

From Higher to Tertiary Education: Where Do We Go from Here?

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The OECD's 1998 publication, *Redefining Tertiary Education*, spoke of "a sweeping shift in orientation toward even higher levels of participation, driven strongly by demands reflecting the diverse interests of clients rather than the supply-led, institution-directed expansion witnessed previously." In opting for the term "tertiary education" rather than "higher education" or "postsecondary education," the OECD report refers not only to increased participation from learners with a wider range of backgrounds, ages, and interests in a diverse array of learning options. The new orientation points to a provision that is more inclusive, focuses more on learners, and shifts from a hierarchy of programs and institutions toward a breadth of flexible, transparent, interconnected, and recognized learning pathways. These directions are already reflected in new policy thinking in four areas: access and equity, standards and qualifications, partnerships and networks, and life-cycle financing.

Access and Equity

Once participation reaches 70 percent or more of a generation—as is now the case in Australia, Finland, Japan, Korea, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States—the transition between secondary education and tertiary-level studies becomes less meaningful as an indicator of access and equity. Further, the tendency for students to undertake studies in more than one program or to acquire more than one qualification means that participation and performance in a single program are insufficient as measures of access and success. Pathways are not equal. For some students, combining vocational and academic qualifications (as in France, Germany, Japan, or the Netherlands) or acquiring double degrees (as in Australia) improves immediate chances on the labor market and likely enhances long-term career prospects. Other students ranking lower in access qualifications or lacking resources may find themselves in second- or third-choice options that lead to "involuntary pathways," when failure requires a switch to another program.

New policy ideas focus on the progress of learners in study programs and through pathways. Policies that reflect these directions include the "10-point programme" in Belgium (Flemish Community) and a new modular approach in France that allows first-year university students to develop study skills, sample different subject areas, and receive credit toward a diploma in the chosen study field. In the United States, a more radical change in this direction would be to

incorporate "remedial education," which presently stands apart, into bachelor's degree programs. The general education component of the bachelor's degree would become the stage of learning where all students are brought up to an advanced level.

Standards and Formal Qualifications

Increased participation and diversity in tertiary-level studies make it more difficult to define and align programs and learning against a single, common standard. Growth in private and cross-border programs and the provision of ICT-based tertiary education add to the range of learning objectives and qualifications.

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New policy approaches not only seek to recognize and foster such diversity but also to balance flexibility against the need for simplicity, clarity in intended learning outcomes, and quality assurance. Qualifications frameworks provide one means to recognize and foster learning across different types of tertiary education programs and from outside formal tertiary education. It has proved difficult to encompass the linkages in learning for a qualification on such frameworks, where recognition is given for mastery of specific skills acquired independently of each other, in any sequence and at any time. The new Irish Qualifications Authority may offer a more promising approach. It sits flexibly over several sector-based curriculum and qualification bodies and has a clear focus on the learner and learning.

Partnerships and Networks

Partnerships are not new: franchising and articulation arrangements and cooperation between universities are common and growing. New policy thinking advances purposeful strategies to shape partnerships or networks. Network Norway, for example, encompasses all tertiary education institutions in the country, so as to allow each institution to draw on the resources, expertise, and information available across the network. The Mjoes Commission, in its May 2000 report *Freedom with Responsibility*, anticipates the extension of this network outside of Norway's borders. The French government offers incentive funding to tertiary education institutions that work together through the infrastructure of a regional

pôle universitaire. Interinstitution cooperation often involves links with regional authorities and local industry.

Life-cycle Financing

Programs to enable students (or parents) to spread the learner's costs over time via savings instruments and loan or deferred payment arrangements are common in nearly all OECD countries. In the new policy thinking, some countries are considering ways to align financing with new patterns of participation over a lifetime. A 1997 green paper issued by the New Zealand Ministry of Education proposed the option of eligibility for further public subsidy for students enrolling *after a break in tertiary study*, in anticipation of retraining and upskilling needs (the proposal was not adopted). In the Netherlands, the Hermans Committee proposed providing each student with an account of NLG 20,400 to be applied to up to 4 years of study. Students would be eligible to draw on the

account over 10 years, provided that they commenced studies (entered the scheme) before age 25. In the United Kingdom, Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs), opened up in a bank by individual learners, are eligible for partial matching contributions from the government. Learners can draw on these accounts at any age to meet expenses for courses. Tertiary education institutions may develop modules eligible for ILA support, as can a wide range of other providers.

These policy initiatives—often innovative departures from long-standing approaches—reflect movement toward a tertiary education system that fully welcomes demand, encompasses systemwide and lifelong participation, and relies on flexible boundary-spanning partnerships and networks. There will be benefit to monitoring further policy development along these lines to judge how well the new policy thinking leads to and supports effective responses to changing expectations and circumstances. ■

The Impact of Consumerism, Capitalism, and For-profit Competition on American Higher Education

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American higher education is irretrievably immersed in a merciless marketplace. Increasingly, three aspects of that marketplace—consumerism, capitalism, and for-profit competition—are changing higher education and the way it does business. These three forces, and their implications for institutions and faculty, are described below.

The Triumph of Consumerism

Students have become customers, and colleges have become vendors. Increasingly, class attendance and participation are voluntary, arrival and departure times self-determined, and a passing grade is a student-consumer expectation. Now more than ever before, students believe the chief benefit of a college education is to increase earnings potential.

The competition for student-consumers has caused the vast majority of schools to bombard students with four-color brochures and promise such amenities as state-of-the-art weight rooms and entertainment centers. Price has become negotiable. Financial aid, alias tuition discount, has become as complicated and as competitive as haggling over the price of a new car. Auctioned tuition(s) and spammed applications to 100 institutions are just around the corner, with the quality of the customer (the best students) determining the quality of the product (the best universities, at the best prices).

The Lure of Capitalism

The costs of consumerism (such as marketing, discounting, and amenities), coupled with the decrease in state support and federally funded research, have made generating new revenue sources imperative. Both public and private colleges raise money through campaigns and annual funds. For example, more than 20 percent of all voluntary support now comes from corporate sponsorship, nonrefereed federal research dollars increased 250 percent from 1996 to 2000, and colleges and universities license logos and trademarks for every conceivable item from blazers to bloomers. Division I football and basketball games are played away or at neutral sites during primetime—however dark or cold—to maximize revenues, not student participation. Over 500 colleges have entered agreements with for-profit vendors to carry commercial advertisements on their websites in order to defray design and maintenance costs and to generate additional revenue.

For-profit, or publicly traded, corporations have entered the arena of higher education and plan to stay.

In addition, courses are now for sale. Corporations are sponsoring courses, in which students conduct market research or related work for the client. Saturn alone has funded more than 200 colleges. University business schools