huge financial pressures decreasing their situational security. That factor can be improved by more generous funding of institutions, which in turn would reduce resource allocation conflicts.

**Table 8** Stakeholders' involvement in the selection of chancellors in Germany and in Hungary

State	Recommend	Elect, Confirm, Consent	Appoint	Employer
Baden-Württemberg	Special committee narrows a list with the consent of the minister Rector recommends among them	Board + Senate choose together from the narrowed list	Not known	Minister (can delegate the right)
Bavaria	Board	–	Rector (State confirms)	Rector
Berlin	Special committee (Curatorium, dominated by the State)	–	State	State
Brandenburg	–	–	Rector	Rector
Bremen, Hesse	Rector	Senate	Rector	Rector
Hamburg	Rector	Board	State	State
Lower Saxony	Rector (Board express opinion)	Senate	State	State
Mecklenburg-Vorpommern	Rector	Committee (Konzil) consisting of university citizens	State	State
North Rhine-Westphalia	–	The united committee of the Senate and the Board with the consent of the rector	State	State
Rhineland-Palatinate	Board	–	Rector (State confirms)	Minister (can delegate the right)
Saarland	Rector	Senate	State	State
Saxony	Rector (Senate express opinion)	Board consent is required	State	State
Saxony-Anhalt	Senate	–	State	Minister (can delegate to the rector)
Schleswig-Holstein	Rector (at least two persons)	Senate	State	State
Thuringia	Rector	Senate (with the consent of the minister)	Board	Rector
Hungary	–	State	State (prime minister)	Minister

Source based on the Higher Education Laws of German states as of 2015. The compilation is made by Péter Nagy

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# Performance Agreements in Higher Education: A New Approach to Higher Education Funding



Ben Jongbloed, Frans Kaiser, Frans van Vught and Don F. Westerheijden

## Introduction: Higher Education System Governance in Transition

The allocation of public funding to higher education has been increasingly subject to debates and change in recent decades. The changes have often been linked to changing beliefs and conceptions about how the public sector should be steered and managed. The backdrop to this was the New Public Management (NPM) approach to governing public organizations (Ferlie et al. 1996) which argues that the public sector should be addressed with similar management tools as the private sector.

Under NPM, the predominant steering approach in European higher education systems has emphasized decentralization, with higher education institutions (HEIs) enjoying a large autonomy and receiving a lump sum budget from their funding authorities. To a large extent, HEIs are autonomous in areas such as the provision of educational programmes, managing their research portfolio, their human resources and their asset and property portfolio. This governance approach may be characterized as “state supervision steering” (Van Vught 1989). The government limits itself to a restricted number of “framework steering” elements: setting the tuition fees and distributing student financial support; organizing quality assurance of

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education and research and determining whether new education providers and new degree programmes qualify for public funding.

Barr and Crawford (2005) argue that “the days of central planning have gone”, stating that a mass higher education system requires differentiation and a greater reliance on markets. In their view, the government’s role is to act as a facilitator. The idea is that more institutional autonomy will produce higher levels of quality, diversity and efficiency because a more diverse set of HEIs will better respond to student demands and societal needs. The competition and search for prestige by HEIs will produce better educational and research performance and more distinct educational and research profiles. However, the question is whether more autonomy combined with more market-based approaches will indeed produce more diversity and better performance.

In light of the latter question, concern has been expressed about this governance model that stresses autonomy and decentralisation. Criticism was targeted at how quality assurance and accreditation were shaped, with some arguing that accreditation was too inward-looking, carrying too few incentives to enhance quality and achieve excellence. In addition, there were concerns about HEIs becoming increasingly identical in their race for academic reputation. And yet, others were pointing at tendencies such as fragmentation, duplication and diseconomies of scale resulting from marketization.

The attention for the less-desirable effects of marketization has contributed to the emergence of new forms of accountability and new interventionist policies. An example is the reshaping of accreditation and quality assurance mechanisms, directing them more towards students’ achieved learning outcomes. A related example is the introduction of information tools that try to make higher education more transparent. A third example—very much in line with the NPM approach—is to influence HEIs’ behaviour by concluding contracts between the public authority and each HEI to guarantee that the services expected from the HEI and their quality will be delivered. In another contribution to this volume (Jongbloed et al. 2018) these examples are discussed from the point of view of transparency and accountability in higher education.

In this chapter, we will analyse performance contracts as a way to combine institutional autonomy with new forms of steering and accountability. Performance contracts, and its related concept of performance-based funding imply a new approach to steering, with a contract model replacing state supervision. The contracts are “individualised” agreements, embedded in a clear accountability context, that allow governments to steer on specific societal targets. This may be understood as the next stage in NPM. Performance-based funding (PBF) is a frequently cited example of a new regulatory policy instrument. While some may interpret it as governments moving away from input-steering and preventing intrusion into the HEIs’ internal affairs, PBF schemes may also be seen as a means to allow governments to force universities into certain desired directions. This raises questions about the impact of PBF and performance contracts on institutional behaviour. Does performance steering matter for the performance of a national higher education system? Will it stimulate HEIs towards behaviour that is better aligned with



national goals? And do performance-based approaches have any unintended effects, e.g. a return to forms of bureaucratic oversight?

In the next section, we will present some characteristics of PBF systems in several OECD countries. We then (in Sect. 3) move on to the Netherlands where an experiment with performance agreements was concluded recently. The outcomes of the Dutch performance agreements in terms of their impact on performance and diversity are discussed in Sects. 4 and 5. Section 6 presents some lessons that can be drawn from the Dutch experiment and formulates some overall conclusions on performance agreements.

## **Funding Mechanisms in Higher Education: The Move Towards Performance Agreements**

Models for public funding of HEIs vary across countries/jurisdictions. Most countries employ funding formulas that link the core (recurrent) grant that an HEI receives from its funding authority (a ministry or funding council) to input indicators such as student enrolments (Jongbloed and Vossensteyn 2016). In recent years, many countries have introduced measures of performance in the funding arrangements. PBF was introduced in the belief that it would steer HEIs' behaviour towards producing higher levels of performance, quality and efficiency. In a recent overview of performance indicators included in funding formulas of OECD countries (see De Boer et al. 2015), it is illustrated what the activities are where governments want HEIs to perform better on:

- Number of Bachelor and Master degrees: Austria, Denmark, Finland, Netherlands, Germany, United States (e.g. Tennessee)
- Number of exams passed or credits earned by students: Austria, Denmark, Finland, US (e.g. Tennessee, Louisiana, South Carolina)
- Number of students from underrepresented groups: Australia, Ireland, Germany, US (e.g. Tennessee)
- Study duration: Austria, Denmark, the Netherlands, US (Tennessee)
- Number of doctoral degrees: Australia, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Netherlands
- Research output (e.g. research quality, impact, productivity): Australia, Denmark, Finland, Hong Kong, United Kingdom
- Research council grants won: Australia, Finland, Germany, Hong Kong, Ireland, Scotland, US (e.g. Tennessee)
- External income (i.e. non-core revenues): Australia, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Hong Kong
- Revenues from knowledge transfer: Australia, Austria, Scotland

Obviously, what exactly is understood as performance varies across higher education systems, as well as between subsectors of the higher education system (e.g. research universities versus universities of applied sciences), depending on the challenges and ambitions of the country.

What are the characteristics of performance contracts (or performance agreements)? For one thing, they are *ex-ante* funding. Formula-based funding arrangements are backward looking, with indicators in the formula referring to the recent past (*ex-post funding*). In performance *contracts*, funds are based on a bilateral agreement between the funding authority and the HEI that includes performances that an institution promises to deliver in the (near) *future* and the budget that the HEI will receive in return for this. In this case, the HEI's budget is (partly) based on a specification of its goals for the future (*ex-ante funding*).

In performance contracts (or performance agreements), each HEI is invited by the funding authorities to specify its ambitions. The agreement usually includes a financial penalty or sanction of some sort if objectives are not achieved.

A performance contract seeks to redress the one-size-fits-all nature of formula-based funding that rewards all HEIs on the basis of the same formula and the same indicators. With performance agreements, there is more room for HEIs to have additional aspects of their performance reflected and connected to financial rewards. Performance agreements can handle situations where HEIs have multiple objectives and—within nationally-set boundaries—can set their own target levels, given their particular mission and strengths. A funding agency or independent committee usually oversee the drawing up of the agreements to guarantee that agreements are in line with national objectives and monitor progress during the contract period.

Table 1 shows the characteristics of the performance agreements in place in several countries.

The performance agreement in some countries is not always directly linked to (a separate portion of) the budget (see middle column). For example, in Australia, entering into a performance contract—a *compact*—is one of the quality and accountability requirements that a university must meet as a condition for receiving a grant.

The middle column of the table illustrates that performance agreements are not only meant to strengthen performance but also have aims like encouraging HEIs to strategically position themselves (institutional profiling), improving the strategic dialogue between the government and HEIs, or informing policy-makers and the public at large about HEIs' performance, thus improving accountability and transparency.

The share of the HEIs' public recurrent grant that is based on performance (see Table 1) is difficult to determine exactly because both the funding agreement and the formula often mix input and output elements. For instance, in the Netherlands, the performance agreements constitute on average 7% of a university's teaching grant, whereas 20% of the (separate) formula-based teaching allocation is based on

**Table 1** Performance agreements across the World

Country	Name of the Performance agreement and year of introduction	How is agreement linked to budget?	Period (in years)	% of budget for education and research based on performance (agreement and formula-based funds combined)
Australia	Mission-based compacts (2011)	Agreement is a condition for receiving public funding and is an accountability instrument	3	20% (includes performance-based formula funds)
Austria	<i>Leistungsvereinbarungen</i> (2007)	Budget linked indirectly (after negotiation) to agreed indicator targets	3	Close to 100%
Canada (Ontario)	Strategic Mandate Agreements (2014)	Budget not linked to agreement but meant to strengthen institutional differentiation and strategic dialogue	3	Around 2% of operating grant
Denmark	<i>Udviklingskontrakter/</i> Development Contracts (2000)	No direct link to funding. Is a Letter of Intent and an outcome of dialogue with ministry	3	60% (including funds based on students' credits and research performance)
Finland	Performance Contracts (1994)	Agreement is linked to 25% of public funding (the strategic component); remainder (75%) is indicator-driven	4	Between 75% and 100% (includes performance-based formula funds)
Germany (e.g. North-Rhine Westfalia))	<i>Ziel- und Leistungsvereinbarungen</i> (around 2002)	No link to budget, but meant as a negotiation and accountability device	2	Between 25% and 55% (includes performance-based formula funds)
Hong Kong	Academic Development Plans (2005)	Links the Performance and Role-related funding (10% of public funds) to an agreed Acad. Dev't Plan, based on institution's mission	3	Around 25% (includes performance-based formula funds)
Ireland	Institutional Performance Compacts (2012)	Compact determines 0.8% of funds, but mostly meant to strengthen strategic dialogue with funding authorities	3	0,8%

(continued)

Country	Name of the Performance agreement and year of introduction	How is agreement linked to budget?	Period (in years)	% of budget for education and research based on performance (agreement and formula-based funds combined)
Netherlands	Performance Agreements (2012)	Determines 7% of an institution's education budget and meant to enhance institutional differentiation	4	27% - 32% (includes performance-based formula funds)
Scotland	Outcome Agreements (2012)	Non-compliance with agreement has various consequences (also financial)	3	85% (includes performance-based formula funds, e.g. through REF)
United States (e.g. Louisiana)	Performance Agreements (2011)	If targets and underlying story are judged as sufficient the institution qualifies for rewards (performance funds; more financial autonomy)	6	25% (includes performance-based formula funds for education)

degrees, and another 40% of the (separate) research allocation is also based on degrees. Thus, on average, a quarter (for universities) to a third (for universities of applied sciences) of funds is based on performance measures.

The benefits of a diversified higher education system are well-recognised, and performance agreements are expected to help achieve this goal in, e.g., Austria, Ireland, Germany, Finland and the Netherlands. The broader set of objectives and indicators facilitated by the performance agreements are expected to promote institutional diversity. Performance agreements may prevent one of the risks of formula funding, namely that all HEIs respond to the formula's indicators in the same way, which would result in more homogeneity instead of more diversity in the system (Codling and Meek 2006; Van Vught 2008).

## Performance Agreements in the Netherlands

The Netherlands has a binary higher education system, which means there are two types of programmes: research-oriented education, traditionally offered by research universities, and professional higher education, offered by universities of applied

sciences (UASs). University and UAS programmes differ not only in focus but also in access requirements, length and degree nomenclature.

There are eighteen research universities in the Netherlands, including one Open University, and 36 UASs. The UASs have a more regional function and focus in particular on their education mission, although in recent years they also began to strengthen their practice-based research, partly thanks to dedicated public funds for research and research-oriented staff positions.

In 2009, an independent expert committee (the Committee on the Future Sustainability of the Higher Education System, also known as the Veerman Committee) was tasked by the Minister of Education to advise about system performance and diversity in Dutch higher education. The Veerman Committee concluded that, overall, the quality of the education provided is in good order and that the binary structure should be maintained. However, at the same time, it perceived many risks for the future. It called for a threefold differentiation in higher education (Veerman et al. 2010):

- 1 differentiation in institutional types (meaning: universities versus UASs)
- 2 differentiation among institutions of the same type (i.e. institutions distinguishing their own profile)
- 3 differentiation in the range of programmes offered.

The third dimension points at the need for a more tailored approach and smooth transfers between programmes at different levels, to enable students to successfully complete their studies. The Committee stated that student dropout was too high and completion too low. It also opined that some students' talents were not properly addressed and there was too little flexibility in the system to serve the various needs of students and the labour market. Especially the large difference between the success rates of "ethnic minority" and "native Dutch" students was considered to be problematic.

Increasing diversity was regarded as an important part of the solution and, partly as a result of the recommendations of the Veerman Committee, performance agreements were introduced in 2012. The agreements were signed between the Education Ministry and each individual HEI and formulated in terms of quantitative indicators and qualitative ambitions, with ambition levels chosen by the institutions themselves. The agreements intended to encourage and reward performance in terms of the following goals:

- Improving the quality of education and the success rate of students in universities and universities of applied sciences;
- Enhancing differentiation within and between HEIs, encouraging them to exhibit distinct education profiles and more focused research areas (including the creation of Centres of Expertise by UASs);
- Strengthening the valorisation function in universities and UASs (i.e. knowledge dissemination, commercialization, promoting entrepreneurship).

For the period 2012–2016, 7% of the core grant for education (some €130 million for the research universities and €170 million for the UAS sector) was tied to performance agreements. The remainder of the core grant of HEIs continued to be based primarily on a funding formula that, already since the early 1990s, included a significant performance orientation. An independent *Review Committee* was installed by the Minister of Education in 2011 to oversee the performance agreements, to develop criteria for assessing them, to monitor each institution's progress in realizing its ambitions during the contract period, and, at the end of the period (i.e. in 2016), to make a recommendation to the Minister about whether the goals in the agreement had been met. If an HEI did not achieve its agreed goals, it risked losing part of the core grant for subsequent years. The performance agreements arrangement was set up as a policy experiment. Depending on an external evaluation, performance agreements could be continued (perhaps after some adaptations) and be included in the legal arrangements determining the funding of HEIs.

## **Enhancing Study Success Through Performance Agreements**

At the start of the performance agreements process, the HEIs jointly agreed to use seven mandatory indicators measuring their ambitions with respect to student success and educational quality. Two indicators, completion rates and dropout rates, received the most attention in the annual monitoring and, eventually, in the final conclusion of the performance agreements. Ambitions with respect to differentiation and institutional profiling were stated in more qualitative terms, relating to topics such as starting new degree programmes and phasing out old ones, introducing student mentoring programmes, setting up research centres, engaging in partnerships with local business, et cetera.

In 2016, the agreements came to an end. The Review Committee assessed each institution's performance in the light of its performance agreement, based on information presented to the Review Committee through the institutions' annual reports and meetings with the institutional governing boards.

The Review Committee published a summary of the results of the performance agreements in its 2016 Annual Monitoring Report (Review Committee 2017a). The Committee concluded that many research universities had achieved substantial success in reducing dropout and increasing completion rates. The average completion rates in universities had risen from 60 to 74%, and dropout rates declined from 17 to 15%. In professional higher education (i.e. the UASs), major efforts had been undertaken to achieve the targets set in the performance agreements; nonetheless, some of the UASs had failed in their attempts to improve completion. The average completion rate in UASs fell from 70 to 67%. However, dropout was pushed back slightly, from 27 to 25.6%.

The disappointing results in the UAS sector regarding student completion can be attributed partly to the trade-offs between access, quality, and completion. These trade-offs manifested themselves in particular in the large UASs that have a highly diverse student population. Being confronted with the accreditation agency's requirement to set more stringent academic standards, the UASs saw themselves facing more challenges than they had expected at the start of the performance agreements experiment. At the conclusion of the experiment, many UASs argued that they had prioritised quality over completion and, in addition, felt a need to stick to their institutional mission of facilitating access, also to students who, from an academic point of view, may be less academically prepared than other students.

The Review Committee had to advise the Minister that six UASs had not fully achieved their targets, despite all their efforts. The Minister decided to impose a financial penalty on these six institutions. However, she decided to apply only half the envisaged penalty in appreciation of their efforts.

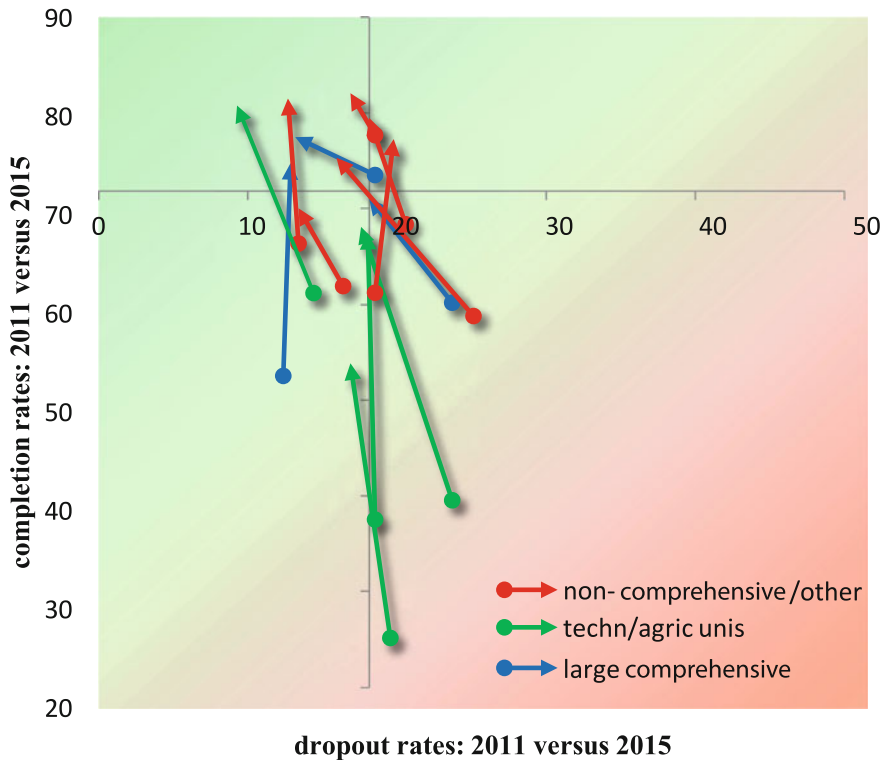
In Fig. 1 (for the 13 research universities we have data for) and Fig. 2 (for 36 UASs), we show the results for two key performance indicators: completion rate (on the vertical axis) and dropout rate (on the horizontal axis). Definitions are as follows:

- completion rate: the proportion of full-time Bachelor's students who, after the first year of study, re-enrol at the same HEI and earn a Bachelor's degree at that same HEI in the standard time to degree plus one year;
- dropout rate: the proportion of the total number of full-time Bachelor's students (only first-year HE students) who, after their first year, are no longer enrolled in the same HEI.

During 2012–2016, most universities (Fig. 1) achieved higher completion rates and lower dropout rates, though some showed higher completion with slightly higher dropout. In the UAS sector (Fig. 2), the dominant movement is towards lower completion and higher dropout. The opposite movement also occurs but only for a few UASs. To show the scores of individual HEIs better, we used colour codes for various types of HEIs. Type is primarily determined by the student cohort size of new entrants and the scope of programmes offered.

The average completion rates in universities have risen considerably. The sharpest rise can be observed among the technical research universities (green; see Fig. 1): from on average of 42% to 68% in 2015. At most research universities, the 2015 completion rates equalled or exceeded the ambition set for 2015. At two of the four universities that fell short, the 2015 completion rates were close to the target values.

In the UAS sector, the average completion rate fell from approximately 70% to 67%. Large differences between the UASs can be observed in this respect (cf. Fig. 2). For example, among the large UASs in the largest cities of the Netherlands (the blue arrows in Fig. 2), the average completion rates over 2015 (55%) were not only substantially lower vis-à-vis 2012 (63%) but also in many cases showed a persistent downward trend, which only recently had appeared to take a turn for the



**Fig. 1** Completion rate and dropout; initial situation (year 2011) and realisation (year 2015); research universities

better. At thirteen UASs, completion rates in 2015 were significantly lower than in 2011 whereas they had formulated ambitions to reach higher rates.

Around the conclusion of the performance agreements (during the second half of 2016), most attention in the popular press and among relevant stakeholders in higher education was given to the indicators shown in Figs. 1 and 2. This was only natural because the financial sanctions attached to the performance agreements were very much tied to whether an institution had met its agreed ambition levels on the seven mandatory indicators, among which completion and dropout proved most challenging.

In particular, challenges were big for UASs that wished to serve a large variety of students. Compared to universities, UAS institutions have a much more challenging and heterogeneous student population, with many “ethnic minority” students or students holding a vocational education and training (VET) degree. For UASs in the large cities, the proportion of incoming “ethnic minority” students averages 26%.



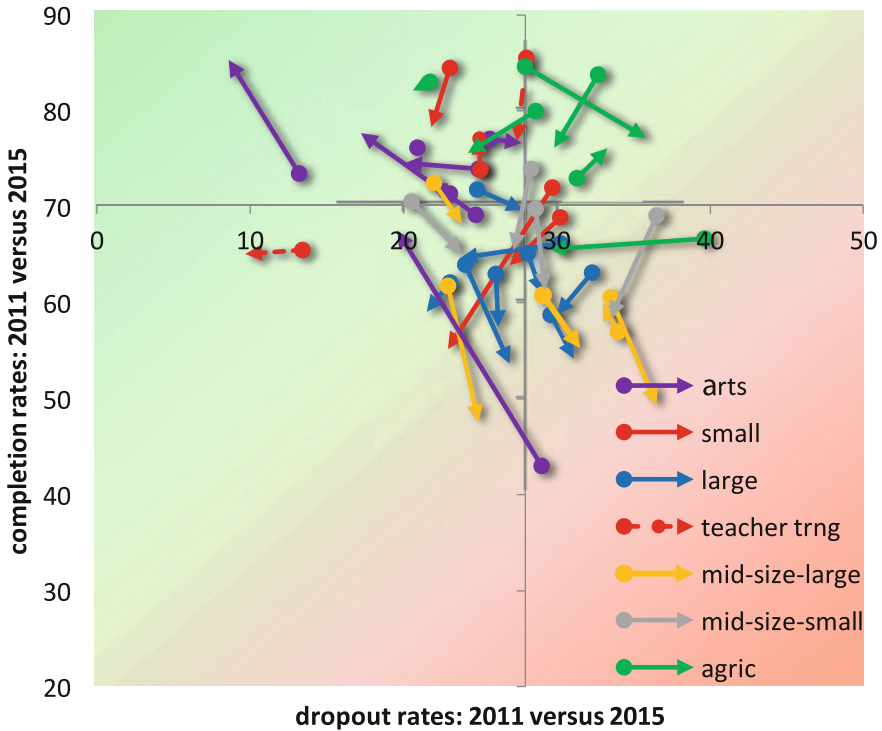


Fig. 2 Completion rate and dropout; initial situation (year 2011) and realisation (year 2015); universities of applied sciences

### Encouraging Diversity in Dutch Higher Education Through Performance Agreements

The performance agreements aimed to create a higher education system “fit for the future”, offering increased quality and diversity. Recognising that a one-size-fits-all approach tends to create uniform reactions, performance agreements were seen as the way to create more diversity. Diversity is a prominent theme in higher education (Birnbbaum 1983; Marginson 2017) and science and technology policy (Nowotny et al. 2001). It is seen as a means to enhancing rigour and creativity, offering flexibility in the face of uncertain future progress and promoting learning across programmes (Stirling 2007).

While five-sevenths of the budget tied to the performance agreements depended on seven mandatory indicators, the remainder (two-sevenths) was awarded to HEIs in the form of competitive funds. This was known as the *selective budget* and it was awarded in proportion to the quality of an HEI’s plans for programme differentiation and research concentration. HEIs that submitted the best plans according to the Review Committee received relatively more than other HEIs.

The concept of diversity is difficult to grasp because diversity is naturally multidimensional and its nature is essentially qualitative—making it subjective and susceptible for criticism. In its annual monitoring reports and its assessment of the individual performance agreements, the Review Committee operationalised diversity through the range of programmes offered by individual HEIs (e.g. two-year Associate degrees, Bachelor’s degrees, Master’s degrees, broad-based bachelor programmes, two-year research master’s, selective honours programmes, professional Master’s programmes offered by UASs) and by the disciplines covered by their research.

To assess aspects of diversity, the Review Committee analysed three partly overlapping features of an HEI’s profile: (1) the range of programmes offered by an HEI, to see whether it is broadening the scope of its programmes and covering more or fewer disciplinary areas, (2) whether an HEI focuses on particular programmes within its programme range, and (3) the market share of the programmes provided by the HEI. The Review Committee looked at a number of diversity indicators to analyse (de-)differentiation over the period of the performance agreements. Sophisticated diversity measures were computed (see Review Committee 2017a for more on this topic), including the Herfindahl index—often used to measure concentration in a market on the basis of the institution’s market share. Another diversity indicator is the Gini inequality index, indicating the balance of an institution’s student intake across its programmes.

In this chapter, we must limit ourselves to the question whether HEIs differ in terms of their emphasis on particular disciplinary areas—both in their education and in their research activity (see Review Committee 2017a for analyses of other aspects). To analyse this, the Review Committee used information on student intake across the institution’s respective degree programmes, respectively the dispersion of research publications across the 250 sub-disciplines that can be distinguished in the world of science.

The Review Committee noted that, from 2006 onwards, student intake in the majority of research universities became increasingly even across the Bachelor’s programmes on offer and that this trend largely continued during the period of the performance agreements (Review Committee 2017a). This was even stronger the case among Master’s programmes. The Review Committee interpreted this as a tendency towards less focus in education. Also in the UAS sector, over time, the distribution of students across Bachelor’s programmes became more even, showing no indication of a focus on particular education areas. However, in Master’s programmes in the UAS sector, more institutions appeared to develop more clearly visible focus areas during the period of the performance agreements.

On the *research* side of higher education institutions, the performance agreements aimed at the promotion of focus areas (research concentration is the English term; “focus and mass” is the Dutch term). Since research in the UAS sector is still a rather small part of UASs’ activities, robust judgements can only be made for the research universities. To achieve the goal of research concentration, the performance agreements included many initiatives related to (inter-institutional and intra-institutional) collaboration, selective professorial appointments and internal

reallocations of research capacity and resources. It obviously takes time for such initiatives to be reflected in research publications or other research outputs. Nevertheless, the Review Committee has sought to monitor the development of focus areas in research by analysing the distribution of the scientific publications per university across the various sub-disciplines; an unbalanced distribution across disciplines indicating research concentration.

The Gini index that was used for this analysis indicated that over time, research publications were spread more equally across disciplines. This proved to be the case, in particular, for the four technical universities. The Review Committee interpreted this as a decline in the number of focus areas in universities and as showing a decline in the diversity of the Dutch university research system. For each university, the committee witnessed an increase in the number of sub-disciplines covered by the research publications. The differences between the various categories of universities (e.g. comprehensive versus technical universities) appeared to diminish. This suggests a decrease in differences between university research profiles. However, the Review Committee found it difficult to attribute these tendencies to the performance agreements alone as they already started to manifest themselves much earlier.

Initiatives by HEIs to enhance differentiation and diversity cannot be evaluated only in terms of programme offerings or research publications. Therefore, the Review Committee also analysed non-quantitative differentiation initiatives. Based on its conversations with HEIs and a study of their annual reports, the Committee concluded that HEIs had undertaken substantial efforts for institutional profiling in the areas of education, research, and knowledge valorisation, but that their impact was not yet visible in terms of its diversity indicators.

## **Reflection: Lessons from the Dutch Performance Agreement Experiment**

The question whether performance agreements actually have made a difference is a very complex one. Before we try answering it for the Dutch performance agreements, we turn briefly to some of the results and experiences that may be found in other countries.

According to the OECD (2017), evidence from several OECD countries has shown that performance agreements:

- are not solely meant to strengthen performance but also have aims such as encouraging HEIs to strategically position themselves, given their particular mission and strengths
- can handle situations where HEIs have multiple objectives (education, research, innovation, entrepreneurship) and—within some nationally-set boundaries—can set their own targets;
- improve the strategic dialogue between the government and the HEIs

- help inform policy-makers and the public at large about the HEIs' performance, thus improving accountability and transparency
- can be used to promote horizontal collaboration between different actors.

The evidence also points at the following lessons for an effective design of this type of agreements:

- Performance agreements are taken more seriously by all parties and have greater impact if financial consequences are attached. They should include a mechanism to reward “overachievement” and not just be focused on budget cuts as a result of failure to meet indicator-based targets.
- The nature of financial incentives must be carefully chosen. The budget linked to the agreements must be sufficiently large to have an impact, yet not so sizeable to the extent that the incentive becomes a goal in itself or could lead to perverse effects.
- Agreements must primarily pertain to goals and results. The indicators related to the targets should meet the requirements of validity, relevance, and reliability. Organisation-specific performance indicators can sometimes limit the scope for horizontal collaboration, with HEIs focusing solely on meeting the performance targets assigned to them.

Overlooking the outcomes of the performance agreements experiment in the Netherlands, the general conclusion must be that the results in terms of the two overall objectives are mixed. In the previous sections, we showed that degree completion in the research universities significantly improved while the UAS sector experienced difficulties in achieving its ambitions regarding degree completion. In terms of the second key objective, increasing diversity in terms of degree programmes and more distinct education and research profiles, results again are mixed. In terms of programme diversity, there is no clear sign of institutional differentiation: most institutions exhibit a more equal distribution of activity over their degree programmes. On the research side, we notice a clear tendency towards decreasing differences among universities, giving no indication of increased research concentration.

Although the results in terms of their general objectives are mixed, the public reactions have been largely positive. Leading newspapers reported the substantial increases in educational quality, student satisfaction and completion rates; employer organisations applauded the results of the experiment, and some politicians argued that the results show that performance agreements are a very effective steering instrument. The evaluations that were undertaken by three different committees also were largely positive. The Review Committee produced its own evaluation (Review Committee 2017b). The association of UAS institutions also produced an evaluation (Slob et al. 2017). Finally, the Minister of Education ordered an independent committee (the Committee Van de Donk) to evaluate the experiment and make recommendations for a future system of performance agreements (Evaluatiecommissie Prestatiebepoosting Hoger Onderwijs 2017).

The three committees agreed on many issues. They concluded that the performance agreements (PAs) had contributed to the following outcomes:

- Putting improvement of study success more prominently on the institutions' agendas
- Intensification of the debate about drivers of study success (both among and within HEIs)
- More attention for profiling (differentiation, focus areas) of HEIs
- Improvement of the dialogue between stakeholders in higher education (executive boards of HEIs, Ministry, department heads, associations of HEIs, Review Committee, representatives of business and community)
- Increased transparency and accountability, thanks to the setting of targets and the use of indicators
- Appreciation of the possibility for HEIs to share their "story behind the numbers" with the Review Committee, especially in meetings with the Committee.

The associations of the universities and the UASs and the national student organisations were more critical. Their concerns regarded:

- Decline of the HEIs' autonomy, due to setting national targets and prescribing uniform indicators
- Additional bureaucracy due to the emphasis on uniform indicators
- The financial penalty for not achieving goals
- Choice and definition of the seven core indicators, which in some cases contributed to unintended effects
- Lack of time available for a well-considered construction of the rules surrounding the experiment
- The fact that the experiment was managed largely by stakeholders that are quite distant from the "shop floor level" (executive boards, managers, ministry, national committees and organisations), with a small role only for students in this process.

In the three evaluations of the performance agreements and in the political follow-up discussion, the need to incorporate a performance-oriented component in the funding mechanism for HEIs was reaffirmed. Already earlier, the Minister of Education had expressed her intention to continue with some form of performance agreements but was keen to stress that the agreements should ultimately be about the quality of higher education and that quantitative targets regarding study success should not receive priority over qualitative ones. The future agreements will, therefore, have the label "Quality Agreements". There still is no clarity about potential financial sanctions tied to future quality agreements. The associations of HEIs showed little enthusiasm for financial sanctions. However, the Review Committee in its evaluation (Review Committee 2017b) concluded that attaching financial consequences to agreements fosters effectiveness. It argued that both the international literature and the Dutch experiment have shown that agreements are taken more seriously by all the parties and have greater impact if financial consequences are at stake for each individual higher education institution.

Despite concerns expressed by associations of universities and students, there is political support for connecting budgets to the quality agreements. Most likely,

there will be some form of rewarding (but not punishing) HEIs for meeting self-stated ambitions about quality and differentiation. The fact that those ambitions are to be agreed in close dialogue with the HEIs' relevant (local) stakeholders implies that the agreements will lose more of their New Public Management character and develop more into a steering instrument that fits the Network Governance and Public Value Management paradigms (Stoker 2006; Vossensteyn and Westerheijden 2016).

Whether performance agreements matter for the performance of higher education is a question that cannot be answered on the basis of the Dutch experiment with performance agreements alone. Causality is difficult to prove. First of all, because the experiment was integrated in a larger policy framework with connections to other policy instruments and policy domains. Second, one needs to be aware of the fact that national policies and their associated incentives have to trickle down from the ministry (i.e. system level) to the HEI and, then, the level of the student or the academic (say teacher, researcher) to have an effect. The individual HEI and its specific characteristics is an important intermediate layer where many intervening (either obstructing or facilitating) factors are located (Jongbloed and Vossensteyn 2016). And, thirdly, one needs to understand the concept of performance much better (de Boer et al. 2015); it is a multi-dimensional concept and highly subjective for that matter.

Despite these methodological concerns, the effectiveness of the Dutch experiment can be judged favourably, and many of the positive results that performance agreements had in other countries (OECD 2017) can also be found in the Dutch system. The Dutch performance agreements are an experiment on the way towards finding an effective design for funding mechanisms and their associated incentive structure. While we have perhaps not definitely answered the crucial question "Do Performance Agreements Matter for Performance?" we have summed up some of the evidence that may be used to inform the design of future funding mechanisms.

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# Policy Learning in Higher Education and Universities' Governance. A Case Study of the 2008–2016 Policy Cycle in Romania



Adrian Curaj and Cosmin Holeab

## Introduction

The governance principles and policies of the Romanian HEIs are shaped by a policy learning cycle that is most decisively described by three major policy initiatives at national level between 2008 and 2016:

- The broadly participative systemic foresight exercise carried between 2008 and 2011 (the Romanian Foresight Exercise in Higher Education—RFHE), that delivered a Strategic Vision for the Romanian HE system in 2025, emphasizing on *personalised learning*, *transparency*, and *diversification* of HEIs mission and governance (Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding 2011).
- The Law of Education published in 2011, setting the frame for the classification of universities and study programs' ranking; the first cycle—the institutional evaluation of 70 Romanian universities undertaken by the Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) of the European University Association (EUA) between 2012 and 2014; the system evaluation report provided ten priorities for Romanian HE system and HEIs (with 30 recommendations), based on the 70 institutional evaluation reports.
- The request of the Romanian ministry of education (provided as a recommendation by the Directorate General for Higher Education) that all universities should publish updated institutional strategies during 2016.

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The first major systemic intervention—the national foresight exercise—aimed at *strategic capacity building* within HEIs (apart from policy deliverables which are not relevant for the analytical arguments of this paper); the second—the institutional evaluation of 70 HEIs—identified common *challenges* and proposed recommendations for further institutional and strategic development of the HEIs; the third initiative is not a systemic intervention but relevant here as a milestone in assessing the impact of the foresight exercise and of the institutional evaluation at HEIs level, allowing a substantiation of the current governance features of Romanian HEIs.

## The Policy Learning Cycle in the Romanian Higher Education System

### *The Romanian Foresight Exercise in Higher Education*

Implemented between 2008 and 2011 by the Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding (UEFISCDI),<sup>1</sup> the RFHE—the first national foresight exercise for the Romanian higher education—focused on systemic decision making and building consensus amongst various players in the system setting out to ensure the necessary systemic perspective and the desired freedom to rethink Romanian higher education. Considering its scope, the RFHE had an obviously close connection with the policy-making process but also went further in the area of epistemic communities by developing a knowledge-based network of experts and stakeholders in higher education that have been involved along the foresight process.

In order to outline the immediate impact (and long-term *expected* impact) of the RFHE on strategic capacity building at HEIs level, we should first explain the design and functions of RFHE as a systemic foresight exercise.

According to the FOR-Learn online guide, typical objectives of foresight exercises include: *informing policy-making; building networks; developing capabilities, including foresight culture; building strategic visions and creating a shared sense of commitment to these visions among foresight participants* (DG-JRC 2008). Da Costa et al. articulate six main functions of foresight for policy-making, namely: *informing policy; facilitating policy implementation (by building a common awareness and new networks); embedding participation in policy-making; supporting policy definition; reconfiguring the policy system (i.e. to address long-term challenges); and a symbolic function—indicating to the public that policy is based on rational information* (Da Costa et al. 2008).

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<sup>1</sup>[www.uefiscdi.gov.ro](http://www.uefiscdi.gov.ro), [www.forhe.ro](http://www.forhe.ro)

*Supporting policy definition* through foresight [the scope of the RFHE] involves “jointly translating outcomes from the collective process into specific options for policy definition and implementation” according to Da Costa et al. (2008, p. 369). Therefore, the development of an inward (in terms of manageable within the project) epistemic community at national level was the condition for the RFHE to capitalize the collective outcomes. For that matter, based on various collaborative instruments ranging from expert panels to scenario building workshops and online consultations and debates, around 10,000 stakeholders and experts took part in the foresight process i.e. the process of refining the policy options that have been provided by the strategic vision for 2025 and the White Paper (Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding, 2011).

Although the (strategic and policy) learning cycle at institutional level is rather gradual due to certain systemic factors, such as the fact that foresight exercises are exploratory in scope and even when normative their results do not include detailed articulations (Miles et al. 2002), or that stocktaking is moderate as the stakeholders involved in the foresight exercise carry a smaller responsibility compared to the decision-makers, the consultation exercise of the RFHE contributed to the development of a policy community (Curaj et al. 2010).

Aside from enabling this epistemic/policy community in Romania during the foresight exercise, in terms of developing a *foresight/strategic planning culture*, we ascertain that, given the broad participation of HEIs representatives in the process, the impact of the fully-fledged RFHE (largely participative and policy-oriented) consists in developing strategic capabilities at the institutional level—not only at systemic level.

Moreover, the RFHE had an explicit focus on building strategic institutional capacities implementing measures such as developing (and training HEIs decision makers) a Blueprint for Organizing Foresight in Universities<sup>2</sup> and enabling the FOR-Wiki sustainable international foresight community with Romanian stakeholders participation.<sup>3</sup>

We argue that, given the design and subsequent outcomes of the RFHE, strengthening strategic capacity building at HEIs level is the landmark of a policy learning cycle that should translate into enhanced and more articulated governance principles and policies in Romanian HEIs.

For further research and understanding of the mechanisms of facilitating capacity building at institutional level, we consider relevant to add here that the RFHE also underlines the need to consider the cognitive and epistemic challenges in the system approach, given not only the complexity and permeability of the higher education system but also the large variety of perspectives from different stakeholders accommodated in the participatory exercise. (Andreescu et al. 2012)

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<sup>2</sup><https://tinyurl.com/ya3jouru>.

<sup>3</sup>[http://www.forwiki.ro/wiki/Main\\_Page](http://www.forwiki.ro/wiki/Main_Page).

## *The Institutional Evaluation of 70 Romanian Universities*

Following the strategic initiative of the Romanian Ministry of National Education in 2011 of grouping 90 universities into three classification bands (*advanced research and teaching universities, teaching and scientific research universities—including teaching and artistic/creative universities, and teaching and learning universities*), an independent international evaluation of 70 universities was carried out by the Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP), a quality assurance agency listed in the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) and an independent membership service of the European University Association (EUA), with the support of UEFISCDI.

The IEP has conducted similar coordinated evaluations in the past (in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Catalonia, Ireland, and Slovakia) but by its scale, the Romanian exercise was the foremost in the history of IEP. The ambitious evaluation exercise was carried out successfully by extensively expanding the IEP expert pool and improving the quality processes of the IEP secretariat in order to ensure consistency of judgement across the evaluation reports.

During and concluding the evaluation process, EUA and UEFISCDI published the two rounds evaluation reports for each university and a final aggregated evaluation report aiming at identifying common challenges and propose strategic recommendations for the Romanian HEIs.

The key findings arising from the 70 evaluation reports were addressing HEIs long-term strategic capacity, quality assurance and systemic architecture:

- *Despite the high commitment of senior leaders and academic and administrative staff to their institutions, the long-term strategic capacity of institutions is limited by the narrow scope of their autonomy, constant legislative change and financial uncertainties.*
- *The detailed regulatory framework and the way that the national quality assurance process is carried out reinforce institutional isomorphism across the sector, particularly because these aspects are combined with a strong tendency toward academic inbreeding and limited internationalisation in a number of universities.*
- *The higher education system in Romania is characterised by its fragmentation due to the existence of many small institutions, a pervasive lack of institutional cooperation and a variance in the sustainability and quality of the institutions.*

The final report set out 30 recommendations out of which some are addressed to the HEIs and others to national authorities. These recommendations have been grouped under ten thematic priorities (nine addressing HEIs and systemic governance and one addressing central governance exclusively): *stimulate institutional change, secure sustainable funding, invest in people, assure quality, promote student access and success, shift to student-centred learning, increase research capacity, engage with society, internationalise, rethink the higher education landscape* (Sursock 2014).

The request of the Romanian ministry of education that all universities should publish (updated) institutional strategies during 2016 was, certainly, a top-down initiative aimed at boosting the strategic focus of HEIs. The revised strategic plans allow us to carry an in-depth semantic analysis attempting to reveal the current governance principles of Romanian HEIs in the context of the policy learning cycle described earlier.

## **A Semantic Analysis for Understanding the Policy Learning Cycle and HEIs Governance Principles**

In order to see the outcomes of the above-mentioned systemic measures in terms of strategic capacity building at HEIs level, to mark the policy learning cycle in the Romanian higher education system, and to profile the governance principles of Romanian HEIs, we analysed the redesigned institutional strategies of Romanian universities in relation to the strategic vision for the Romanian HE system (published in 2011) and the systemic evaluation report (published in 2014).

### ***Research Methodology and Tools***

The analysis was carried through a bibliometric method based on blending semantic and network analysis that enables the combined operation of complex parametric and non-parametric models, such as structural and loose semantic algorithms together with mathematical and statistical algorithms for dynamic visualisation of data.

In order to perform the semantic analysis, we used the open-source semantic software Tropes (ACETIC and CYBERLEX 2002).

The theory that the software is based on is integrating two theoretical work models: *propositional discourse analysis* (Ghiglione et al. 1995) and *predicative propositional analysis* (Kintsch and Dijk 1978). This analytic approach derives from the need to identify the *cognitive unit* for primary information processing and the *syntactic unit* to allow “clipping” the discourse. The minimal unit that meets both requirements is the *sentence*. In regard to content analysis, the theory is based on the fact that the sentence is exposing microworlds more or less articulated among each other, more or less completed. Therefrom *actors* (*actants* and *acted on*) appear, highlighted by acts (predicates) as being embodied by the argumentative strategies and the constraints that are constitutional to the linguistic system. The number of *references* (microworlds) that evolve around a topic depends on a number of central objects referred to as *nodal references*, which are the structural elements of the given semantic universe. Finally, a logical model for the construction of discourse is implemented in order to mark out the *cause-consequence*

facilitating the identification of the node that is generating the references, which plays an essential role in shaping and analysing the discourse (Ghiglione et al. 1995; Caragea and Curaj 2013).

The main outputs of Tropes relevant for the bibliometric analysis presented in this paper consist in matrixes of references (central topics containing mainly user-defined keywords) with directional cause-consequence relations depending on the relative positions of each reference in a sentence and the references co-occurrences. These outputs can be further processed with network analysis tools. For that matter, we used another open-source software for network analysis—Gephi.

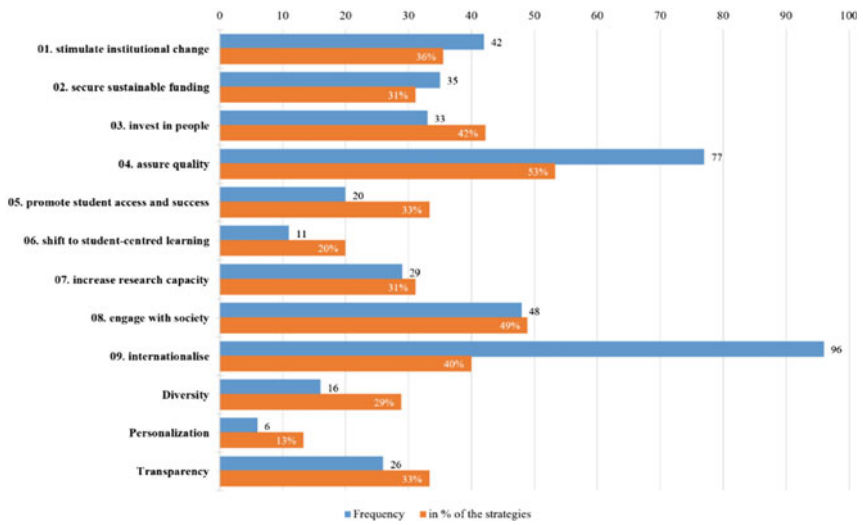
The basic principle of the two software blending is that the network analysis software interprets the matrixes of *references* and their *relations* (or *semantic ontology* that is the Tropes output) as *nodes* and *edges*. The substantial benefit is that network analysis tools enhance Big Data visualisation through statistical algorithms that are suitable for semantic analysis. An example is the multi-level *modularity class* aggregation for decomposition of networks and identification of communities (Blondel et al. 2008) which, in semantic analysis, identify the modular subnetworks of references that are the discursive episodes i.e. the groups of keywords that most often occur in the same sentence or co-occur in different sentences but with the same connectors/keywords (Holeab et al. 2017).

## ***Semantic Analysis and Results***

The semantic analysis was performed on a corpus of 45 updated institutional strategies of Romanian HEIs (covering around 80% of the public HEIs). The files were retrieved from institutional websites and, therefore, the total of 45 documents do not reflect the actual number of universities that have revised their institutional strategies, but the number of HEIs that have published the strategic documents. Statistical data on the correspondence between the list of evaluated HEIs and the list of HEIs with revised strategies or on territorial distribution at national level is not to be included in this paper due to lack of analytical relevance.

The manifold process of the semantic analysis blended with network analysis of the 45 documents consisted of:

- (1) a preparatory phase in which we have formatted and cleaned the textual information by removing the redundant table of contents, introduction and annexes of each document, that could have resulted in inaccurate semantic ontologies and statistics;
- (2) building and refining a semantic dictionary i.e. the analysis scenario with a three-level tree structure containing 12 *semantic references* (classes) i.e. the nine thematic priorities provided by the external institutional evaluation report of EUA (numbered accordingly in Fig. 1) and the three strategic concepts promoted by the Strategic Vision for 2025, with 271 corresponding *keywords*



**Fig. 1** The occurrences of the 12 semantic references (classes)

(performed with Tropes software); given the conceptual diversity of the recommendations provided by EUA under the nine priorities, the 12 semantic references have been further operationalized by 34 semantic subclasses (corresponding to the actual recommendations) under which the keywords have been grouped. The dictionary had to be built in Romanian—as the documents are written in Romanian, but the 12 semantic references have been inset in English for being presented in this paper since the semantic software does not operate with the classification levels for textual matching and semantic analysis of the documents.

We have to add here that we rigorously selected and input the 271 keywords that are best describing the nine priorities with their corresponding recommendations and the three strategic concepts. That is, taking for instance priority number 7 “Increase research capacity” and one of the associated recommendations of “developing a research culture”, if we had chosen “research” as a keyword—one that is so often used—then the analysis would have shown a consistent strategic focus of HEIs building on that specific recommendation. Instead, trying not to lose the comprehensiveness of representation, we strived for accuracy with keywords such as “young researchers” or “reduced teaching workload”, mirroring the actual content and meaning of the provided recommendations. At the same time, it is worth mentioning that the semantic dictionary—that is driving the whole analysis—reflects the view of the analyst and, therefore, is always improvable and open to further in-depth debate. A final methodological note is regarding the technical limitations of our analysis/software tools: the primary data for semantic analysis with Tropes consists in the digital form of words that is in bytes of Unicode characters including Romanian special characters. Since the documents have been

made public by HEIs in the form of officially signed scanned documents, in order to perform the analysis, we had to first use Optical Character Recognition algorithms, which in some cases (depending on the quality of the scan) identify only ASCII characters i.e. do not recognize certain Romanian letter with diacritics. This means that it is possible for the analysis to have omitted certain instances of keywords comprised in our dictionary (actually present in the documents scanned at a lower quality), resulting in a slight decrease of recorded semantic statistics compared to the actual situation—but those cases cannot be documented unless going thoroughly through the 16.8 million characters of our textual corpus, which was not the case;

- (3) building the visual representation (Fig. 5) of the semantic network of the entire textual corpus by employing force-directed graph layout algorithms on the semantic ontologies exported from Tropes, i.e. ForceAtlas2 with LinLog<sup>4</sup> and low-scaling “Dissuade Hubs”<sup>5</sup> modes distribution showing modularity classes (performed with Gephi software).

## Results and Discussions

Figure 1 shows the frequencies of the 12 semantic references (as sums of their classified keywords occurrences)—marked with blue bars and labels. It can be easily observed that there are two key topics that the strategic plans of the HEIs refer to most abundantly, to a significantly higher extent than to the other topics: (no. 9) *internationalise* and (no. 4) *assure quality*. An explanation can be provided here.

In regard to the *internationalisation of higher education*, between 2014 and 2015, UEFISCDI has implemented a structural funds project that successfully delivered—following a highly participative process—a strategic framework and various methodological tools and guidelines for the internationalisation of the Romanian higher education, a functional platform for higher education marketing (Study in Romania<sup>6</sup>), and 19 HEIs internationalisation strategies<sup>7</sup>. Most of the universities participating in the process have published revised strategies that are included in the analysis presented in this paper. For that matter, the strategic capacity of Romanian HEIs addressing the topic of internationalisation has been

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<sup>4</sup> $a - r = 1$  in LinLog, meaning that visual densities in the graph denote structural densities, that is when the attraction force of the nodes depends less on distance, and the repulsion force depends more (Noack 2007).

<sup>5</sup>The *Dissuade Hubs* mode affects the shape of the graph by dividing the attraction force of each node by its degree plus one for nodes it points to, meaning it grants authorities (nodes with a high indegree) a more central position than hubs (nodes with a high outdegree) (Jacomy et al. 2014).

<sup>6</sup><https://www.studyinromania.gov.ro/fp/index.php?>

<sup>7</sup><http://iemu.forhe.ro/>

significantly strengthened; or, to a lesser extent of strategic significance, the priorities and measures on the topic were already available to a part of HEIs to be further included in their revised strategies analysed here.

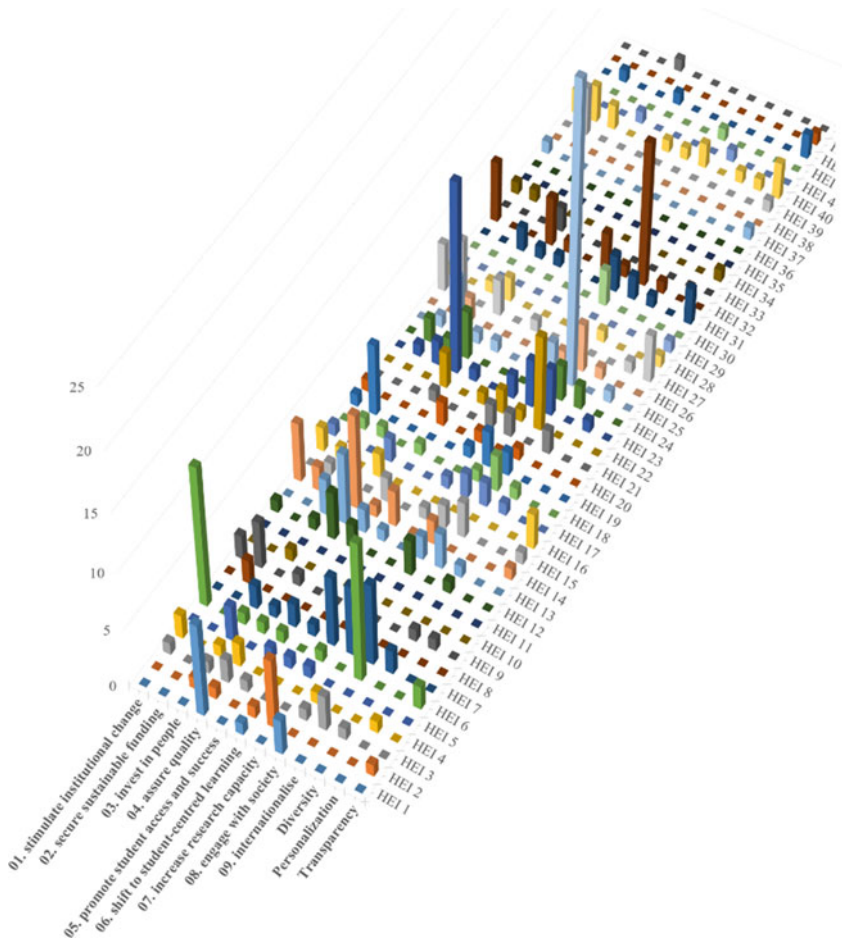
As regards the priority to *assure quality*, we have to detail here the operationalisation framework of the recommendations provided by EUA. The semantic subclasses we have selected as best delineating the recommendations are *internal quality assurance*, *quality culture*, and *quality assurance*, with 3, 4 and 70 occurrences respectively. The corresponding keywords employed in the analysis are, of course, semantic markers of those topics. The simple fact that we used the rather general topic of quality assurance—that could not be avoided given the recommendations rationale—made it boost the statistics on this particular priority. While considering the systemic dynamics, the broad dialogue and increasingly high interest for quality assurance in the Romanian higher education over the past few years, *quality assurance* has been generously integrated in the institutional discourse.

Figure 1 also shows that, aside the topics of average interest, there are key topics that are rather marginally addressed by HEIs: *personalisation* (consistently articulated by the Strategic Vision for the Romanian Higher education in 2025 published in 2011), with only six occurrences in six documents (only one isolated reference per document) and the priority regarding the shift to *student-centred learning* (no. 6), with only 11 occurrences in nine documents. Marked with orange bars, the percentage of HEIs addressing each strategic priority shows that only *quality assurance* crossed the 50% threshold (referred to in 53% of the documents—24 out of the 45). An interesting fact is that the most frequently quoted key priority—*internationalise* (no. 9) is found only in 40% (18) of the institutional strategies; that is because half of the references are provided by only three of the 45 HEIs (HEI 25 with 25 and HEI 6 and 32 with 12), as shown in Fig. 2. A first general conclusion would be that, with an average of 34% coverage, the 12 key priorities are rather non-comprehensively addressed by HEIs in their strategic plans as of 2016.

Figure 2 depicts a rather heterogeneous “strategic landscape” to what concerns the nine priorities provided by the EUA report and the three strategic concepts promoted by the Strategic Vision for 2025. The first perspective of the heterogeneity is that the differences in frequencies within universities reflect their strategic focus; for instance, HEI 25 has a moderate focus on the priority to *invest in people* (five occurrences) and *to engage with society* (three occurrences) also briefly addressing (with one recorded occurrence each) *personalisation* and priorities no. 2, 4 and 5, while extensively referring to the *internationalisation* of HE (25 occurrences). There is also the detrimental aspect of the heterogeneity, namely that there is a certain lack of critical mass and consistency of the strategic discourse in relation to the main challenges identified for the Romanian HE system. Figure 3 shows that the strategic focus of HEIs is diverse in thematic coverage, intensity and distribution (with only one university equally addressing four topics—HEI 34).

As further details regarding the coverage of 12 key priorities, each of the 45 HEIs fails to address at least four priorities out of the 12 (except one HEI that fails



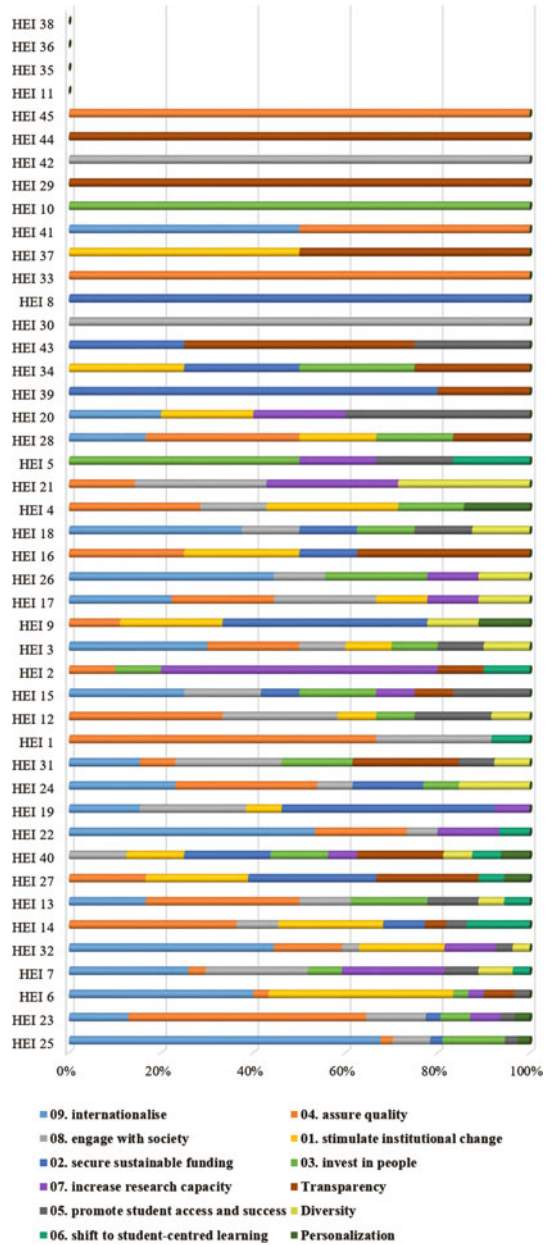


**Fig. 2** The distribution of the 12 semantic references among HEIs strategic plans

to address only three); top five HEIs by total number of references (HEI 25, 23, 6, 7, and 32—at the base of Fig. 3) fail to address either four or five priorities while at the antipode eight HEIs address only one priority and four HEI do not address any of the strategic references (at the top of Fig. 3)—making it a cluster of 25% of the (45) HEIs that is placed outside the mainstream of what we have described to be the policy learning cycle in the Romanian higher education system.

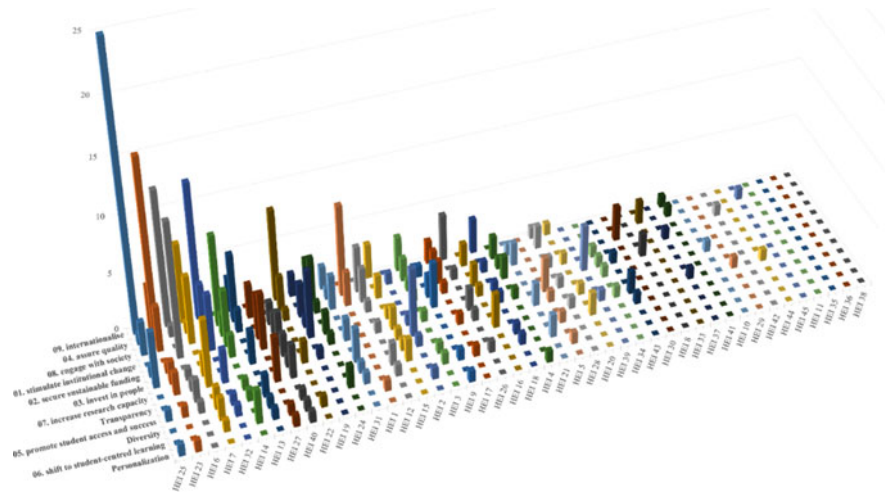
Figure 4 offers the hierarchy of strategic topics (as given by the expressed interest of HEIs) and a more accurate image of the ascertained diverse focus/lack in consistency of the strategic discourse among the 45 HEIs. On the aggregated statistics, it can be observed that there is a cluster of five HEIs that are active in relation to the strategic framework described in this paper, a “middle” cluster of 13–20 HEIs and a cluster of 20 HEIs (to the right of the data plot in Fig. 4) delaying

**Fig. 3** The distribution of the 12 semantic references among HEIs strategic plans (relative frequencies)



in addressing the core of strategic priorities and challenges identified at systemic level i.e. falling within the policy learning curve.

Beyond our findings so far, it can be observed that the three concepts promoted by the Strategic Vision for the Romanian Higher Education system in 2025—a key



**Fig. 4** The distribution of the 12 semantic references among HEIs strategic plans (aggregated values per line and column in descending order)

element of long-term strategic thinking ingredient of the policy learning cycle—are moreover lagging behind or, rather to say, they failed in bringing about a substantial impact on strategic capacity building at institutional level given the sufficient timespan between the publication of the strategic vision in 2011 and the revisions of the HEIs strategic plans in 2016.

Going one step deeper in the semantic analysis, further employment of network algorithms reveals the conceptual (by semantic) connection between the 12 strategic priorities as reflected by the rhetoric of the 45 institutional strategies. Quoted between brackets, the terms with high occurrences among the 34 semantic subclasses (corresponding to the actual recommendations that describe the nine thematic priorities provided by the EUA institutional evaluation report) are included in the graph in Fig. 5 in order to better understand the structure of the strategic discourse of HEIs. It should be noted that the size of these components/subclasses is already comprised in the size of the 12 semantic classes and does not add up to the total recorded frequency of the 12 references. A significant evidence here—already discussed before—is that the remarkable HEIs’ focus on *assuring quality* (priority no. 4) is almost exclusively attributed to generic “quality assurance” references (marked with light blue colour).

Figure 5<sup>8</sup> shows the modular classes i.e. thematic subnetworks of references with strong connections among them. For that matter, we can further observe that (marked with green nodes and edges) *internationalisation* of HE (priority no. 9) is

<sup>8</sup>The size of each node in the semantic graph indicates the occurrence of the semantic reference while the size of the edge indicates the occurrence of the semantic connection between two nodes (occurrence within the same sentence).



Fig. 5 The semantic network of the textual corpus (45 institutional strategies)

described by HEIs as mainly linking with *engaging with society* (no. 8), with *increasing research capacity* (no. 7) and with “governance”—**which** is in fact a semantic decomposition/determinant of priority no. 1—*stimulate institutional change* and does not fall within the network of that priority (marked with pink colour) due to the discursive structure of the strategic documents i.e. closeness to priorities no. 9 and no. 8. Also, we can observe that the HEIs address “research culture” as rather relating to *investment in people* (priority no. 3) than to its actual semantic class of *increasing research capacity* (priority no. 7) (marked with red colour). Another interesting fact is that “regional development” (marked with light blue colour), although a subclass of priority no. 8—*engage with society*, is rather connected to *assuring quality* (priority no. 4).

It can also be observed that the strategic concepts promoted by the Strategic Vision for 2025 published in 2011—*diversity*, *personalisation* and *transparency*—are placed to some extent outside the strategic discourse encompassing the nine thematic priorities with no relevant semantic connection to those and in a distinct modular class (therefore not operationally integrated within the understanding of the nine priorities provided by EUA) (marked with blue-violet colour), aside the

fact that *personalisation* is the most marginally addressed topic, included in Fig. 5 indiscernible accordingly, at the very bottom of the graph with pink colour.

On a general note, Fig. 5 shows that the overall strategic discourse is, to a certain extent, inconsistent given the low number and weight of edges (between nodes/references).

Further analysis can focus on each institutional strategy and external evaluation report (European University Association (EUA—IEP 2013) respectively, to reveal the manner in which the EUA priorities were particularly addressed and substantiate HEIs governance profiles. While leaving this for further research, take for instance the top two universities (in Fig. 4) by total occurrences of semantic references describing the nine EUA recommendations:

- HEI no. 25 focuses notably on *internationalisation* (25 occurrences) but also on *investing in people* (five occurrences) and on *engaging with society* (three occurrences), addressing at the same time (rather inconsistently with only one occurrence) the topics of *quality assurance*, *securing sustainable funding* and *promoting student access and success*; the hierarchy of challenges that HEI no. 25 is confronting with, quantitatively given by the number of particular recommendations provided by EUA for the university is: *internationalisation* (five recommendations), *increase research capacity* (four recommendations), *engage with society* (two recommendations), and *shift to student-centred learning* (two recommendations). Thus, we can note that, on the one hand, this HEI focuses on its main challenge (*internationalisation*) and on other two challenges (*engaging with society* and *student access and success*) as recommended by EUA, but, on the other hand, fails to address the *research*-related second most important challenge. Also, HEI no. 25 has a significant focus on *quality assurance*, despite the fact that the evaluation report did not provide any recommendation on that topic. We do not criticize here the strategic options of this particular HEI, but only mirror them to the recommendations provided by the external evaluation report in 2014. Solely from that perspective, it can be ascertained that this particular HEI committed only in part to its identified challenges—to an insignificant extent, considering that the focus of *internationalisation* comes from the already existing internationalisation strategy of the HEI, or to a significant extent, considering that focusing mainly on its most important challenge (*internationalisation*) can denote, inter alia, incremental capacity building.
- HEI no. 23 focuses mainly on *quality assurance* (16 occurrences), has a moderate focus on *internationalisation* and *engaging with society* (with four occurrences each), and also addresses the challenges of *investing in people*, *increasing research capacity* (two occurrences each), *securing sustainable funding*, and *promoting student access and success* (only one occurrence each). The institutional evaluation report (extensively) provided ten recommendations for *stimulating institutional change*, four recommendations for *promoting student access and success*, three recommendations for *internationalisation*, three recommendations for *increasing research capacity* and two recommendations for *engaging with society*. It is obvious that the revised institutional strategy of

this particular university is not correlated with the external evaluation report when it comes to the major challenge of the university—namely *assuring quality* versus *stimulating institutional change*. It is an obvious problem of prioritisation while otherwise there is a significant correlation in the topics covered.

## Conclusions and Recommendations for Further Research

Our analysis has pointed out several drawbacks and certain major issues—discussed in previous sections of the paper—when looking at how the described systemic initiatives have shaped strategic capacity building in HEIs, or how the actual governance profiles and strategic focus of HEIs reflect the former initiatives. We will recall a few here.

The redesigned institutional strategies of Romanian HEIs (as of 2016) reflect a rather deficient and heterogeneous strategic discourse in relation to the priorities provided by the EUA evaluation report (2014) and the strategic concepts promoted by the Strategic Vision for 2025 (2011): on the one hand, there are challenges and strategic priorities that are abundantly addressed while there are also topics of low to very low interest from HEIs; on the other hand, with an average of 34% thematic coverage, the key priorities identified by systemic measures are rather non-comprehensively addressed by HEIs in their strategic plans. For that matter, each of the 45 HEIs included in the analysis fails to address at least four priorities out of the 12 (except one HEI that fails to address only three).

When looking at the relative impact of the two major systemic interventions (the RFHE and the external institutional evaluation exercise), the vision for the Romanian higher education system published in 2011 is (even more) lagging behind in arousing the interest of HEIs in the strategic concepts it promoted.

Moreover, we noted that the overall strategic discourse of HEIs is, to a certain extent to what regards the 12 priorities, inconsistent—as shown by the network analysis of the semantic ontology. The network analysis also outlined certain interesting facts about how the 12 strategic concepts/challenges are operationalised by the Romanian HEIs.

These rather bluntly expressed conclusions and findings could make one believe that the systemic interventions failed to have a positive impact on HEIs governance and capacity building. In fact, they depict only “frames” of an “unfolding motion picture”. In our endeavour to outline a policy learning cycle in the Romanian higher education system and its impact on the governance profiles of HEIs, we believe that the expected impacts are still to be assessed. No definitive conclusions are to be drawn at this stage; especially since our semantic analysis presented herein does not account for case studies (with all its other limitations), since the brief analysis of two of the institutional strategies and corresponding institutional evaluation reports included in the previous section indicates that there is more to understand about the

strategic governance dynamics at Romanian HEIs level, since HEIs governance should be analysed in close relation to higher education funding (Miroiu and Vlăsceanu 2012), and moreover since the strategic capacity building process is incremental.

We hope that future systemic and grassroots initiatives will give us food for thought and research to soon reassess and have a better overview of the policy learning cycle in the Romanian higher education system.

Taking on expanding the relevance of our paper beyond the Romanian case study, we would dissociate the policy initiatives (systemic foresight in higher education and international institutional evaluation of HEIs) from the semantic analysis, considering the fact that systemic foresight and the institutional evaluation of HEIs are extensively substantiated research topics while the IEP of EUA is a well-established instrument with proven results, and abundant research is available in this respect. We argue that the bibliometric methodology based on semantic analysis blended with network analysis—as described and presented in this paper—is a valuable tool both for policymakers and policy analysts and for HEIs leaders; it can improve evidence-based policy-making and systemic impact analysis while it is also beneficial in rendering the coherence and the focus of (coordinated) institutional strategic documents. For that matter—and also considering the availability of the open source instruments employed -, we believe that our methodology is relevant for further research on HE policy and governance of HEIs in a variety of institutional and national settings across EHEA.

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# The Impact of the Bologna Process on the Governance of Higher Education Systems in Eastern Partnership Countries



Nicolae Toderas and Ana-Maria Stăvaru

## Introduction

This chapter addresses the change of higher education (HE) in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries from the perspective of policy coordination at central level. In this context, governance is analysed through the relationship of central government authorities with Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and the motivating factors for adherence to Bologna Process (BP) and participation in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The main sources of documentation used for elaborating this chapter are research results of the authors from the last few years, especially for the case of the Republic of Moldova. These sources have been complemented by analyses and reports elaborated by European institutions and international organizations (the European Commission, the Council of Europe, the World Bank) and by official reports regarding the implementation of BP in EaP countries.

According to art. 6 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, cooperation in the field of HE belongs to the complementary competencies of the EU, which consist in actions to support, coordinate or supplement the actions of the Member States. The EU's power of change in the field of HE is a "soft power" (Polglase 2013) through which Member States cooperate in order to reach common objectives rather than reach decisions that are then implemented top-down. In spite of this limiting formal framework, over the last three decades, the EU's influence in the field of HE has constantly increased (Vögtle 2014; Sin et al. 2016) causing

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important changes for universities, states and regions in Europe. EHEA was created in 2010 through convergence measures such as the coordination of policy actions or intensifying the exchange of experience and mutual learning. EHEA had a direct contribution to the functioning of the internal market, as well as to the intensifying of political and economic trade-relations with third countries. Cooperation in the field of HE, through BP or other instruments, is the catalyst for intensifying other policies for intergovernmental cooperation (Martens and Wolf 2009) and for changing internal policies in fields connected to HE, ranging from policies specific to economic development and market opportunities to policies related to public administration capacities. Since the second half of the 2000's, the EU's Action Plans with some countries from the Eastern neighbourhood (such as the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia and Armenia) have made reference to cooperation and harmonisation of higher education systems (HES) in line with EU approaches and the BP principles. Both directions of actions have gradually led to the effective accession to the BP of the EaP countries. In order to gain access to the multiple opportunities and financial resources provided by the EU through its policies and financial instruments, EaP countries were interested in implementing reforms derived from the conditionalities established in the Action Plans. Accession to BP has been an important conditionality related to *people-to-people contacts* objective. Thus, the sooner the EaP countries implemented the reforms, the sooner they had access to the financial resources and technical assistance promised by the EU. In order to continue the actions for deepening intergovernmental cooperation within EHEA, the EU's Association Agreements with third countries from the EaP include objectives for strengthening the governance regime for HES, including quality assurance systems which had been institutionalized up until the moment the Association Agreements were signed.

Although the enlargement of EHEA towards the East in 2005 (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia Moldova and Ukraine) and 2015 (Belarus) has brought on a revitalisation of the BP, the dynamic of institutionalizing the new governance arrangements of the HES in EaP countries has not been researched in detail (Dobbins and Khachatryan 2015). Our research shows that in comparison to the previous decade, in the last few years many more articles, studies and policy analyses have been published regarding the dynamic of change in HES governance from EaP countries. Still, many aspects have yet to be discussed and analysed. Consequently, the enlargement of EHEA towards the East offers fertile ground for deepening the analysis regarding the ways and means of institutional change of HES in the context of processes of regional convergence, internationalisation and globalisation.

The enlargement of the BP towards countries in Eastern Europe has generated and supported a series of structural changes in the governance of their HES. Through its nature, the BP is a hybrid mechanism for policy coordination. Within the EU, it has the character of voluntary intergovernmental cooperation between Member States, putting the EU single market into practice. On the other hand, outside the EU, it has the same character of voluntary intergovernmental

cooperation but is also accompanied by instruments for stimulation provided by the EU (such as access to the former TACIS or Tempus programs, or presently Erasmus +, Horizon 2020 or ENI), gaining an important capacity for supporting and guiding structural changes in certain third countries beyond the area of HE. In the case of EaP countries, the BP is a mechanism which has a convergence-promoting force (Dobbins and Khachatryan 2015). EaP countries are harmonizing their internal HE policies with approaches from countries in Western Europe in order to maximise the benefits offered by EHEA. As a result, some of them are a good example regarding the application of this convergence-promoting force, although the changes which have been made do not offer the guarantee of irreversibility. Through the convergence-promoting force (Dobbins and Khachatryan 2015), EHEA has conditioned and facilitated a process of transnational policy diffusion of market-oriented HE governance approaches and instruments from Western and Central Europe to Eastern Europe (Dobbins and Knill 2009; Dobbins 2011; Kozma et al. 2014; Vögtle 2014; Sin et al. 2016). The enlargement towards East has also generated multiple cooperation priorities for EHEA. Such is, for example, the way in which assistance is offered for institutionalising quality assurance systems so that they can become convergent with those in Western and Central Europe and be mutually recognised.

## The Context of Cooperation

Being designed as a platform for multilateral cooperation between the EU and the six countries in the Eastern neighbourhood of the EU (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine), the EaP is meant to diminish the barriers generated by the enlargement of the EU and the deepening of European integration. Thus, in order to avoid the isolation of the region, in 2009, the EU launched another approach for intergovernmental cooperation based on differentiation principle (Korosteleva 2017) and, from 2015, also on inclusivity principle (Sakwa 2017). The main idea was that, apart from the new areas of cooperation which would be initiated within this platform, there is a need to relaunch support for domains in which some type of cooperation already exists. Up to that moment, five of the six countries in the region had become part of the BP and were participating in the construction of EHEA. Initially, in the 2009–2013 period, the areas of cooperation in the HE field were vaguely defined, being based rather on the stipulations of action plans between the EU and partners in the region. These were not concerned with clear obligations regarding the application of BP provisions in consonance with the objectives of EHEA (Luchinskaya and Ovchynnikova 2011; Vögtle 2014; Kutsyuruba and Kovalchuk 2015) and did not lead to irreversible and sustainable changes in the governance of HES in the sense of a greater orientation towards the market and society.

Due to the very few and inconclusive results regarding the evolution of EaP countries within the BP and implicitly EHEA, it was decided to redefine priorities, with a clearer specification of the objectives which needed to be reached by 2020. Thus, for the 2014–2020 financial period of the EU, within the objective *people-to-people contacts* a reinforced focus on the implementation of the Bologna reforms was proposed.

We must underline that gradually, through the EaP, the EU has instituted the approach of a partnership relationship of normative pressure. This is based not only on conditionalities but also on incentives such as the participation in EU Programs, direct allocations for empowering civil society and technical assistance (including through twinning or permanent counselling from high-level experts) in priority domains. Through the EaP, the EU used a merit-based approach, expanding the application of the “*more for more*” principle which is “based on the premise that the more governments undertake relevant reforms, the more they will be rewarded and supported by the EU” (Schumacher and Bouris 2011). On the one hand, this principle proves to be an adequate means for encouraging processes of change which have been initiated in the field of HE. On the other hand, however, especially in situations in which reforms are stagnating, it has proved to be a demotivating factor for the actors involved in the institutionalization of the regime of market-oriented governance of HES.

The concomitant joining of the EaP countries to the BP has a great advantage for comparing the group dynamics. The delay is explained by the fact that in 1997, due to their participation in the Commonwealth of Independent States, there was a desire to create a common space of HE in this region (Gille-Belova 2015). The Russian Federation offered to former Soviet states a model of governance based on an approach which was different from the tendencies that were visible in Central Europe at that time—involving the market and different non-governmental actors, institutional autonomy etc. (Tomusk 2000). The late accession of the EaP countries to BP was influenced by their tendency to follow Russia’s choices regarding external policy. In the second part of the last decade, the initiative of creating a common space of HE was forgotten, being later on abandoned completely by Georgia, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova.

### **Three Distinct Patterns of Change of Governance Arrangements**

The enlargement towards the East of the BP has brought a series of challenges to the entire process. The main challenge was that most of these countries were based on arrangements of state-control governance of HES (Dobbins 2011; Dobbins and Khachatryan 2015) due to the lack of mechanisms for public responsibility. Thus, up until effectively becoming part of the BP, their HES had the following characteristics:

- they developed and expanded mainly in the Soviet period, without having a tradition regarding institutional autonomy and academic freedom;
- the governance arrangements were specific to the state-control paradigm of management;
- they were powerfully controlled by the government, through the shared coordination of several line ministries—the HEIs benefited from a variable institutional autonomy depending on their type and regime;
- regulation was done based on arbitrary decisions which were not founded on evidence and were non-deliberative—for example, the distribution of resources or accepting the expansion and diversification of the services offered by certain HEIs;
- the creation of parallel sets of informal arrangements had the role of eluding current regulations regarding the monitoring of quality assurance, the financing of HEIs, the creation of public or private HEIs etc., which generated an uncontrolled expansion.

Although they are not explicitly formulated in such a manner, the objectives of the BP and those of EHEA were meant to lead to the modification of the governance arrangements of HES in the sense of bringing them closer to the market and to society (Dobbins et al. 2011). Consequently, in systems in which these arrangements are defining by default and have been incorporated for hundreds and tens of years in the regulating and normative institutional frameworks, the modifications brought on by the principles of the BP and the values of EHEA cannot be ample or sudden (Dobbins 2011), but rather gradual (Vögtle 2014). On the other hand, in HES in which the institutional and normative frameworks have a state-control origin, the changes will be ample, revolutionary, thus representing a rupture from the previous arrangements. The changes can take place either suddenly, as in the case of the Baltic countries, or incrementally, as in the case of the EaP countries, although even in their case there are peaks in revolutionizing their governance systems. On the other hand, the BP and EHEA do not aspire to create a pan-European system for the governance of HES based on a top-down imposed unitary model. The essence of cooperation consists in the institutionalization of a coherent framework of coexistence of the different regimes of HES governance.

In order to compare the dynamics of the processes of consolidating the governance of HES from EaP and to determine the degree of irreversibility of the reforms which have been implemented, there is a need to clarify the factors which have motivated countries to become part of the BP and their later contribution to the creation and development of EHEA. By their aspirations of European integration, the six EaP countries can be divided into three categories. The first category is represented by countries which manifest their interest of joining the EU in the near or medium-term future (Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia). For them, becoming part of the BP and actively participating in EHEA represents a window of opportunity for deepening both HE policies as well as adjacent domains, such as research, development, innovation. Their motivating factors were initially found in the political desire of becoming closer to the EU. In addition, for Georgia, it was

obvious that there was a desire to dismantle the institutional arrangements inherited from the Soviet period (Glonti and Chitashvili, 2007; Dobbins and Khachatryan 2015; Jibladze 2017). In the case of Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, such arguments were not so consistent as to motivate stakeholders to generate pressures on governmental institutions in order to establish new paradigms for managing the system. The success in transposing BP principles at the internal level represented a first piece of evidence, both for external actors as well as for the electorate, that the respective countries were capable of accelerating institutional and normative convergence and deepening these types of processes in other domains such as the liberalization of internal markets, the strengthening of institutions and democratic values etc.

Beginning from the accession to the BP and up until now, an incremental style of dismantling the old state-control arrangements of governance and replacing them with others such as state, socio or market governance predominated. The exception is represented by Georgia where, in certain stages of structural reforms of the state, several shock reforms were made for strengthening the institutional autonomy of actors within the HES (Dobbins and Khachatryan 2015), by introducing arrangements of collegial-university nature, some inspired from the USA. On the other hand, in the case of the Republic of Moldova, it took almost a decade to institutionalise a new regime of governance for HES and four attempts to adopt a comprehensive legislative framework (Toderas and Stăvaru 2014). Each legislative project included variations from state-oriented to market-oriented HE governance regime. Although the new legislative provisions have entered into force, the system does not yet function according to the routines specific to the market-oriented governance, since the old routines based on informal policy-making arrangements still predominate.

The planned reforms proposed to institute ample changes in the governance of the systems. The amplitude of the changes was however diminished by delays in the elaboration and adoption of new education laws and, during the legislative deliberations, many of the arrangements which were going to be institutionalised were restrained (for example the modification of mechanisms for financing universities). What is more, the institutionalisation of the new arrangements was applied in a top-down manner, without offering the opportunity of adaptation (Kovtun and Stick 2009; Shaw et al. 2013, Toderas and Stăvaru 2014). In spite of this, in the case of this group of countries, we also need to take into account the temporary variation of the impact of changes.

In a similar manner to the case of HES in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), in this category of countries from the EaP there was a gradual transition from elitist, profoundly bureaucratic, politicized systems that were based on state-control arrangements towards systems which were much more open, collegial, and less politicized (Dobbins and Kwiek 2017; Tofan et al. 2017). There is still a need to measure and analyse the impact and effects of the institutionalisation of governance arrangements oriented towards the market and society both in a manner of policy-making, as well as research regarding institutional changes.

The second category is represented by countries that wish to intensify their commercial relations and political dialogue with the EU, and thus diversify and maximize the advantages and facilities offered by the EU's internal market. On the other hand, they have not manifested their intention to become part of the EU and undergo corresponding structural and systemic reforms. Countries in this category are Armenia and Azerbaijan. For them, the motivating factors for becoming part of the BP were oriented towards diversifying their opportunities and facilities in education and research. In the case of Armenia, another motivating factor was also the fact that proximity to the EU was declared a key direction for the country's foreign policy, and higher education was considered as a proxy for this political objective (Matei et al. 2013). Consequently, reforms in the governance of HES were oriented more towards aspects such as increasing the quality of HE, developing qualifications systems and intensifying different types of mobility. To this end, the external assistance offered by the EU and other international donors was maximised. For example, the quality assurance system from Armenia was developed with the financial support of the World Bank (Dobbins and Khachatryan 2015; Terzian 2016), quickly becoming a model of best practice for states in the region—in spite of the fact that this system operates under the paradigm of controlling HEIs.

From the analysis of reports elaborated by different international organizations (Council of Europe, World Bank, European Commission) we can notice that for the most part, the HES in these two countries has remained excessively regulated and controlled, powerfully centralized and dependent on political decisions. Even though since becoming part of the BP important actions have been undertaken for institutionalising some market-oriented governance arrangements, the changes which have been registered are marginal and have yet to reach the desired effect.

Even though the changes are incremental, participating in EHEA contributes to the multiplication and deepening of the processes of transferring practices and approaches from HES governance regimes from other BP members. The literature findings about these two countries nuance the fact that in general, the impact of becoming part of the BP was a positive one.

The third category is represented by Belarus, which became part of the BP in 2015, after being denied in 2012 (Gille-Belova 2015; Dakowska 2017). Belarus is the first country for which ex-post conditionalities were imposed in order to become a member of EHEA, which refer to the implementation of the fundamental values of EHEA, being presently under a careful process of monitoring by the BFUG (Yahorau and Antashkevich 2017). Over time, Belarus developed a relatively distant attitude towards the EU, although it benefited from certain facilities of the internal market. What is more, the attitude towards the BP varied in the first part of the 2000's from an openness towards cooperation towards a political reticence regarding the membership in the 2005–2009 period and back again to a relative openness in the last few years.

The reason for joining EHEA was a political one, in the sense of diminishing political tensions with certain Western European countries and with the EU. In spite of this, the accession to EHEA was based on a limited implementation of BP provisions. For the governmental authorities, the main fear regarding the full

application of BP provisions referred to the fact that the state would lose control over the HES (Gille-Belova 2015) and consequently, the power of the political regime would erode in time. The incentives granted by the EU through different programs proved to be inefficient, in a similar manner to the sanction measures applied by the EU to this country (Boss and Korosteleva-Polglase 2009). The main cause for the failure was precisely the enunciation by the promoters of the process of the argument regarding the spill-over effects of BP over other domains.

Reforms in the field of HE in Belarus have especially targeted the attraction of foreign students and capitalizing on research results (Polglase 2013; Gille-Belova 2015). Few actions were initiated for changing the governance system, most of which were concerned with marginal aspects in order to mime the institutionalisation of market-oriented arrangements. In reality, the governance regime has remained state-oriented, with authoritarian accents. Thus, it has not drifted far from the Soviet model of management (Gille-Belova 2014). Consequently, in comparison with the other countries in the region, the pre and post accession to EHEA changes were not ample. Taking into account the current state of affairs, the accession to EHEA has had a positive impact on the HE domestic policy. In the case of Belarus, there is still a dilemma regarding how the EHEA actors should be positioned, complementary to the conditionalities imposed prior to accession, in order to institutionalise irreversible arrangements of HES governance.

By synthesizing the three patterns, we can draw the following conclusions:

- The political motivation for becoming a BP member and for participating in the development of EHEA—with the exception of Belarus, consisted in becoming closer to the EU and maximising the benefits offered within the framework of cooperation. In the case of Georgia, even from the beginning of the preparations for accession, there was a predominant motivation of rupturing from the Soviet past and from the influence of the Russian Federation. In the case of Armenia, joining BP was an instrument to support the process of creating a new national identity (Matei et al. 2013);
- Presently, we can notice the predominance of forms of governance in which old arrangements are overlapped with new ones which are much closer to the market and society, but the state continues to play a major role. There is still confusion in the region regarding the object and functions of the new arrangements;
- The means of implementing change—non-linear and anachronic forms of implementing reforms have predominated;
- The type of change—a predominance of incremental changes, except certain contexts of abrupt change in the case of Georgia or non-change in the case of Belarus during the 2005–2011 period;
- The amplitude of change—limited harmonization based on the conditionalities of incentives that were offered.

Looking back, we can notice that important changes have taken place, such as increasing the flexibility of systems and coming closer to market-oriented governance models. In some respects, the changes are radical, of rupture from the old



Soviet governance arrangements. The intensity of the changes varies from one political context to another. It is still questionable how fast these changes should take place and if accelerating them can guarantee the irreversibility and sustainability of the processes.

### **Analysis of the Determining Factors Which Have Supported the Latent Institutionalisation of the New Governance Arrangements of HES**

As shown above, changes are latent but a series of spill-over effects still take place (institutional autonomy, financial diversification, quality assurance, mobility of students and teachers, lifelong learning programs etc.), which support the forces for deepening reforms by departing from authoritarian approaches and excessive control of the state. While preparing the accession to the BP the aim was to apply with priority the actions regarding the implementation of the ECTS system, switching to the three-cycle system and institutionalising new mechanisms for quality assurance. Switching to the three-cycle system was initially applied incompletely—on two cycles, bachelor and masters. The third cycle was made compatible relatively late and in the case of Belarus and Armenia, it is still not harmonized with BP provisions, presently being, among other aspects, in the stage of legislative deliberations for modifying the education law. In the case of almost all the EaP countries which became BP members, the doctoral studies cycle is still organised based on Soviet principles (Kovács 2014) although the regulations formally transposed the BP principles. The focus on the harmonization of the study cycles offered the guarantee of maximising the advantages of BP and EHEA (mobilities, recognition of qualifications and periods of study etc.). The delays are also characteristic to the objective regarding the creation and development of national frameworks of qualifications, as well as to the institutionalisation of new mechanisms for quality assurance. In September 2017, from this region, only one agency for quality assurance, the one in Armenia, was registered in EQAR. The rest of the agencies from EaP countries, except Belarus, were only affiliated, and the ministries of education had the statute of governmental member. This highlights the inefficiency of reforms which were implemented in this direction.

By retrospectively analysing the evolutions, we can notice that the BP has represented an opportunity for an ideological battle between maintaining the old arrangements for system governance and changing them in the sense of becoming close to the models from Western Europe. In all six EaP countries, the governmental authorities have used discursive rhetoric in order to sustain momentary political objectives. The rhetoric content was and is dependent on the type of relationship the respective countries have with the EU, on the one hand, and with the Russian Federation, on the other hand. The political discourse is nuanced by the ideologies promoted by the governing parties as well as by the general societal

axiology. For example, initially in the case of Georgia and later Ukraine, the powerful rejection of the Russian Federation leads to the predominance of pro-BP arguments for intensifying cooperation within EHEA. Furthermore, the discursive use of BP in internal political battles was done out of phase under the form of contagion from one country to another. For example, at the beginning of the 2000's, the experience of the Russian Federation regarding preparations for BP accession initially represented, for national decision makers and pressure groups which supported accession to the BP of EaP countries, an obvious source of enlightenment, inspiring arguments in favour of intensifying cooperation in the field of HE (Tomusk 2008). The diminishing of diplomatic and economic relations of the Russian Federation with countries in Western Europe offered to pressure groups from EaP countries, which advocated for the preservation of old Soviet arrangements and against the application of BP principles, arguments for diminishing cooperation within the BP (Luchinskaya and Ovchynnikova 2011). This aspect highlights the dependency on the former decision-making centre, even though in the case of the Russian Federation the application of BP principles was much slower in comparison to the other countries in the region which became BP members in 2005.

On occasions, the influence of the Russian Federation was counteracted through the contribution of groups of experts from CEE. For example, expert groups from Romania had an important influence in configuring the new arrangements for the governance of HES in the Republic of Moldova (Toderas 2012), as well as those from Poland in the case of Ukraine (Dakowska 2017) and Georgia. Moreover, many critical points of view came from the Central and Western Europe regarding the low performance of EaP countries in terms of achieving the objectives of BP and attaining stability and coherence of their HES.

In comparison to the anti-BP discourse from the Russian Federation, Central and Western Europe offered alternatives for action which were compatible with the Western-European models of systemic governance of HEIs. Processes of modernization and decoupling from the Soviet past were encouraged, subject to the fact that the effects of EHEA on the internal stability of HE will be mainly negative (brain-drain, lack of coherence in professional training, the expansion of foreign universities etc.). Whether they were positive or negative, the ideological influences regarding the BP and EHEA proved to be useful mechanisms for contagion in cascade within EaP countries, thus strengthening deliberation and public reflection regarding the adoption of their own styles for HES governance.

Apart from the financial incentives granted by the EU through the Tempus and TACIS programs, the activity of pro-PB pressure groups was supported through top-down mechanisms. For example, an important role was played by UNESCO-CEPES (Conley Burrows 2017; Dakowska 2017), Council of Europe, as well as Open Society Foundations (Matei et al. 2013; Toderas and Stăvaru 2014; Terzian 2016; Dakowska 2017). Still, because their actions were sporadic, they did not manage to support, at least at the rhetorical level, actions for reforming HES governance.

In the entire region, we can notice the persistence of a non-deliberative framework of policy-making which leads to the imitation of reform processes (Yahorau and Antashkevich 2017). The actions were mainly voluntary, without having mechanisms for direct pressure, targeting relatively small circles of civil servants with no direct access to political decision-making. Thus, the bottom-up mechanisms which were created proved to be relatively fragile and did not last for long after the grants were depleted. This is why the region is characterised by a limited capacity for reflection and internal deliberation regarding the opportunity and way of changing the relationship between the state and HE institutions, in order to ensure institutional and policy convergence with western HE models. Furthermore, BP promoters were not so active as to be able to explain at the external level the nature of internal changes and, respectively, at the internal level, the nature and types of arrangements for system governance, as well as of the tendencies for changing them. For example, Matei et al. (2013) underline that there are no academic or other forums in Armenia to discuss the state of affairs and perspectives of higher education.

In a similar manner to countries from CEE, in this region, the institutionalisation of the new governance arrangements depends on political conjectures, as well as on the ideology of governing parties. For example, in the case of the Republic of Moldova, the process of creating a national agency for quality assurance lasted several years due to uncertainties and political blockages, in spite of the fact that the organizational and procedural design of the agency and of the quality assurance process existed since 2008 (Bischof 2016). In all the countries in the region, due to the lack of a participative policy-making system, the decisions of institutions which participate directly or indirectly in the governance of HES are implemented in a top-down manner, thus eliminating certain categories of stakeholders from the deliberative process, such as students or employers.

## **Efficiency and Sustainability of the Processes of Change Dilemma**

From the multiple monitoring reports and analyses of the current state of affairs, we notice that in the case of EaP countries there is a persistent lack of trust with regard to continuing the reforms and the irreversibility of changes in the absence of pressures, conditionalities or complementary external incentives. The entire region still remains dependent on external financial assistance, expertise and logistics. Consequently, there is still a dilemma about how can EaP countries be empowered from the perspective of the normative power of EHEA in order to make the processes of consolidating the governance of HES irreversible.

In spite of the fact that in this area the BP was interpreted since the early 2000's as a component of the EU's external policy, the process of becoming members of the BP and the presence in EHEA are of intergovernmental nature. In this regard,

the Action Plans and Association Agreements are vaguely formulated. Consequently, in order to ensure that the reforms which are implemented are sustainable and irreversible, there is a need to use the normative-power approach of the EU in the manner of a convergence-promoting force by ensuring more openness, the intensification of mobility (similar to CEEPUS) and of mutual learning. Clearer monitoring mechanisms are necessary, as in the case of reforms regarding the economic liberalization or those in the field of justice. In the context of current discussion regarding the results of EaP from 2020, there is a need to place more accent in the following period on monitoring and qualitative evaluation of the processes of changing the governance regimes of HES in this area based on a set of common results indicators, as well as a set of customized indicators for each country in the region. Measures of support have to be differentiated, customised according to the specificities and adequate to the needs and capacities of each country. Within the BFUG, a special working/advisory group can be created for monitoring the achievement of indicators and for offering methodological support and expertise. In order to increase the level of knowledge regarding the reforms which have been implemented and the implications of actively participating in EHEA, the results of monitoring and evaluations need to be communicated in a language accessible to different types of audiences.

Incentives such as “more for more” or “less for less” sometimes prove to be ineffective due to the fact that they are oriented towards the quantitative-mimetic implementation of reforms, without generating comprehensive processes of reflection and deliberation. Of course, a good implementation of reforms requires time and complementary resources. Being conducted within EHEA and under the auspice of ENI, reforms can contribute to strengthening trust and diminishing the amplitude of the rhetoric against reforms and the intensification of cooperation within EHEA.

## Conclusions

The chapter offers an overall view of the tendencies of change in HE in EaP countries in connection with the BP. The main conclusion that can be drawn is that there is no single pattern of change. After over 12 years of membership in BP of the majority of countries in the region, they still need to be analysed case by case. The general impact of enlarging the BP towards the East is a positive one, however, and the governance of national HE systems has changed significantly in comparison to the period before accession. The amplitude of the changes largely depended on the political context of each EaP country and the incentives offered by the EU or international donors.

In the EaP area, the motivation for joining BP was used either to accelerate European integration or for the benefit from the advantages of intergovernmental cooperation in the field of HE (maximising opportunities for mobility, participating

in EU initiatives etc.) without attempting to join the EU. After the EaP countries became part of the BP, there was no direct and explicit pressure from the EU regarding reforms implementation. In consequence, there was no approach based on global progress indicators but only on interventions financed through EU funds. Thus, the institutionalization of new governance arrangements was made based on intermittent processes.

The approach gradually changes, and BFUG, in its capacity of executive structure supporting the BP, already has a series of leverages through which it can contribute to making the changes more dynamic, as well as ensuring the efficiency and sustainability of the processes of change. Considering the current priorities of the ENP are better formulated and even oriented towards stimulating reforms in HE, this presents an opportunity for EU Member States to actively become involved through bi- or multilateral cooperation in supporting EaP countries to overcome the major discrepancies between the East and the West.

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