

have both used this strategy to achieve very high levels of overall degree attainment.

Making a high level of public commitment. The investment of more resources in higher education often leads to higher levels of participation, which then may translate into higher rates of attainment. A number of countries, especially from Nordic regions, have made a significant public commitment to expanding their higher education systems and raising attainment rates. Ireland, too, has significantly increased its investment of public resources in higher education, but this increase came more from rapid national economic growth than from a high level of public commitment.

Relying on the private sector to foster growth. South Korea and Japan are the prime examples of industrialized countries that have relied on private-sector institutions to fuel growth in participation and attainment. Both have become worldwide leaders in attainment without a high cost per student or high level of public commitment. Some developing countries have pursued this strategy for increasing the size of their higher education systems with reasonable success.

One obvious way to raise attainment rates is to introduce regulations or provide incentives to institutions or students that lead to higher degree-completion rates.

Enrolling more students in universities. Several Scandinavian countries now have bachelor's-degree attainment rates similar to or exceeding those in the United States, at least for their youngest workers. Norway, with the highest rate of bachelor's-degree attainment, has focused on bachelor's-degree programs, with a very small sector of sub-bachelor's programs. As a result, these countries tend to have relatively high levels of both education cost per student and public commitment. They also tend to spend more on research per student than do countries with smaller university sectors.

Increasing tuition fees in the public sector. Some OECD countries have raised their participation and thus their attainment rates by relying more on the fees paid by students attending public-sector institutions. Canada has followed this strategy, and it now has the highest overall attainment rate among OECD countries, although much of this growth has been in sub-bachelor's degrees. In the United States and New Zealand, higher public fees also have expanded resources, which in turn allow for higher enrollments. Australia is the prime example, through its Higher Education Contribution Scheme, of a country that now publicly funds higher fees initially, with students repaying these fees based on their income once they graduate. England and Thailand recently have adopted similar approaches.

Recruiting abroad. Another means for countries to increase resources and enrollments is to recruit more students from

other countries. The fees these students pay, which often approach market rates, can generate significant resources for a higher education system. Australia and New Zealand are particularly aggressive in this regard: overseas students represent one-fifth or more of total higher education enrollments. In Austria, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom, overseas students represent at least one-tenth of enrollments. But to the extent that these students do not become citizens of the countries in which they study, large influxes of international students may not affect attainment rates significantly.

CONCLUSION

Each of these eight strategies are worth considering as countries around the world deal with economies in deep recession. Since the recovery from these hard times may be longer than normal, it is even more critical for political and education leaders to focus on higher education strategies that will lead to more degree attainment achieved in financially sustainable ways. ■

The Unintended Effects of the Bologna Reforms

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When the Bologna Declaration was signed 10 years ago, the 29 ministers' commitment to concerted national reforms of their higher education systems and to the creation of common and readable degree structures was not taken seriously at first. Many stakeholders saw these goals as the inflated rhetoric that had become typical of European ministerial meetings. Now, however, close to the self-set deadline of 2010, after a process of unprecedented ministerial peer pressure, most of the reform objectives appear implemented, albeit in most countries in a merely formal and superficial manner.

The ideal of the Bologna reforms to improve the quality and international attractiveness of European higher education remains a vision, for it would have needed substantial investments, which few countries were ready to carry out. The prospect involved multiple policies: student-centered teaching, flexible curricula and learning paths, transparent descriptions of learning outcomes to facilitate student mobility and inter-institutional recognition of [program] study periods and higher education's adaptation to more diverse student qualifications and labor-market needs. However, such trends would have required better student-staff ratios and staff development than most countries were ready to provide.

At this juncture, one should go beyond accounting for short-falls—as helpful as that may be to refuel a deeper reform—and examine some unintended and unnoticed effects of the Bologna reforms that may have profoundly changed higher education, but only in ways unforeseen by the visionaries.

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EFFECTS AT THE SYSTEM LEVEL

Four of the many unintended effects of the Bologna reform process are of interest to higher education researchers and policymakers.

An osmosis. The Bologna process has created such a dense network of policy exchange and institutional comparison that one may expect policy choices at all levels to transpire much more rapidly into the political contexts of other European countries. The spread of policy discussions between countries has reached an unforeseen intensity that makes the European higher education landscape begin to appear as a common “European higher education area.” Bologna has brought about frequent transnational exchanges and policy consulting between European rectors’ conferences and university presidents in similar transitions. For example, the Slovak design of research evaluation was inspired by parts of the English Research Assessment Exercise; the French Programme Campus, in which 10 high-quality universities receive infrastructure support after competitive bidding, was modeled after the German Excellence Initiative; as well as the many national merger incentives that have been picked up from the Scandinavian practice.

A catalyst. The Bologna rhetoric of urgency and international competitiveness and the far-reaching systemic implications of its curricular and quality objectives have also acted as a stimulation for other “urgent” national reforms. Many national reform agendas went well beyond the Bologna “action lines” and were presented as inevitable ingredients of an increasingly international higher education arena. They often included increased institutional autonomy, new governance structures with stronger institutional leadership and more stakeholder influence, and greater proportions of performance-based funding. Examples include Austria, the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, some of the German *Länder*, Belgian Flanders, Portugal, Slovakia, and most recently Spain. A recent European Commission-funded study on governance in Europe documents these convergences.

Vocational drift. With the emphasis on graduates’ “employability” and on the labor-market relevance of the new bachelor’s-degree level, the Bologna reforms strengthened the position of

the more professionally oriented higher education institutions, such as the *Fachhochschulen*, in many higher education systems in Europe (as can be seen in Norway, Germany, the Netherlands, and, to a lesser extent, in Switzerland). Together with the Lisbon agenda’s emphasis on innovation, the status of the less-traditional functions of universities rose to public recognition. While research universities have advanced, through international rankings, as an essential element of an internationally oriented higher education system, the overall effect of the weakened role of basic research and traditional academic research training can still be noted. Doctoral training is being reviewed in its efficacy and relevance for nonacademic employment. The resulting attention to transferable research skills training, which can be seen in Germany, Switzerland, Norway, Finland, Belgium, and France, may well be observed as an indirect effect of the Bologna reforms.

Mass vs. elite degrees. Recent studies on the implementation of the Bologna reforms show that the new two-tier curricula are often structured as a more mass-oriented bachelor’s- and a more selective or elite master’s-degree program. While many systems continue to regard the master’s as the main university degree, the nature of the first three years has clearly changed in its new bachelor’s habitat, based on the European University Association trends studies report. Most often, staff-intensive research training has been restricted to the master’s level, although some research universities are attempting to reverse such trends, as the League of European Research Universities reports. Wherever bachelor’s-degree education is accessible for all high school diploma holders, while master’s programs may select their students to fit their profiles, one may observe early

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signals of mass and elite dimensions of the system. Some less-resourced national systems (such as Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic) already simply allow the most-qualified students to continue into master’s programs. Overall, cost pressures and labor-market reactions to the new degrees are likely to determine whether bachelor’s degrees will become the main degree at least in some fields.

EFFECTS AT THE INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

Central leadership. The Bologna reforms have helped strengthen the position of institutional leadership, creating an institutionwide process of consultation and decision making. Since the Bologna reforms were associated with governance in some countries the central-leadership position at institutions was enhanced there, resulting in controversy from students and academics in some places (e.g., France and Spain).

Crosscutting. The Bologna reforms also often led to attempts to dissolve the vertical boundaries that cut through many continental European universities, resulting in incentives to foster interdisciplinary programs or research. Especially at the new master's level, such new interfaces were sought and institutionalized. Another trend involves support for new interdisciplinary centers or doctoral-level schools within and between institutions, especially in Germany, France, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and the Scandinavian countries.

Stakeholders. Finally, stakeholder influence, which has been associated with the relevance agenda of the Bologna reforms, has been strengthened not only through widespread new governance structures—such as institutional boards (e.g., in Austria, Denmark, Norway, and the Netherlands) and institutionalized advisory boards at program levels. While the direct influence of external stakeholders still raises skepticism at most traditional (self-declared science- or scholarship-driven) institutions, consulting relevant outside partners on program orientation is more widely accepted among academics from all types of institutions now, as recent studies show.

CONCLUSION

It is too early to tell whether the vision of a Europe in which a substantial proportion of students and graduates would study or work abroad, with full recognition of their prior studies and qualifications that open them doors abroad, will become a reality within the next decade. However, beyond such hopes for the realization of the Bologna reforms' deeper vision and potential, one should perhaps begin to look more closely at the effects that were never envisioned but have already become reality. ■

Globalization, Universities, and Quality Assurance in Panama

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Higher education in the developing world has changed dramatically over the past two decades, mainly as a result of increasing globalization. It is the complex interplay of global and local forces, however, that determines subsequent effects on an individual country's university system. The most impacting of these forces come from two directions: economic and political. The economic aspect drives the business opportunity associated with higher education; the political aspect drives the vision for higher education a country develops through policy, legislation, and regulation. How the two factors interact and the kind of system they produce depend largely upon the quality-assurance mechanisms implemented.

The Republic of Panama is an illustrative case of a small, highly globalized country whose university system has grown exponentially since 1990—without a solid quality-assurance system. A recent study from the National Secretariat for Science, Technology and Innovation shows how this lack of quality assurance has allowed the business of university education to undermine the political vision. It further explains how this scenario impedes competitiveness. Studying this particular, but fairly representative, case may provide a glimpse of what developing countries in Latin America and elsewhere can expect given similar circumstances.

PANAMA'S UNIVERSITY SECTOR

Until the 1980s there were two universities in Panama. Today, the Ministry of Education recognizes 36, and the Public Registry lists over 95. These are large numbers for a country with a population of 3 million and potential university cohort of under 300,000. Simultaneous to this proliferation of institutions, global trends toward higher education convergence have pushed initiatives on program and standard harmonization that have, in turn, affected Panama's regulatory environment.

As most of university growth has occurred in the last 15 years, all but a few schools have been operating for a decade or less. Private universities account for the majority, with nearly all legally registered to operate for-profit. There are five public universities, representing almost 75 percent of enrollment. The oldest and largest is the University of Panama; the others have evolved recently, principally from former University of Panama departments or regional centers.

While the private sector represents just over a quarter of university enrollment, it is the fastest-growing segment. It accounts for all Public Registry institutions and 31 of the 36 ministry-recognized universities. Few are nonprofits. Many are products of transnational agreements with international providers, which create branch campuses, online distance-learning programs, "off-shore" degrees, franchising arrangements, or multinational corporations.

International higher education institutions represented in the Panamanian market include Florida State University, University of Louisville, Towson University, College of Notre Dame of Maryland, Florida International University, Universidad de San Martín of Colombia, McGill University (Canada), University of St. Louis, School of International Training, and ADEN Business School. Of these, only Florida State University can claim a full-branch campus, significant market presence, and thousands of graduates. Others generally franchise specific degrees or courses and several run study-abroad programs for outside students exclusively. So while international university presence is growing, with the exception of Florida State University, the overall impact on the sector is relatively weak.

Multinational for-profit university corporations represented in Panama include Laureate International Universities and the Whitney International University System. These companies