

NAB for another accreditation.

CONCLUSION

In Ghana, the quality assurance of higher education has evolved from its colonial structure of being managed by HEIs to the establishment of external QA agencies, in order for the country to meet the contemporary demands on higher education. So far, remarkable progress in the external dimension of QA, with differentiated agencies, seems to have been made. This differentiated external QA strategy could perhaps serve as a useful reference point for other African countries working on strengthening their QA systems. Nonetheless, with the rapid growth of the sector, QA agencies are faced with notable challenges due to their limited capacity. What is yet to be ascertained is whether achievements in external QA have had a positive impact on the delivery of quality higher education in Ghana. ■

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Academic Drift in China's Universities of Applied Technology

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The priority to make China an innovation nation is not new and results from a longer-term strategy to make China strong through science and technology (*kejiao xingguo*), including its scientific personnel (*keji rencai*). Through these policies, China's higher education institutions (HEIs) are charged with a new mission and significance. This applies in particular to a new type of HEIs, the Universities of Applied Technology (*yingyong jishu daxue*), or UATs, which were designed to play a significant role in China's higher education system, specifically by boosting cooperation with industry. While other countries struggle to mitigate academic drift in universities of technology, China's proposed transformation of more than 600 HEIs into UATs, designed to fulfil a distinct mission, is a major reform. Distinct from research universities, UATs are expected to devote themselves to regional economic development by cooperating with local small and medium enterprises in applied innova-

tion projects. Through this practical orientation, UATs were supposed to cultivate high-level personnel skilled in applied innovation, as well as diversify China's higher education system as a whole. Yet, achieving these goals turned out to be far more difficult than planned. Detailed case studies of policies and practices at four UATs and aspiring UATs of different sizes and in different regions of China revealed that achieving the goal of collaborating with local industry to boost innovation was undercut by significant academic drift, which distorted the original intention.

THE IMPORTANCE OF INNOVATION IN CHINESE HIGHER EDUCATION

China's HEIs have long been important engines for research and innovation. Premier Li Keqiang has forcefully emphasized the high degree of interdependency between the national innovation system and the scientific research activities of HEIs, as a force in turning China into an innovation nation. Preferential policies were given to innovative enterprises, HEIs, and research institutions in every field. But China's highly stratified higher education system ensures that universities and colleges with a stronger record of innovation attract far more funds as well as other resources. Research productivity also forms a major component of university rankings; within the intensively competitive Chinese academic system, this gives an advantage to China's top universities, which attract the best researchers, and whose graduates are more highly sought after by employers. While innovation is a national and regional priority, in practice Chinese HEIs are all running the same race, despite UATs' distinct mission to boost regional innovation through industry collaboration.

RATIONALE FOR ESTABLISHING UATs IN CHINA

Over 600 undergraduate colleges and universities (mostly local second-tier universities and independent colleges) established since 1999 are proposed as the main body of the planned UAT transformation. They now form a significant proportion of the 2,600 or so universities granting bachelor degrees. As mentioned above, UATs are an important measure to diversify China's higher education system. In particular, they are charged with providing advanced applied and technical talent to meet the needs of ever-changing industries. They are also expected to help lessen serious structural unemployment in some key industrial sectors, as well as strengthen the binary divide within the university sector—which over time has become increasingly blurred. Compared to major research universities undertaking basic and cutting-edge research, UATs should contribute to innovation not by directly discovering new knowledge, but by applying existing knowledge to practice, and refining existing processes by working with industry, an innovative process

that is also designed to strengthen the competence of UATs' high-level technical personnel. However, detailed studies of UATs reveal serious academic drift, which divert them from their original industry-oriented and market-based mission.

ACADEMIC DRIFT IN UATs

Academic drift refers to the tendency of newer and specialized colleges to boost their research activities in ways that emulate large research universities. A form of institutional isomorphism, the process often means that applied knowledge, intended to be directly useful, gradually loses its close ties to practice. Detailed studies of several UATs reveal such academic drift. While the original plan for UATs was to demonstrate innovation through cooperation with local enterprises and industries, in practice, this is not taking place. Instead, UAT faculty devote most of their energy to publishing and applying for major scientific projects at the national level—as these achievements pave the path to promotion. Academic drift results from institutional processes linked to performance-related measures, such as stimulating publishing and participating in major national research projects through partnerships with regional re-

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search universities in China's middle and western regions; offering extremely high financial rewards to academics for each paper published in high-ranked journals; or garnering projects at the national level—while offering much lower incentives for university–industry projects. Coupled with the fact that UATs are less competitive collaborating with industries (which prefer to reach out to established research universities when in need of advice or technical assistance), such counterproductive processes lead UAT faculty to shift their efforts away from their primary tasks. Still, when interviewed, more than 90 percent of interviewees thought the papers they published were of little use and admitted that most of the papers they had written resulted from copying and combining ideas from papers published by others.

CONCLUSION

The process of academic drift in UATs highlights a basic contradiction between policy and practice. Instead of ac-

tively collaborating with the industry using applied technical expertise, they display a strong organizational inertia, largely because of long-standing macropolitical orientations prioritizing academic research. College and university rankings, developed by government or nongovernmental entities, weight scientific and technological innovation heavily. The persistence of the traditional evaluation system also rewards publishing and acquiring projects. Unless policymakers acknowledge, and succeed in controlling, these tendencies, academic drift will keep UATs from fulfilling their original mission. ■

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University Autonomy and Accountability in Russian Higher Education

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We are currently experiencing the heyday of university transformation, as many higher education systems, including in Russia, are looking to upgrade their universities from the national to the global level of operation. During this process, independent strategic thinking by university leadership is critical, and this is only possible with sufficient autonomy.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Throughout the 300-year history of Russian higher education, the level of university autonomy has oscillated. Originally, institutional design was borrowed from Germany, and the first university charters contained a bold level of autonomy—in contrast with other public institutions in the Russian empire. By the middle of the eighteenth century, universities had become hotbeds of liberal thinking, and in an effort to curtail this trend, Emperor Nicholas I significantly reduced their rights. Then, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Alexander II restored their initial, relatively high level of independence, as part of the process of Europeanization of the country.

In the 1920s, the Soviet government redrew all social structures, including higher education. Universities were