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Academic Star Wars: Excellence Initiatives in Asia and Europe

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Threats to Academic Freedom Do Not Just Come from Autocrats

Chris Glass and Hans de Wit

Academic freedom, long taken for granted in democratic societies, is under attack from all sides. In our last editorial, we shared several examples of attacks on academic freedom, from right-wing populist leaders like Florida governor Ron DeSantis appointing politically connected presidents to left-leaning governments like the MORENA party in Mexico seizing private universities and slashing budgets. But the threat does not just come from autocrats. It comes from the use of wealth to steer research agendas, from social media harassment campaigns, from students and staff with no respect for an academic debate, and from university leaders who placate rather than defend embattled faculty.

Some might argue these stakeholders have always sought to influence universities through social and political activism—and they would be right. But this moment seems different. The stakeholders are more activated, and the tools and tactics in their hands are more intense. All the while, defunding of higher education has left universities beholden to private donors and corporate interests.

Corporate partnerships increasingly shape scientists' research agendas to align with industry needs. This shifts focus from basic research to applied domains where funding is more readily available. Researchers on short-term contracts face uncertain career prospects if corporate support dries up. Philanthropic foundations, like the Open Society Foundation, also constrain inquiry by limiting topics and methods to funder-defined activities.

Social media supercharges influence campaigns. Wealthy donors, like Harvard University alumnus Bill Ackman, use social media to criticize university leaders and promote favored board candidates to advance their agendas. X (formerly Twitter) mobs intimidate scholars from sharing controversial findings from their research. Even tenured faculty risk being put on temporary leave if they post a politically incorrect or provocative statement. The result is limited speech and narrowed research agendas.

Universities are in a weak position to defend themselves after decades of chronic underfunding by governments and cuts to arts and humanities budgets. In Uganda, president Museveni has criticized academic disciplines he deems “nonmarketable,” directing budget allocations away from programs unaligned with development agenda. A recent study for the European Parliament, *State of Play of Academic Freedom in the EU Member States*, concluded that major breaches of and threats to academic freedom can be observed across the European Union and the world. And the recent book *New Threats to Academic Freedom in Asia* provides several examples from that region.

This multifront assault on academic freedom comes at a concerning time, with over 50 countries holding presidential elections this year in both established and emerging democracies. The results of these elections could embolden populist leaders hostile to dissent. However, even if populist candidates face defeat, threats to academic freedom will remain. Threats to academic freedom do not just come in the form of violent oppression. They also come from the gradual corrosion of public debate; not just headline-grabbing cases of censorship but creeping intellectual conformity; not in one dramatic purge but death by a thousand cuts.

If universities do not fight back, what will remain of academic freedom after its slow erosion goes unaddressed? Recent European-level statements, like the Bonn Declaration and the Rome Ministerial Communiqué, affirm academic freedom as essential to democracy, but declarations alone lack concrete protections scholars need. Academic freedom requires stronger protections from universities and governments to preserve truth-seeking, no matter how unconventional, critical, or contrary the ideas are to current consensus. ▲

Academic Star Wars: Excellence Initiatives in Asia and Europe

Jamil Salmi, Philip G. Altbach and Maria Yudkevich

Abstract

Academic excellence initiatives have been introduced around the world in an effort to quickly improve research universities, research culture, and the rankings of top universities. *Academic Star Wars*, a recently published book, examines nine case studies of such initiatives in Europe and Asia. The AElS impact on academic culture, productivity, and in some cases governance has been significant.

Preoccupied by the low standing of their top universities in the global rankings, a small number of countries have in the past decades engaged in large-scale government-funded academic excellence initiatives (AEIs) to boost research productivity and output. A newly published book, *Academic Star Wars: Excellence Initiatives in Global Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2023—[available free in open access](#)) analyzes excellence initiatives in nine countries across the world.

These countries expended approximately USD 100 billion to finance these AEIs. At least half that amount was spent in China, which also achieved dramatic success in boosting its research university sector and, not coincidentally, its position in the rankings. The goals, scope, funding—and success, or failure, of the initiatives—vary considerably. The cases show a variety of serendipitous positive results as well. It is perhaps significant that there were no AEIs in the Anglophone world, and also none in the Western Hemisphere or Africa.

Excellence That Is Measured by Rankings

The Russian 5-100 initiative was not unique in concretely mentioning rankings in the aims of the program. Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe declared in 2013 his intentions to have 10 Japanese universities rank in the top 100 in the world in 10 years (by 2023) as a symbolic indicator of the recovery of Japan's economy. Similarly, in France and Germany, the AEIs were very much a reaction to the lack of visibility of their universities in the top 50 in the global rankings.

Thus, "rankings consciousness" is central to many, if not most of the AEIs. While many in the academic community are skeptical about the relevance of rankings as a meaningful metric for measuring excellence, policy makers and the public almost without exception see these rankings as a key sign of success and a justification for allocating resources to AEIs.

Internationalization

Internationalization is considered the key element of all AEIs. Their design often assumed a direct push toward international competition and global visibility and provided incentives for institutions and individuals to make progress in this area. Internationalization has two main aspects. The most relevant for AEIs is the internationalization of research through jointly authored articles and research projects and the mobility of graduate students, professors, and researchers. These are all signs of the internationalization of science and scholarship. However, in some countries such as Japan, internationalization is a challenge due to language, traditions, and other barriers.

Progress in internationalization is often measured by clear quantitative indicators, such as number of joint articles or proportion of foreign academics/students. South Korea used as quantitative indicators of internationalization the proportion of courses, programs, and dissertations in English, intensive short-term seminars taught by foreign scholars, and the number of presentations at international conferences. Similar techniques were used by the Russian 5-100 participating universities.

Governance and the Role of Government

In most AEI programs, the government plays a key role not just as the main source of funding but also because it defines the rules and goals of the game. Governments demand more accountability from universities. As a 2026 Danish governmental act puts

it, “universities that are doing well should be rewarded. And poor quality should have consequences.”

Such direct government involvement has raised concerns in most AEIs. The Taiwanese case shows that it has likely diluted social trust and raised anxiety in the university community. This reinforces a situation in which the definition of excellence is translated into simple indicators such as positions in the global university rankings to demonstrate impact, quality, and performance. Japan, Malaysia, and Russia are clear examples of a top-down approach to program implementation.

At the same time, with the government playing the key role, in most cases AEIs do not substantially increase the involvement of industry and do not help universities to become more financially sustainable. This correlates with the fact that governance models have not changed much, reflecting a continuing hierarchical relationship between universities and the state.

Impact

Evidence suggests that AEIs have had a substantial influence on the performance of beneficiary universities, increasing their efficiency, research output, competitiveness, and global visibility. They also impact the allocation and concentration of talent—faculty and students alike. Furthermore, AEIs have had a positive effect on other universities and national research systems in general. AEIs have increased academic mobility and created more opportunities for early-career researchers. Less measurable are the soft, but perhaps equally important effects of the AEIs. These effects include a greater drive for excellence, a stronger competitive spirit, and an increasing role of leading universities in national and regional development.

Significant Concerns

At the same time, case studies reveal a number of concerns. Some cases clearly show that it is doubtful that the observed changes are sustainable without permanent funding. Another concern is the tension between local and global values (since the world-class model is associated with the North American model of research-intensive university). Reaching high positions in rankings may mean becoming similar to Western universities, especially in terms of resources, standards, performance indicators, and organizational/governance patterns. The China, Japan, and Taiwan cases raise concerns about this aspect. Academic freedom is another issue. Does participation in AEIs bring more autonomy and academic freedom? In China and Russia, it seems that participation in AEIs brought more institutional autonomy on matters relating to teaching, research, and staffing, while the government continues to exercise strict control and restrain academic freedom, especially in the humanities and social sciences which were largely ignored in most AEIs. There is also a concern in some countries that the concentration of resources in a small number of universities may starve the rest of the national higher education system. Regional inequalities have also been noted in France, Russia, and South Korea, with metropolitan universities getting most of the additional funding. The Taiwan case study showed a weak connection between universities and local communities in the pursuit of academic excellence. In Germany, the autonomy of academic units has created tensions between centers of excellence benefiting from the national excellence initiative and those not involved. These areas are all highlighted in the book.

Concluding Comments

While there has been emphasis on rankings when shaping AEIs in general, the case studies show that these initiatives bring more benefits when they focus on national and institutional goals, and use rankings only as reference points for comparison with other institutions and countries. There is a need for a more comprehensive concept of academic excellence that would not be linked narrowly to scientific publications in elite journals but that would promote scientific truth and responsible research. ▲

Evidence suggests that AEIs have had a substantial influence on the performance of beneficiary universities, increasing their efficiency, research output, competitiveness, and global visibility.

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Abstract

The accelerated global expansion of higher education in the twenty-first century is accompanied by the emergence of a shrinking sector in many matured systems. It is argued that the expansion possibilities are higher in the least developed region of Africa. Despite the stated policies promoting internationalization, many countries follow inward-looking strategies of higher education development. Massification of the sector challenges the traditional elite modes of operation and social interactions in the sector.

Medical and engineering schools, which once enjoyed a premium in the education market, are nowadays often vacant in India.

Global Trends and Local Policies in Higher Education

N.V. Varghese

The twenty-first century has already experienced an accelerated growth and global expansion of higher education. The gross enrollment ratio (GER) doubled from 19 percent to 38 percent between 2000 and 2018. The sector experienced an average annual increase of around 6.5 million students in the first two decades of this century against an increase of 2.45 million students between 1980 and 2000. According to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics data, global enrollment in tertiary education reached 236.8 million in 2021. More importantly, women became the majority in colleges and universities accounting for 52 percent of the total global enrollment.

Higher education enrollment in the global South increased by 91 percent. The countries of Sub-Saharan Africa experienced the highest increase of 125 percent between 2000 and 2018. China and India expanded most rapidly and increased their share in global enrollment to nearly 40 percent in 2021. It is expected that Sub-Saharan Africa will remain the only region with a continuously growing youth population and higher education enrollment in the coming years.

Shrinking National Systems

The global picture conceals local variations because expansion of higher education was uneven across countries. Interestingly, some of the advanced higher education systems experienced a stagnation or a decline in enrollment. For example, in Japan, South Korea, Russia, and the United States the higher education sector actually shrunk. In more than half of the countries in the world, fertility is below the replacement rate of 2.1, so most countries are facing a decline in population. Some of the estimates indicate an almost 40 percent decline in student numbers by 2040 in some parts of East Asia.

Downward demographic trends are leading to a phenomenon of “marginal universities” which are insolvent and on the verge of closing due to insufficient student numbers. Nearly 75 percent of private universities and many public universities outside South Korea’s capital are severely affected by the decline of student population. They can survive only as “zombie universities,” heavily relying on financial support from the government. There are nearly 84 such marginal universities in South Korea. Japan has closed several universities and merged many others due to insufficient student numbers. The Japanese government further plans to close universities that cannot recruit enough students for a consecutive period of three years. In some countries, there are also proposals to sell university property to ensure their financial survival.

Medical and engineering schools, which once enjoyed a premium in the education market, are nowadays often vacant in India. A total of 860 places for medical students remained vacant in the past three years in India due to high fees levied by private medical colleges. Many students migrate to East European countries or China to benefit from their low-cost medical education. Many engineering colleges in India are closing due to lack of students since households are unwilling to invest in “low-value” high-cost engineering degrees.

Inward-Looking Local Policies

Globalization process integrated national systems into the global higher education market. But many trends are now reversing. Many countries have adopted inward-looking policies. Brexit in the United Kingdom, the dual circulation strategy in China, the self-reliance policies prioritizing indigenous knowledge systems in India, country-first policies, substitution of international expertise with local talents and the promotion of a higher education system with “Chinese characteristics” rather than based on Western

standards are examples of inward-looking policies. It seems investing in nationalism and inward-looking policies is becoming increasingly beneficial in terms of political gain.

Is University Education Worth It?

The college wage premium for the best performing students is high, while average and poor performers, who constitute the majority of graduates, receive low returns for their investments. Given the high cost of higher education, many students are asking themselves: Is university education actually worth it? A poll published by the *Wall Street Journal* in March 2023 pointed to a crisis of confidence: 56 percent of Americans now believe that a degree is no longer worth the time and money spent on it. In August 2023, the *Economist* reported a declining rate of return for a bachelor degree in the past decades. In the post-financial crisis period, the return on higher education has been declining in the less developed countries, and the decrease in returns has been high among the youth and early-career workers.

The polarization in returns has made admissions to elite institutions highly competitive and led to a significant growth in “shadow education.” Private tutoring is considered important to improve results in admission tests for highly selective institutions and graduates’ final exams results. In fact, private tutoring is widening educational inequalities favoring children from privileged households.

Diversity and Elitism

Higher education remained a privilege of the developed countries and of the privileged in the less developed countries. Massification of the sector attracted students from non-traditional groups, from disadvantaged groups and from remote rural areas. Increasing student diversity poses challenges to social exclusive and elitist practices in institutions of higher education everywhere.

Diversity also has implications for the medium of instruction since language of instruction may be different from language of social interactions, especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Elite universities with credentialing students for high prestige employment may refuse to respond to the diversity challenges and may remain “cathedrals of conservatism and masters of survival.” Private elite universities in the South, though limited in numbers, reinforce conservatism and enjoy market premium among the elites who seek admission in these institutions.

Concluding Observations

This century saw an accelerated expansion and massification of higher education in the less developed countries, and a contraction of the sector in some of the matured systems. Higher education expansion is fuelled by an increasing social demand stemming from a negative correlation between unemployment rate and level of education. Massification of the sector attracted students from nontraditional backgrounds adding to student diversity on campuses in developing countries. Improving quality and managing student diversity remains an institutional challenge in most countries. ▲

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Present and Future of Internationalization of Higher Education: Insights from the Sixth IAU Global Survey

Giorgio Marinoni, Hilligje van't Land and Hans de Wit

Abstract

The sixth IAU Global Survey comes on time to draw a holistic picture of internationalization of higher education around the world, to capture key changes over the period of 2018-2022, including the COVID-19 pandemic, and to give hints on how internationalization could evolve in the future. Key findings of this survey presented provide a tool to enhance quality, inclusion, equity, and social responsibility through internationalization.

In 2023, five years after the fifth edition, the International Association of Universities (IAU) conducted the sixth edition of the global survey on the internationalization of higher education. Five years is a good time to allow for evolutions to take place and to be analyzed, and at the same time, a not too long time to have a completely different situation, thus allowing for meaningful comparisons over time.

However, the last five years witnessed major changes in the world that influenced the evolution of internationalization of higher education. It is enough to think about the COVID-19 pandemic or the changed geopolitics with new tensions between countries emerging and new wars ravaging the world.

Therefore, the sixth IAU Global Survey comes on time to draw a holistic picture of internationalization of higher education around the world, to capture the aforementioned changes, and to give hints on how internationalization could evolve in the future.

The sixth IAU Global Survey was conducted in three languages (English, French, and Spanish) through an online institutional questionnaire between January and June 2023. It sheds light on the most important trends and evolutions in internationalization around the world and provides for some interesting comparisons between private and public higher education institutions (HEIs), as well as between HEIs across different regions of the world. It also provides information on the evolution of some trends over time, when comparing the results with previous editions, whenever this is possible.

Insights from Survey Results

It is important to mention the high importance that academic leadership all around the world attributes to internationalization, and that such importance has generally increased also at HEIs that consider internationalization of low importance. This result reverses a worrying trend of growing inequality among HEIs that was highlighted in the fifth edition of the survey, and gives hope for the future.

Another positive result from the survey is the fact that HEIs around the world see increased international cooperation and capacity-building as the main benefits of internationalization, a trend already highlighted by the results of the fifth global survey and confirmed by the present edition. Although in terms of priority of internationalization activities there is still a strong focus on student mobility, international cooperation and capacity-building are the activities that increased the most over the last five years, showing a move toward a convergence between expected benefits and activities to achieve them.

The results of the survey also build on the fact that the world is very diverse, and that for some aspects of internationalization, there is no common denominator at the global level, as exemplified, for instance, by the great variety of risks and challenges/obstacles identified. In some cases, regional analysis helps explain this great variety, for instance with the clear identification of "brain drain" as the most important risk in Sub-Saharan Africa. But in other cases, diversity persists also at the regional level, showing that multiple factors other than the geographic location of institutions are important in defining trends.

The survey results also underline the commonly understood nature of internationalization as a strategic process. At the same time, they underline some limitations, especially

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in terms of funding. They also show how internationalization is still a top-down process mainly steered by academic leadership and dedicated internationalization offices. This calls for a reflection on the possible risk of insufficient engagement of the rest of the academic community that such an approach implies.

There is still a geographic imbalance at the global level, with regions in the Global North (Europe and North America) still catching the most attention, while South-South cooperation, besides intraregional, is still not considered a priority. It confirms the tendency towards regionalization in some regions but not in others, and the specificity of North America as a region, which more often than not presents divergent results from other regions.

This diversity reminds us that benefits and challenges are not equally distributed around the world, and that there is a persistent risk of inequality in internationalization.

Another interesting result is the fact that the role played by the COVID-19 pandemic in driving changes in internationalization has been much less prominent than expected. The pandemic did drive some changes, especially in the development of virtual internationalization, but it has not been the only or the most determinant factor behind many of the changes internationalization has undergone over the last five years.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the sixth IAU Global Survey provides insights into the evolution of some specific aspects of internationalization, for example in teaching and learning, research and community engagement, as well as into the links between internationalization and other important priorities, such as sustainable development or diversity, equity, and inclusion. Internationalization also plays a positive role in fighting racism and xenophobia, promoting intercultural understanding, and achieving sustainable development.

Conclusion

In summary, the sixth IAU Global Survey provides a present-time picture of internationalization around the world, its evolution over the recent years, and the possible ways it could evolve in the future.

The positive developments in internationalization, manifested in the responses to the sixth IAU Global Survey, should be celebrated but at the same time, not all results of the survey are positive. Some improvements are still marginal and fragmented, and are present more in the discourse than in practice. Exclusion and inequality are still prevailing.

Moreover, the survey is by no means exhaustive, and it is probably posing more questions than it is answering. For many aspects, the survey results are a starting point for more research. Despite limitations and possible needs for improvement, the sixth IAU Global Survey remains the only comprehensive institutional survey on internationalization at the global level and provides invaluable information that is not available anywhere else. The results of the sixth IAU Global Survey, based on information and perceptions provided by university leaders in internationalization around the globe, illustrate the tension between ambitious intentions, positive initiatives, and major challenges.

The IAU Global Survey results, based on a collaborative effort by IAU and global partners, are best to be seen as a tool to enhance quality, inclusion, equity, and social responsibility as key drivers for internationalization for the coming five years during which current challenges and expectations will not abate. ▲

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The survey was organized by IAU in partnership with 16 lead organizations around the globe. All partners are listed on the IAU website. CIHE and the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto, Canada, partnered in the framework of the Future of Internationalization Partnership (FIP) Project, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). The full report is available on the IAU website for free download.

The Mental Health Crisis in Higher Education: Insights from Singapore

Dave Stanfield and Andrew Tay

Abstract

After the COVID-19 pandemic, tertiary students globally have continued to struggle with their mental health at alarming rates. Institutions struggle to respond adequately as the demand for professional counseling services continues to increase. Singapore's higher education sector offers a number of insights, including innovative preventative approaches, an openness to piloting promising new technology, and the involvement of multiple institutional stakeholders.

Much has been written about mental health challenges plaguing higher education around the world. With high rates of anxiety and depression among students, administrators struggle to provide sufficient psychological services at a time when many institutions are facing budget constraints. Gone are the days of a pervasive stigma inhibiting students from seeking professional help, though studies indicate that some vulnerable groups are less likely to access resources. Demand for counseling at most institutions far outweighs supply.

The causes, percentages, and diagnoses likely vary somewhat between countries, but most administrators would put student mental health high on their list of concerns. Likewise, you would be hard-pressed to find an institution that is not struggling to respond adequately. The consequences of inadequate mental health support are dire for students and institutions, including higher rates of academic struggle and attrition.

Singapore is a good example of a country where mental health is receiving national attention, particularly in the higher education sector. A 2022 study using data at the height of COVID-19 restrictions revealed that three out of four students at Singapore's flagship institution, the National University of Singapore (NUS), were at risk of depression, and over 83 percent cited high levels of stress. Recognizing that hiring additional mental health professionals is both cost prohibitive and only part of the solution, institutions in Singapore are implementing holistic approaches to addressing mental health.

Engaging Multiple Stakeholders

Sharing the responsibility for mental health support across an institution can reduce the burden on a university counseling center. Yale-NUS College, a residential liberal arts institution jointly established by Yale University and the National University of Singapore, utilizes trained student affairs staff and academic advisors to triage and manage lower-level mental health issues including mild forms of academic stress and social anxiety. Staff complete in-house training organized by counseling colleagues and some extend their education through external programs such as Mental Health First Aid.

In 2021, as an increasing number of teaching faculty encountered mental health struggles among their students, Yale-NUS introduced "gatekeeper training" that covered how to recognize signs of emotional distress, taught empathic and active listening skills, and explained the various resources available to students. Faculty and teaching assistants are often the first to recognize student mental health issues, since they engage with students regularly in the classroom, at advising appointments, and during office hours. Administrators should ensure faculty have access to and utilize an internal referral system that alerts the appropriate staff when professional follow-up is necessary.

NUS understood the importance of involving multiple stakeholders when they created the WellNUS[®] Mental Health Framework in 2021 to systematically map out the different aspects of well-being and identify the relevant initiatives and key stakeholders to provide support. The aim of the framework is to have a more holistic, structured, and sustainable approach towards student and staff well-being.

Proactive and Preventative

In 2021, Yale-NUS introduced a for-credit "Resilience and Success in College" elective course for first-year students in order to equip them with strategies to respond to the inevitable challenges and adversity that they will face during college. Example topics

In 2021, as an increasing number of teaching faculty encountered mental health struggles among their students, Yale-NUS introduced "gatekeeper training" that covered how to recognize signs of emotional distress, taught empathic and active listening skills, and explained the various resources available to students.

include finding purpose, utilizing strengths, practicing vulnerability, and developing positive interpersonal relationships. The course was later adapted for graduating seniors to help support them through the often stressful phase of transitioning out of college.

The six-week course was a collaborative effort between the student affairs division and psychology faculty with seminar-style classroom discussions and assignments that emphasized personal reflection and application. Students who completed the six-week course reported that they were better equipped to navigate future issues and understand what support resources are available to them.

Organizational Structure

In the United Kingdom, institutions are encouraged to focus on employee well-being through the University Mental Health Charter and the Education Staff Wellbeing Charter. The premise is that staff and student well-being are inextricably linked and supportive of the other. As such, a whole-university approach was called upon to better address mental health risks. Naturally, this requires a review of the organizational structure that cares for both student *and* staff populations. NUS has taken a similar path by devoting significant resources to staff well-being, including a dedicated in-house counseling team for university employees. Additionally, students and staff are recruited and trained to serve as “peer supporters” to provide basic emotional support and coping techniques to fellow students and colleagues in need.

NUS and another large Singaporean university, Nanyang Technology University, created well-being offices reporting directly to the university’s president and provost respectively, signalling a high-level commitment to address mental health risks. Both staff and student populations receive mental health support and experience the strategic program campaigns in a coordinated fashion from central wellness offices. This approach is different from the organizational structure in the United Kingdom and the United States, where mental health support is offered separately by human resources (often through an external insurance company) for staff and by the student affairs departments for students.

At NUS, the consolidation of staff and student mental well-being strategies and approaches has helped to drive consistent mental health campaign messages and resource awareness across the entire university community. In terms of impact, the NUS #AreuOK campaigns in 2021 and 2022 have reduced help-seeking stigma, increased awareness of mental health resources, and increased mental health service utilization among staff and students.

Innovations in Mental Health Services

Since the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in an increased demand for mental health services, overwhelming the existing counseling capacity in many universities, institutions should carefully consider promising new technology. For instance, AI-enabled chatbots and other types of online applications have gained traction in recent years, with thousands of mental health-related self-help apps in the marketplace. Evidence of effectiveness is nascent, though some promising studies have been published examining specific technology platforms. As innovative solutions are deployed, they should be viewed as a complement to existing well-established mental health solutions.

Other technology-based approaches are in the early phases. For example, digital phenotyping refers to passively tracking and actively requesting data through smart devices to assess and predict mental health risk. For example, students could opt-in to receive wellness-related questions via text messages providing mental health professionals with timely information predicting when students are at risk. An institution can then respond with appropriate interventions to prevent further mental health deterioration.

Taking this concept further, universities may be able to quantify student well-being based on measurements through digital devices such as sleep quantity or digital footprints (e.g., how orderly one navigates the learning management system). In turn, this would allow administrators to predict students’ mental health trajectories. This technology is still in its infancy but shows promise.

One obvious challenge is the invasive nature of personal data collection required for such approaches and all the related privacy concerns. Nevertheless, in forward-thinking

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Abstract

The student loan indebtedness issue has become one of the most significant issues in higher education in the United States. This issue impacts nearly 45 million Americans and has long-term economic consequences that are just beginning to be felt throughout the country's economy. This article addresses the evolution of this national problem and discusses the economic ramifications of the student loan debt crisis.

Singapore, innovations like this are being evaluated as possible additional components of a holistic approach to mental health support at NUS and other local universities.

As the global mental health crisis in higher education persists, university counseling services will continue to face an insatiable demand. Singapore's holistic and proactive approach of creating varied pathways to wellness and viewing mental health support as a collective responsibility across an entire institution provides a promising framework that can be applied elsewhere. ▲

The Student Loan Debt Crisis in the United States and the Long-Term Economic Impact

F. King Alexander

To better understand the USD 1.8 trillion student loan debt crisis in the United States which impacts nearly 45 million college attendees and graduates, taxpayers need to recognize the complexity of the problem and to not simply blame student loan borrowers. In the last 50 years policy makers have created a federal funding scheme that has incentivized state governments to decrease funding efforts and to encourage tuition-based funding reliance in higher education. As Arthur Hauptman pointed out in 2011, "common sense suggests that growing availability of student loans at reasonable rates has made it easier for many institutions to raise their prices, just as the mortgage interest deduction contributes to higher housing prices." Expanding the complexity of this issue, the United States Supreme Court struck down President Biden's student loan forgiveness plan that would have erased student loan debts for nearly 23 million borrowers. Since the ruling, President Biden has announced much more scaled-down plans that have only addressed a fraction of this national problem.

Critics of President Biden's loan forgiveness plan, which included conservative politicians, private student-loan servicers, and major companies that manage commercially-held federal financial aid loans, contended that since the student voluntarily acquired the loans, they alone are obliged to repay them. A further claim by critics of the Biden federal loan forgiveness program is that the cost of the USD 430 billion program will lead to much higher inflation due to increased deficit growth. A similar accusation was made that never came to fruition at the beginning of the Social Security Act in 1935 and the G.I. Bill in 1944. This is a simplistic way to look at this complicated problem involving state government funding decisions and bountiful federal loan availability, which has incentivized many colleges and universities to adopt more tuition-based revenue models.

The Domino Effect

At the nucleus of this issue are decades of state government disinvestment resulting in ongoing tuition and fee growth with the federal government backstopping the system through its over USD 100 billion in federal loan programs. As federal loans have expanded, state disinvestment went further as many public colleges and universities have shifted their financial reliance from state government to more tuition-based revenue models. The result is that current state government investment in public higher education is nearly 50 percent less in state "tax effort" or "fiscal capacity" than it was in 1980.

Additionally, half of the states spend less in real dollars for public institutions than they did in 1991, while enrollments increased by nearly 20 percent during the same period.

Public colleges and universities were not the only institutions indirectly incentivized to become more tuition- and fee-reliant. In reacting to the largess of these available federal loan programs higher education institutions in the independent sector, including not-for-profit private colleges and universities and for-profit institutions, developed a fiscal addiction to the availability of federal loan programs. The disproportionate impact of these developments on underrepresented and lower-income populations is only beginning to be understood.

The Long-Term Economic Consequences

The economic consequences of this complicated issue are already beginning to affect the country's economy in the small business, housing, automobile, and most other consumer markets. In 2019, the Federal Reserve Bank issued a report highlighting a national decline in homeownership rates and especially among young Americans in their twenties and thirties, who experienced nearly twice the decline in homeownership as the general population between 2005–2014. The Federal Reserve also reported that student debt accounted for nearly one quarter of the overall decline and precluded 400,000 young adults from buying homes during that period. The report also noted that the rise in education debt increased borrowers' odds of default, adversely impacting their credit scores and ability to apply for a mortgage.

In the last three years, the rate of millennial renters giving up on homeownership has increased by 65.7 percent. The foreseen danger in the housing market is that we are creating a generation of renters and not buyers. Ultimately, consistent declines in homeownership will cause a significant decrease in revenue for banks and investment firms that lobbied against the Biden Administration's Student Loan Forgiveness Program.

Another long-lasting economic impact of massive student indebtedness is a reduction in consumer spending power of those with student loan debt. It is estimated that each time a graduate or nongraduate student's debt-to-income increases 1 percent, their consumer consumption declines by as much as 3.7 percent according to the Education Data Initiative. Also, in a 2018 LendingTree survey, one in ten borrowers said they could not pay for a new car due to their student debt. In addition to homeownership and automobile consumer markets, areas such as clothing, home repairs, entertainment, travel, and grocery goods are all beginning to understand what saddling the next generation of American consumers with substantial student loan debt will ultimately mean for their bottom-line profits.

Perhaps the most damaging economic consequence to the nation is in the small business markets. According to a 2015 Philadelphia Federal Reserve report, an increase in student loan debt of approximately 3.3 percent resulted in a 14.4 percent decrease in the formation of small firms and businesses in each Pennsylvania county.

Moreover, rising student loan debt will prevent young people from saving for their retirement and weathering financial crises, making them increasingly reliant on social programs and government agencies. Demographically, the rise of student debt is already delaying marriage and family formation, which is increasingly becoming an issue of national concern. These economic and societal effects are not short-term, and also disproportionately impact Black, Hispanic, and female student loan borrowers.

Finally, young people in the United States managing substantial student loan debt have very few options except to spend less, since student loan debt is the only debt where filing for bankruptcy is not an option by law. According to Robert Reich, "bankruptcy laws allow companies to smoothly reorganize, but not college graduates burdened with student loans."

According to a warning from Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell, "as it goes on and as student loans continue to grow and become larger and larger, then it absolutely could hold back the economy." If important reforms and recalibrations are left unattended, the problem that college graduates are facing today will have economic consequences for every US business, government agency, and citizen. ▲

Rising student loan debt will prevent young people from saving for their retirement and weathering financial crises, making them increasingly reliant on social programs and government agencies.

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Higher Education Financing in a Time of International Crisis: The Australian Exception

Bruce Chapman

Abstract

The student loan systems of most countries have recently been in crisis. Many former students are confronted with insurmountable repayment difficulties, which for many results in default and can ruin their personal financial future. The situation became very visible during the COVID-19 pandemic. It exposed the key role of insurance against repayment hardship and default, essential to income-contingent student loan systems (ICL), such as that used in Australia.

There is little doubt that most countries' student loan systems are currently in crisis or at minimum face significant difficulties. Substantial problems in higher education financing arrangements have been exposed through the short-term dysfunction of labor markets due to business lockdowns associated with COVID-19 pandemic. The reasons for this issue are now clarified at least for Australia, one of a few countries where student loans have managed to be trauma-free from the economic side of the pandemic.

The key point is that the Australian student loan system, which was initiated in 1989, was the first national higher education financing arrangement to collect student debts on a repayment basis contingent on future personal income. This feature was motivated by the perceived need for insurance for debtors against unexpected, yet inevitable, exigencies associated with unforeseen adverse graduate labor market conditions, to ensure that borrowing risks are substantially mitigated in the process of higher education financing. It has become clear that this is a critical positive feature of the Australian model, which was later adopted in full in New Zealand (1991), the United Kingdom (1998), and Hungary (2002), partially put in place in the United States, Japan, South Korea, Thailand, and Colombia, and currently under very close consideration in many other jurisdictions.

Understanding Why a Particular Form of Student Loans Protects Borrowers

It is critical to understand that there are two quite distinct approaches to student loans, and these are defined by the rules determining loan repayments. The most common approach internationally is known as "time-based repayment loans" (TBRL), in which, like a mortgage, a set stream of repayments is required over a given time period (such as 10 years for Stafford loans widely used in the United States or eight years for the FIES loan system in Brazil).

The other approach, which has been quietly transforming international higher education financing policy over three decades, is known as an "income-contingent loan" (ICL), in which repayments depend solely on the borrower's future income. The essential difference between the two types of loan systems is that ICLs protect borrowers from repayment hardship and default. That is, if an ICL debtor does not have the capacity to repay in a particular period, there are no adverse consequences, such as having to find the money from elsewhere or even defaulting on the loan.

To illustrate how this approach works, note that with the Australian and English ICLs, no loan repayments are required until the debtor's annual income exceeds around AUD 52,000 and GBP 28,000 respectively (both around USD 35,000). The collection rate increases as income rises, in much the same way that characterizes progressive income tax collections, and in most countries ICL is accompanied by interest rate subsidies.

Such protection for borrowers is not present with TBRL, which means that debtors struggling to repay debts when their financial circumstances are poor is a commonplace event in many countries. This results in significant proportions of former students defaulting on their loans. Student-loan defaults constitute a very significant problem to borrowers because of the associated damage to credit reputations, which then severely limits individuals' access to normal commercial loans, for example, to purchase a house. Research for the United States suggests that some prospective borrowers resist taking on TBRLs due to the high associated risks expected and adverse consequences of defaults.

Furthermore, defaults on student loans are a major problem for the lender, which is generally the government, because once a debtor is officially declared as being in default,

Furthermore, defaults on student loans are a major problem for the lender, which is generally the government, because once a debtor is officially declared as being in default,

no further loan repayment streams will be forthcoming from this person. Consequently, the lost revenue from unpaid debt becomes a government expenditure, which in turn fiscally limits the prospects for future levels of public sector support for higher education.

The international student loan comparisons outlined above took on new and much more sinister dimensions with the COVID-19 crisis, in ways that had not been anticipated or understood before the pandemic. Tens of millions of recent graduates in many countries were unable to quickly find employment due to the recessionary consequences of the pandemic. Those former college students with TBRL (e.g., in Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Brazil, Malaysia, Thailand, and the United States) have experienced major anxiety associated with the incapacity to repay their debts.

The crisis then led to major student loan interventions, most notably President Biden's plan announced in August 2022 to forgive almost USD 5 billion worth of student loans, while other countries implemented extended pauses for the repayment of TBRLs. These interventions are hugely expensive for taxpayers and unnecessary in countries with ICLs like Australia.

Australian Student Loans Experience through the Pandemic and Beyond

Unlike the situation with TBRL, the governments of countries using ICL, such as Australia, Hungary, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom, did not have to take emergency action to protect higher education debtors from the short-term crisis associated with the pandemic. This is because ICL systems have built into them the automatic insurance benefits that shelter those with loans from both repayment hardship and default. Debtors with ICL are not required to repay in periods when they do not have the capacity to do so.

In the late 1980s, when the Australian student loan system was being designed, it was recognized that the ICL insurance advantages had key dimensions with respect to adverse individual circumstances, such as through illness or caring for incapacitated family members. However, it was not foreseen that there are also implicit protective benefits for entire cohorts of borrowers from widespread labor market disruption. COVID-19 pandemic has illuminated this very brightly.

It is important to recognize how important these ICL protections are, and this can be reinforced with reference to the prospects and consequences of a borrower defaulting on student loans. As noted above, defaults impose very significant costs for both borrowers (through their adverse implications for access to further credit) and lenders (since once in default there are few prospects for future loan repayments. Default rates can be extremely high, as much as 40-50 percent of all student borrowers in some countries, and even as high as 20 percent in countries with a relatively high student debt repayment rate, such as the United States. Currently there are over 12 million former college students in the United States who are labelled as defaulters and who thus have very seriously damaged future borrowing prospects.

In Australia there are no student loan defaulters, and thus no debtors with tarnished reputations, because the ICL system automatically provides the protection required to assist those in future financial need. Thus, while the current student loan situation in Australia might need some improvement, as all 35-year-old policies do, in the fundamental area of repayment experience, there is nothing approaching the sorts of crises that are evident and hugely costly in the majority of countries with non-ICL higher education financing arrangements. ▲

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Abstract

Faced with higher education expansion and limited public funding, governments globally have resorted to student loans to shift more costs onto graduates. However, there are growing concerns about graduates' mounting debt, and its potentially damaging economic and societal consequences. Income-contingent loans are seen as a potential solution because of their protective features and image of fairness. Yet, research suggests that such an image is at odds with some graduates' subjective experiences of income-contingent loan debt.

The Consequences of Income-Contingent Student Loan Debt for Graduates' Lives in England

Claire Callender

Faced with higher education expansion and limited public funding, governments globally have resorted to student loans to shift more of higher education's costs onto graduates. However, there are growing concerns about graduates' mounting student loan debt, and its potentially damaging economic and societal consequences.

Globally, income-contingent loans are seen as a potential solution to financial distress resulting from student loan debt because repayments are based on graduates' income, protecting debtors from excessive repayments, financial hardship or defaulting on repayments. By contrast, time-based repayment loans, the commonest worldwide, are unable to achieve such safeguards because repayments are determined by the amount borrowed plus interest, divided by the duration of the loan.

This article questions the effectiveness of income-contingent loans in protecting graduates from the negative effects of debt, using England as a case study.

Tuition and Income-Contingent Loans in England

The United Kingdom faced the challenge of tradeoffs between the costs of higher education expansion, equity, and quality in the 1990s when it started to grapple with the financial realities of moving from an elite to mass higher education system. In 1990, England launched government-funded maintenance loans for undergraduates' living costs, which eventually replaced preexisting maintenance grants. It only introduced tuition for all domestic undergraduates in 2006. Since then, tuition has increased from a maximum of GBP 3,000 per annum to GBP 9,250, which now nearly all universities charge for all undergraduate programs—the highest average tuition fees in the OECD.

Since 2006, all students domiciled in England and studying in the United Kingdom have been eligible for income-contingent loans covering all their tuition and some maintenance, which are now the only type of government-funded financial aid available. Students start repaying their loans once they graduate and their income reaches above the government set repayment threshold. They then pay 9 percent of their income above the threshold until they have repaid their loans, or their debt is written off—currently after 40 years. Repayments are automatically deducted from graduates' gross wages via the tax system. These protective features help shield graduates from the financial burden of loan debt.

As England's tuition rose, so did loan take-up rates (95 percent in 2020–2021) and average amounts borrowed (GBP 46,000 for those graduating in 2022), whereby student debt is normalized and not limited to graduates with specific demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. Consequently, it takes English graduates longer on average to repay their debts than their peers elsewhere, which has implications for the longer-term consequences of student loan debt on graduates' lives.

The Strengths of Income-Contingent Loans

Income-contingent loans are considered more equitable and desirable than time-based repayment loans. They are judged as fair because those who benefit financially from higher education contribute towards its costs when they can afford to pay. Income-contingent loans are seen as progressive because higher-earning graduates repay more and are subsidized less by the government than lower-earning graduates. They are also regarded as positive because they afford access to higher education, and help fund its expansion.

Income-contingent loans are depicted by English policy makers and others as primarily harmless because they are income-contingent and designed to protect debtors from the financial burden of debt. The amount borrowed, therefore, is regarded by policy makers as largely immaterial for graduates. Indeed, indebtedness is actively encouraged by government policies, normalized as investment in future earnings potential.

Governments' concerns about income-contingent loans focus exclusively on their economic consequences for the state and on reducing public expenditure which are considerable—the value of England's outstanding loans is forecast to reach GBP 460 billion (in 2021–2022 prices) by the mid-2040s.

Research on the Impact of Student Loans on Graduates' Lives

Income-contingent loans are preferable to time-based repayment loans. However, the personal economic and psychological consequences of income-contingent loan debt for graduates' lives remain unexplored. Government rhetoric and most extant research ignore the realities of repaying them. Existing studies on indebted graduates are mostly economic-driven, quantitative, and United States-based. Yet, studies focusing on the United States have limited relevance to England because of differences in their higher education systems and especially their financial aid, which is more complex, diverse, and punitive in the United States.

Other research on income-contingent loans provides no insights into graduates' experiences of being indebted. Our program of quantitative and qualitative research attempts to fill these gaps by exploring the impact of income-contingent loan debt on English graduates' lives, behavior, and choices.

Our quantitative research shows that graduates aged 25 who had not taken out student loans are more likely to own their home and less likely to rent or live with their parents than graduates who had taken out loans, echoing some United States research. This finding suggests that higher education funding policies and student debt are important in structuring English young people's housing options, questioning some of the purported financial benefits of higher education and highlighting how debt can perpetuate inequalities in wealth.

Our qualitative research provides other insights. Interviews with 100 graduates, five to 12 years after graduation, show that they appreciate income-contingent loans' protective features including the affordable monthly repayments which are automatically deducted from their wages. But these graduates, especially those with higher debt, believe that tuition and interest rates are too high and that the amount of debt owed is a burden with its neverending repayments.

Further analysis of these interviews reveals how the state's relationship with graduate debtors is founded on dependency and therefore highly problematic. The government deems the loan system fair, but graduates show signs of harm and are responding in varied, sometimes unsettling ways. Some are deploying coping mechanisms such as avoidance and submission to the loan system and policy rhetoric. Feelings of indebtedness are rife, along with internalization and self-blame. Many of those who have not seen more positive employment outcomes question the system and its unrealized promises. Most not only blame the system and the state but also themselves.

The characterization of income-contingent loans in policy rhetoric as positive and harmless seems, therefore, at odds with some graduates' subjective experiences of loan debt. Only a small minority of graduates in our study who graduated 10 to 12 years ago withstand any negative consequences of their debt. Most endure some, if only minimal, harmful effects from their debt. But a sizable minority experience multiple detrimental effects which negatively impact decisions about further study, employment, housing, family formation, and their mental and financial well-being and security—again echoing research findings from the United States. Our findings suggest that income-contingent loans' protective features seem to successfully prevent or minimize the adverse consequences of debt for most graduates in our study, but prove ineffectual in shielding a sizable minority from its more negative effects.

We believe that income-contingent loans' inbuilt safeguards are designed primarily to ameliorate the financial burden of debt but not its psychological burden. Our findings on the apparent ineffectiveness of these loans' protective features highlight that

However, the personal economic and psychological consequences of income-contingent loan debt for graduates' lives remain unexplored.

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for some graduates, the psychological burden of debt is as important as its financial burden, as is the way these two burdens interact. Together they lead some to change their behavior and life choices in damaging ways, potentially curtailing their aspirations, and limiting their opportunities.

Our research suggests that we need to pay far more attention to the psychological toll of student debt for graduates and how it can have negative repercussions for their lives, even in the context of income-contingent loans. Greater recognition of the full consequences of student loan debt for graduates is needed, and policy makers should support a global shift in policy design that recognizes this and better protects graduates from both the financial and psychological burden of debt. ▲

Performance-Based Funding of Universities: Past and Present European Developments

Jussi Kivistö and Kateryna Suprun

Abstract

The article provides an overview of the implementation of performance-based funding (PBF) across the European continent. The cross-country comparison includes both endorsement and proposed rethinking of PBF practices by early adopters (e.g., United Kingdom, Finland, Denmark, and the Netherlands) and latecomers (e.g., Latvia, Ukraine). The authors argue for diversified approaches to PBF depending on system maturity, and for voluntary peer-learning across systems.

Over the years, performance-based funding (PBF) has become a common method of distributing public funds all over the world, including in higher education, first starting from the developed economies and then gradually being introduced in many of the emerging economies. PBF incentives are expected to trigger productive behaviors within universities and therefore lead to better performance. PBF is also assumed to promote transparency (allocation criteria are unambiguous), accountability (it measures what universities produce), and legitimacy (allocation criteria are same for all). The introduction of PBF has often been accompanied by governance reforms widening the institutional autonomy of public universities. Institutional autonomy is seen as valuable within the context of PBF because it allows universities to adopt new managerial tools to respond to PBF incentives and to use them more freely.

The most common and widespread approach to implementing PBF is to use performance indicators as part of the funding formula. In the context of research funding, PBF is often based on assessment of the volume and quality of scientific research output, although the manner in which this output is assessed varies, with some funding bodies being guided primarily by bibliometric indicators, and others relying upon peer review. Other typical indicators relate to external research funds generated by staff and the number of doctorates awarded. On the teaching side, the most frequently applied performance indicators are the number of degrees provided, study credits accumulated, graduation rates and graduate employment. PBF formulas often mix input and output indicators, and give very different weights to particular indicators based on their relation to policy priorities (i.e., the higher the weight, the more policy importance attached).

Early Adopters and Latecomers

In Europe, PBF is currently in use in the vast majority of higher education systems. This has been the case for more than several decades already. However, a [recent study](#) commissioned by the European Commission found that PBF systems in Europe are very diverse. This diversity is related to the composition of funding formulas, share of public funds driven by PBF criteria, and the role negotiations/agreements play in allocations. Currently, the share of core funds driven by PBF-related criteria in most systems range

from 15 percent to 59 percent. Only in a few countries, like Denmark (80 percent) and Finland (76 percent), does the share of PBF exceed 70 percent of core funding.

Across Europe, there is also great variation in the level of maturity of PBF systems. In addition to the United States, early adopters of PBF include Western European countries like Finland, Denmark, and the Netherlands, where PBF has been in extensive use since the 1990s. The first PBF system at the national level was introduced in the United Kingdom in 1986 under the label of the “Research Assessment Exercise” (RAE), later renamed “Research Assessment Framework” (REF). Some of these mature PBF systems are now moving away from PBF. For example, the Dutch and Norwegian governments recently decided to discontinue using publications as a criterion for allocating research funding to universities. Strong voices in Finland are also demanding a reduction of the PBF share in universities’ core funding, and the British REF will be adjusted in 2028 in order to be more inclusive (by recognizing and rewarding a broader range of research outputs than before).

At the same time, a number of European countries—particularly in Eastern Europe—are taking their first steps toward implementing PBF. Latvia and Ukraine are good examples of this: both countries have introduced PBF in the last 10 years. Latvia introduced PBF in 2015 by incorporating a proportion of core funding to be allocated based on performance indicators. In Ukraine, PBF was implemented in 2020–2021, although the reform was suspended in 2022 as a result of Russian military invasion. During these two years of implementation, PBF in Ukrainian higher education accounted for modest 12–22 percent of the core funds and was distributed based on student number, attracted research funding, position in global rankings, and graduate employment rate. Contrary to the good practices in other countries, Ukrainian universities were not granted higher financial autonomy after the PBF launch. Still, PBF has greatly promoted transparency of public funding allocation in Ukrainian higher education. In mid-2023, Ukrainian government reopened discussions about reinstating PBF and revising its design to fit the disrupted war-affected sector. If accomplished, this will be the first case of PBF implementation in a system in an ongoing crisis.

Diversity is a Key for the Future

This short retrospective exercise offers several takeaways for how PBF can be conceived, both now and in the near future. As a starting point, it needs to be acknowledged that countries are moving in different directions, based on their level of PBF maturity. Putting systems under the same roof with diverging PBF footprints brings little value, so PBF impact assessments should more explicitly discuss and reflect upon these factors. Indeed, there are good reasons for countries to move first toward and then away from PBF funding. PBF is often viewed as a periodic boost to efficiency, rather than a permanent solution. As a result, in contexts with longstanding PBF practices, taking time off can be a useful way for systems to recuperate and identify imbalances or gaps to be tackled further. Consistency in PBF implementation is more important for newcomers, as they aim to reach envisioned goals and stay on track with what is often an unpopular reform.

A second takeaway is that it is important for “latecomers” to have a chance to learn from the experiences of early adopters. Several decades of PBF implementation enables a supportive global policy borrowing and transfer environment. Certainly, context plays a crucial role in implementation, but wheel does not have to be reinvented.

Finally, it is helpful to remember that convergence of PBF models should not be the goal, given that systems differ too in many respects. It is easy to fall into the trap of advancing a golden PBF standard to which all adopters must adhere. Robust policy research into the benefits of PBF has highlighted several similarities which might broadly be considered good practices (such as goal clarity, stakeholder engagement, balanced indicators, and addressing institutional diversity). However, although useful when treated with discretion, suggested good practices should never override national differences, but rather bolster them. ▲

Across Europe, there is also great variation in the level of maturity of PBF systems.

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Cost and Equity: Decoding University Financing Reforms in Kenya

Ishmael I. Munene

Abstract

Recent university financing reforms in Kenya seek to mitigate the effects of neoliberalism on the financial health of public universities. The reforms introduce a new approach to public funding for universities, initiate an academic program price discrimination model, and propose a four-category student financial aid scheme. The reforms' silence on government budgetary support for universities, implementation challenges, and institutional restructurings invite questions about long-term sustainability for the funding of public universities.

The recent reforms in higher education financing in Kenya are a response to the funding crises that have plagued the sector since 2010. Not only do they seek to address the challenges of systemwide growth, surge in student enrollment, and education quality, but they also endeavor to address equity concerns in student financing and institutional financial viability. More importantly, the reforms also signify the failure of the marketplace as a viable alternative to state funding of universities as was envisaged in the reforms of the mid-1990s. While the current reforms herald a paradigm shift in the funding of university education, they fail to address important issues related to the sustainability of higher education funding in the neoliberal context.

African countries have been confronted with the outcomes of neoliberalism in higher education introduced in the 1990s to address critical shortfalls in state funding and epitomized by massification, marketization, and privatization of universities. The model adopted by many countries has been a combination of private resources, marketplace revenues, and government subsidies trying to sustain and stimulate systemwide expansion. Thus, students and their families had to pay the costs themselves partially or in full, universities were expected to generate revenues, and the governments offered subsidies for the disadvantaged students. However, the Kenyan experience discussed herewith provides vital lessons on the limits of markets and privatization as the basis for funding universities, and the challenges of addressing university funding and equity outcomes while preserving neoliberal policies. This discussion concerning Kenya is significant not only for the African context but globally because finding balance between government funding, private cost-share, marketplace revenues, and quality is as relevant as ever.

African countries have been confronted with the outcomes of neoliberalism in higher education introduced in the 1990s to address critical shortfalls in state funding and epitomized by massification, marketization, and privatization of universities.

Mid-1990s Reforms

Informed by neoliberal tenets, Kenya's reforms ushered in the transformation of state universities into state-owned, largely privately funded institutions in response to the World Bank and IMF-mandated structural adjustment programs for Africa. The government introduced cost-sharing measures, with students paying a highly subsidized, modest tuition fee of USD 106 per year and a bursary scheme for those unable to pay. In addition, students would pay for their living expenses on campus. However, a loan scheme administered by the Higher Education Loans Board (HELB) would provide financial support for vulnerable students to cover accommodation costs. These measures applied to government-sponsored students only—those qualified for government scholarships based on their high school results. HELB is a state corporation fully funded by the government to provide higher education financing to individual students.

These reforms ushered privatization and marketization in higher education. State universities were permitted to admit privately sponsored students (known as 'module II') who paid the full cost of their university programs, thereby generating additional revenues for universities. They were also required to engage in entrepreneurial activities to supplement state funding. Furthermore, private universities were authorized in a move designed to expand higher education opportunities. These interventions resulted in substantial systemwide growth. There were 18 universities in 2000 (six public, 12 private), 60 in 2010 (22 public, 38 private), and 69 in 2023 (39 public, 30 private). In terms of enrollment, there were 45,412 students (38,413 public, 6,999 private) in 2000 vs

182,253 in 2010 (150,926 public, 31,327 private). The current enrollment stands at 563,000 (426,965 public, 85,946 private).

These neoliberal policies have had undesirable consequences for public universities financing. The anticipated revenue growth from entrepreneurial activities did not materialize, and while the initial growth in privately sponsored students was impressive at the beginning, it later plummeted, leaving the public universities in financial distress. Furthermore, to safeguard the quality of university education, in 2015 the state outlawed satellite campuses at public universities and merged government-sponsored students with privately sponsored ones to ensure consistency of course offerings—measures that further restricted avenues for additional revenue-generating module II enrollments. Moreover, in funding public universities and students, the government priced academic programs the same, irrespective of the cost of delivery. Prior to the current reforms, public universities' total debt surpassed USD 110 million, negatively impacting their operations. Government support continued to decline; in the 2019–2020 financial year, for instance, state funding was slashed by USD 300 million.

New Higher Education Funding

Under this model, public universities are no longer funded directly by the government but receive funding from the recently established University Fund, a public trustee that develops institutional funding criteria and appropriations, and disburses all government funding. The fund also prices academic programs relative to perceived delivery costs, which also determines loans available as financial support for students. For student funding, means-testing will be used to divide students into four categories with differentiated levels of financial support, including government scholarships, loans, and household contributions. These categories are: vulnerable (82 percent scholarship, 18 percent loan), extremely needy (70 percent scholarship, 30 percent loan), needy (53 percent scholarship, 40 percent loan, and 7 percent family contribution), and less needy (38 percent scholarship, 55 percent loan & 7 percent family contribution). The financial support will be availed through HELB. There are now two funding avenues for higher education in Kenya: University Fund avails funding to public universities, while HELB funds individual students, including those in private universities.

These reforms invite serious apprehension. They are silent on strengthening government funding to meet the capitation needs of public universities, which is the major source of their current financial challenges. Determining which category to place a student into remains a challenge in a country where most households struggle to make a living and work in the informal sector, where income may not be easy to capture. How then do you determine the vulnerable, extremely needy, needy, and less needy? Price discrimination through differential tuition based on program cost fails to recognize that the cost of offering a program could differ on account of institutional location. Noteworthy, private universities in the same location have different pricing models for similar programs, thereby providing choices unavailable at public institutions. Indeed, the issue of government-sponsored students enrolling in private universities is not adequately addressed.

Concluding Remarks

Restructuring higher education funding by only targeting student equity and price discrimination to reflect program costs is insufficient to address university funding challenges created by neoliberalism. Holistic reforms that would also address government funding, institutional budget and staff rationalization, sustainable systemwide expansion devoid of political expediency, quality control, and the scope of private resources promise to provide a viable solution to the problem. ▲

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Higher Degrees or Higher Ambitions? A New Approach to PhDs in Arts and Humanities in the United Kingdom

Christopher Smith

Abstract

The arts and humanities PhD in the United Kingdom has not been reconsidered for many years. It is time to look hard at what value is offered by this important qualification, and how we can show the public and social value of the energy and imagination which arts and humanities graduates demonstrate in their work through changes in supervision, examination, and definitions of purpose.

For a qualification which is so steeped in the appearance of prestige, the doctorate is remarkably underexamined. It has changed relatively little in terms of output, form, and process but the context is markedly different. The modern PhD in the United Kingdom is usually dated to the years immediately after the First World War. It is a relative latecomer to our educational portfolio, and the complex articulation of a three-cycle process (undergraduate, master, doctorate) through the Bologna Process came at the end of the twentieth century.

What we have long argued, especially when justifying efforts to recruit, is that the PhD is a route to many careers other than an academic job. It is undoubtedly true that successful PhD candidates do indeed go on to do a variety of things. The question which is much trickier is the extent to which the PhD was a necessary step or an elective one with marginal added value. One will need to have a relevant PhD to enter a role in research and development in many private laboratories. One may not need a PhD to enter the civil service, school teaching, publishing, business, a think tank and so forth.

This raises some interesting questions, in particular for arts and humanities PhDs:

- Can we be sure that the PhD is adding the skills necessary outside the academic route and that it is fit for the wider purpose which we attribute to it?
- How do we value the skills which are created through studying arts and humanities at a higher degree level if these cannot be arrived at via the classic government recourse to market failure?
- How much public money should be spent and on what kinds of arts and humanities PhDs?

These are difficult questions, and all the more so when the value of arts and humanities is deeply at question from time to time in public discourse. None of us care to pull at a thread which might unravel more of the fabric. But there is a risk that in looking past this, we miss an opportunity for the debate that we actually now need to have about the PhD in arts and humanities.

Are Arts and Humanities PhDs Fit for Purpose?

We cannot just assume that the arts and humanities PhD is fit for purpose. The variety of forms has grown through the increasing admission of practice-based research, but it is at the same time not appropriate that art practice should be constrained to a PhD format. Moreover, some arts and humanities PhDs are much closer to professional doctoral qualifications but that is perhaps less explicit than in, say, business. It is difficult to pin down what we really expect a PhD to offer, and we need to tie that to the broader skill set which a reimagined PhD could offer.

The classic PhD may give shape to many theses, but there are far more models out there, and models which proceed directly to an intervention in public space. The PhD as a route to social innovation and creative intervention does not replace the solid contribution to existing scholarship, but neither is it necessarily separate from it. It may put a high demand on candidates, is a way of showing the kinds of skills the degree fosters and an argument for the kind of funding which may be available.

Public Funding of Arts and Humanities PhDs

Different countries have different ways of funding the PhD of course. But only public funding can open opportunities to all, and the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) spends proportionately more of its money on PhDs than any other research council in the United Kingdom, although it still supports only around 10 percent of all the arts and humanities PhDs in the system.

In 2020–2021, in the United Kingdom there were about 18,000 arts and humanities doctoral candidates. The gap between supply and demand is inverse to the situation in parts of science, where jobs requiring a PhD exceed the supply. Yet, it might be beneficial if we challenged every publicly funded PhD to be able to show a path to impact just as we assume impact is embedded in research and many other application routes. A broader and more positive definition of the potential skill set of an arts and humanities PhD makes it clear that there should be multiple funding routes.

Two perhaps provocative answers: First, how many arts and humanities PhDs would actually find it so difficult to fit their scholarship into more innovative models, if the encouragement were there? And if they do find it so difficult, should we look at what skills they are acquiring? What funding might be available if the conceptualization of what the PhD was for became the space and time to cocreate rigorous and effective innovations in the public sphere? And what difference could it make to the profile, and employability of the arts and humanities PhD were it framed in those terms?

Second, if we were to arrive at a consensus that our PhD should be open to more innovative and transsectoral work, but if the current model does not fit, should we not look at the model? What might a properly funded and genuinely integrated five- or six-year program, incorporating master degree, look like? Overseas models could be helpful here.

Going further, the supervision and examination of the PhD remain relatively unchanged. Moves to consistent dual supervision in the United Kingdom are welcome but managing this across different kinds of institutions has always been difficult. Should we incentivize it better? Would a different form of examination provide a different route to success? Should we own the ambition of proper PhD supervisory panels which are connected to the process of examination? The PhD is now the only remaining academic qualification regularly awarded on the basis of an interview with two people in a closed room. Why should our final examination not be public as in other European countries, cementing the notion of the PhD outcome as public knowledge?

Revitalizing the Notion of Postgraduate Arts and Humanities

We should fund and support higher degrees in arts and humanities. But we cannot rely on intrinsic value or the public purse to justify our expenditure or hide it under a broader tent. We have to be able to show that the shape and model of an arts and humanities PhD can be as valid and constructive as one in engineering or life science.

We can make the argument better, especially if we work harder at showing the breadth of the industries relevant to our world of thinking and imagining. What are our pharma and life science equivalents? Can we do more to explore and explain portfolio PhDs, discontinuous experiences which can produce the equivalent of a PhD by publication but played out over projects? Or PhDs in policy and social innovation work, especially cocreated with communities? How do we embed the PhD properly in the developing nexus between place, regeneration, and opportunity? What are the models for team PhDs? What are the innovations in funding we should explore? How do we move from paying a fee to creating value? Is the arts and humanities PhD actually a helpful step on the path to genuinely civic universities? How can we reimagine what the laboratories are in which the arts and humanities PhD can be undertaken—not just for the funded few, but for a much wider and more diverse population?

The AHRC will continue to support collaborative PhDs, to promote a wide distribution of discipline-agnostic funding for studentships across the United Kingdom, and to offer targeted competitive funding for centers of excellence. Yet, there is still more to be done. Thousands of unread PhDs is not the answer. A genuinely ambitious project of revitalizing the notion of postgraduate arts and humanities might be transformational, in the United Kingdom but also elsewhere. ▲

The gap between supply and demand is inverse to the situation in parts of science, where jobs requiring a PhD exceed the supply.

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Abstract

Recently, the European Union and the OECD introduced an extensive set of measures designed to promote research careers, including those of doctoral candidates. These measures enforce the authority of international organizations through soft law mechanisms to indirectly influence relevant national education policies. They are also reframing the concept of a doctorate by embedding it in the discourse of economic competitiveness. This underscores the urgent need to question the marketing and educational expectations for the doctoral degree.

Evolution of Doctorate Policy Governance: The Rising Influence of International Organizations

Teele Tönismann and Matthieu Lafon

Over the past twenty years, notably since the Bologna Process introduced a three-cycle higher education system consisting of bachelor, master, and doctoral degrees, governments have progressively intensified their focus on doctoral education, which was once primarily viewed as something within the domain of the academic community.

However, there is yet another, less extensively documented trend: the growing emphasis placed on doctoral training internationally and globally, notably by international organizations such as the European Union (EU) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). In this article, we examine recent policy initiatives from international organizations and contend that the involvement of such organizations in shaping research career strategies alters both the institutional governance framework and substance of doctoral policies.

Advent of Doctorate Policies within Research Career Strategies

To fully grasp the significance of the recent developments within international organizations, it is useful to review how doctoral education first became integrated into research policy matters.

The example of the European Commission (EC) is compelling because it suggests a rather complex institutional process from the early 2000s onwards. On the one hand, the question of doctoral education first gained prominence at the international level within the context of the Bologna Process and the subsequent establishment of the European Higher Education Area. This highly discussed intergovernmental initiative aimed to improve cooperation between universities, enhance quality, promote mobility, and increase the employability of graduates. Besides aiming to have a positive impact on doctoral education in these areas, the Bologna Process has also contributed to the agenda of university modernization, notably promoted by the EC as one of the signatories and implementing members of the Bologna Process. On the other hand, doctoral education also gained momentum within the policy framework of the so-called European Research Area (ERA)—a policy initiative established in 2000 by the EC with the goal of making Europe “the most competitive knowledge-based economy in the world.” The ERA assisted in facilitating significant growth in EC research policies, with increased funding, enhanced instruments, and a new policy focus on social challenges and research excellence. The EC’s efforts to establish a single market underscored the need for a more organized approach to research careers. Of note, in 2005, the EC endorsed the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers. While doctoral candidates were still classified as students (and thus part of higher education-related public policies), they were now designated as “early-career researchers,” thereby linking research career policies to doctoral training programs.

Therefore, by recognizing doctoral students’ work and status, this change in classification enabled the EC to establish its authority within the domain of the doctorate. Since then, driven by various policy initiatives, including those resulting from the 2009 Lisbon Treaty, which established research policy as a shared competence between the EU and member states, the EC has consistently pushed to create new doctoral programs, alliances, and increased intersectoral mobility in research.

Marketization of the Doctorate

The classification of doctoral candidates as early-career researchers has had a major effect on doctoral policy governance in international organizations, and recent policy initiatives serve as a good example of this effect.

In the summer of 2023, the EU and the OECD jointly introduced major policy measures related to promoting research careers including those of doctoral students. First, the EC proposed a comprehensive set of measures that encompassed a proposal for a Council Recommendation to establish a European framework for research careers, a novel Charter for Researchers, and the European Competence Framework for Researchers (ResearchComp), which is designed to enhance intersectoral researcher mobility. Second, in a joint effort, the OECD and the EC presented a document outlining the foundational concept for the upcoming Research and Innovation Careers Observatory (ReICO) that was further complemented by OECD recommendations to promote diverse career pathways for doctoral and postdoctoral researchers.

By primarily addressing researchers' careers, all of these initiatives are pertinent to doctoral careers. Moreover, in addressing researchers' careers, they establish a specific framework for doctoral training within which policy action should be taken. In short, the policy documents highlight in their main narrative a significant lack of support for researchers, including those with doctorates, who are endeavoring to transition into various employment sectors outside of academia. They posit that doctorates should contribute to the job market in a direct and seamless way. For example, in the proposed European research career framework, states are prompted to “encourage interaction and cooperation, including partnerships, between academia, industry, other businesses, public administration, the nonprofit sector, and all other relevant ecosystems of actors,” and to ensure that “doctoral training and targeted training are developed or codeveloped on the basis of the actual skills needs of the parties concerned.” Hence, it appears that the essence of doctoral education is no longer confined to academic curiosity but is evolving beyond its traditional mandate of nurturing future academics to serve as a vital strategic instrument and an impetus for economic growth. Such reasoning is a usual characteristic of the modern neoliberal governance logic that advocates for the state bringing about market-relevant reforms in every aspect of society.

As a result, framed within the market logic, these initiatives are not merely technical frameworks to refine the doctoral career trajectory. They also introduce a cognitive dimension, recalibrating the perception of the doctorate within the broader contours of higher education and research.

Soft Law Regulation: Implications for National States

Finally, the changes described above also prompt the question of their impact on national policies.

Altogether, policy recommendations, policy instruments (ResearchComp), and benchmarking tools (ReICO) can be identified as “soft law” measures, an often used method of governance in international organizations. The main goal of this method is the diffusion of common political objectives and cognitive principles, rather than a complete harmonization or the centralized implementation of identical policies. Hence, they rely more on emulation and peer evaluation than on formal constraints; they allow different national responses to common problems. Yet, to our knowledge, national case studies regarding doctoral training only occasionally establish links with evolving policies at the level of international organizations. However, this is a critical issue, especially considering the diverging policy models and academic cultures across both the EU and OECD.

Appreciating international organizations' actions is important in understanding the transformation of the governance structure of doctoral policies, also because it enables us to focus on the changing role of doctoral training, which seems to occur more discreetly behind the scenes of more public discussions on research careers. Within the requirement of the job market to enhance employability, a sole emphasis on employment market relevance might restrict the broader purpose of education, and this issue applies even for advanced programs like doctorates. A holistic education equips PhD candidates with specialized skills on the one hand and the ability to adapt, innovate, and contribute meaningfully to society on the other hand. Therefore, doctoral education

The classification of doctoral candidates as early-career researchers has had a major effect on doctoral policy governance in international organizations, and recent policy initiatives serve as a good example of this effect.

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Abstract

As higher education, migration, and mobility intertwine in increasingly complex ways, we need a new way to analyze international student mobility (ISM). Unpacking ISM's "messiness" brings to light two key interfacing continua: first, the discretion to move, and second, opportunity through movement. Recognizing this confluence not only better explains the reproduction, amplification, dissolution, and restructuring of privilege in international education, but also highlights the need to visibilize students from displaced, refugee, and forced-migrant backgrounds.

As Global North higher education systems increasingly depend on international student tuition fees, and governments depend on those students as future "ideal" immigrants, higher education is now embedded in a deepening education-immigration, or "edugration," nexus.

should strike a balance, integrating both practical, market-oriented skills and a humanistic foundation. This approach ensures that graduates are not only prepared for the job market but also possess the intellectual breadth to navigate the challenges of the ever-changing global landscape. Such a comprehensive education benefits individuals and also enriches societies by producing well-rounded, socially-aware professionals and scholars. ▲

International Student Mobility, Opportunity, and the Voluntariness of Migration: A New Conceptual Approach

Lisa Ruth Brunner, Bernhard Streitwieser and Rajika Bhandari

Internationally mobile students are often positioned as relatively homogenous with common motivations and experiences. However, the changing interplay between higher education, mobility, and (im)migration requires us to rethink this outdated approach.

As Global North higher education systems increasingly depend on international student tuition fees, and governments depend on those students as future "ideal" immigrants, higher education is now embedded in a deepening education-immigration, or "edugration," nexus. Higher education institutions also provide global pathways to refugee protection, a growing focus of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) Global Compact on Refugees. These and other shifts present important implications for the cross-disciplinary study of international student mobility (ISM).

ISM's "Messiness"

ISM refers to the physical movement of individuals acquiring academic experience in another country. While ISM has long been overlooked in migration studies and undertheorized or approached uncritically in international education, it has become a key topic in both fields. Recent critical insights reveal intricacies and challenges related to its study. Changing technologies, regional integration processes, and partnership structures now complicate who counts as an international student. Privileging the study of *international* mobility over *intranational* mobility raises questions about the distinctiveness of crossing often colonial state borders. The wide-ranging motivations for, and experiences of, ISM defy simple classifications. Echoing Hans de Wit's critique of the "problematic sloppiness" associated with the term "internationalization," we suggest that ISM also suffers from interrelated areas of "messiness."

Messy Terms

Terms hold discursive significance in their organization and communication of values. ISM-related terms are not just used inconsistently. They also obscure the complexity and power relations that are inherent to (im)migration. For example, as "edugration" expands, it is becoming more difficult to distinguish between internationally mobile "students," "migrants," and "immigrants." The UNHCR's Eurocentric and arguably outdated legal definition of a "refugee" is also increasingly critiqued for serving the needs of

states rather than of forced migrants, and of excluding a wider spectrum of movement from protection., e.g., displacement due to climate crises.

Messy Data

ISM-related data varies between countries, where categories may be conflated and thus complicate international comparisons and public discourse, and is also incomplete. A dearth of statistics on international student transitions to permanent residency, for example, obstructs understanding of “edugration” patterns. Meanwhile, refugees who engage in education are often not counted as international students and thus tabulated and theorized separately.

Messy Practices

Higher education institutions crudely differentiate between categories of internationally mobile students for tuition assessment, scholarship eligibility, and other administrative purposes. “Domestic” students with migrant backgrounds are arbitrarily separated from international students, while those who are undocumented, stateless, members of transborder Indigenous nations, or otherwise not easily classified, challenge domestic/international binaries. Meanwhile, asylum-seekers and recently resettled refugees may be considered “domestic” students, yet they require “international” student services, further complicating student affairs and funding models.

A Reconceptualization of ISM

We believe this messiness is partially due to a lack of a nuanced analytical approach to ISM’s entanglement with migration. In response, we propose a new theorization of ISM based on two key conceptualizations.

The first, presented by Bernhard Streitwieser, splits ISM into three distinct categories. Category one is “mobility for enlightenment,” or voluntary international education. Category two is “mobility for opportunity,” or international education driven by economic migration. The third category is called “mobility for survival,” or international education undertaken as forced migration.

The second approach, presented by Marta Bivand Erdal and Ceri Oeppen, positions forced and voluntary migration as a spectrum rather than a dichotomy.

Building on these conceptualizations, we identify two structuring elements of ISM: first, the discretion to move, which addresses the voluntariness of mobility; and second, movement’s degree of impact on opportunity itself.

The Discretion to Move

Discretion is often presented as a clear-cut distinction in migration: a refugee is forced to migrate, while an international student has agency. However, we suggest the voluntariness of movement in ISM needs to be understood as a *spectrum* containing a wide range of possible degrees of discretion. Importantly, we must ensure that refugees, forced migrants, and otherwise displaced students are included in ISM analyses, and also recognize the impact of historical and current-day forces of imperialism, colonialism, and capitalism on ISM, as well as their impacts on the voluntariness of movement.

Opportunity through Movement

ISM is often discussed and instrumentalized based on its economic benefits at the level of an individual. But common notions that are too often employed in discussions of ISM, such as upward mobility and Bourdieusian capital theory, remain too simplistic. We suggest viewing opportunity through ISM as a spectrum, too, thus making space for a wide range of possible degrees of opportunity, educational or otherwise. This means that we need to recognize the relative way ISM operates, where social markers are not static but rather (re)produced through mobility, and the notion of “opportunity” is highly contextual.

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The Interface of Discretion and Opportunity

In our reconceptualization, ISM is structured by the interface of these two spectra: discretion and opportunity. In other words, the “*discretion to move*” spectrum intersects with the “*opportunity through movement*” spectrum in important and various ways that result in a broader constellation of possible forms of ISM.

For example, in horizontal credit mobility, where there is an exchange between similarly ranked institutions in countries with similar GDPs, participation in ISM is likely relatively optional, and its impact on opportunity is relatively marginal. A student’s social or cultural capital may increase, but their international engagement is voluntary. In “education,” however, immigration becomes a particular form of social mobility through access to new labor markets and permanent residency. A student’s discretion to move is more constrained due to uneven national economies, and the movement’s impact on their opportunity is likely more significant. Lastly, in forced ISM, a refugee student engages in ISM out of necessity or in order to escape persecution, while the movement can carry outsized influence on their opportunity.

In observing these broad patterns of discretion and opportunity, key to our conceptualization is the recognition that individual and situational variations will always be at play, hence we stress the importance of viewing discretion and opportunity on intersecting spectra.

What Needs to Change

As ISM’s societal functions change in relation to global migration, scholars and practitioners alike need to rethink the conceptual tools they use to grapple with what has become an increasingly messy set of terms, data, and practices. Rethinking implies that our current purveyors of mobility data, such as the Institute of International Education’s annual Open Doors Report and UNESCO’s Global Education Monitoring Report, need to reinvent how they tabulate the data on which researchers in various fields like international education and refugee studies rely. Today we can no longer exclude forced migrants from discussions of ISM, just as we can no longer assume that ISM is always associated with upward mobility. ▲

International Student Policies in Japan and South Korea in the Aftermath of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Yukiko Ishikura and Yon-Soo Tak

Attracting international students has been a central internationalization effort for higher education institutions around the world. While English-speaking countries such as Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States have been major destinations for international students, non-Anglophone countries such as Japan and South Korea have strived to increase their international competitiveness and attract international students through government initiatives. Japan set a goal to attract 300,000 international students by 2020, and South Korea aimed to attain 200,000 students by 2023. They successfully reached their goals. However, the outbreak of COVID-19 first halted and then changed student mobility flows. Nevertheless, the pandemic brought the international student market game-changing opportunities. The pandemic's aftermath is therefore a pivotal period for higher education institutions to reexamine ways to recruit and attract international students. This study thus explores how Japan and South Korea are striving to reattract international students through government initiatives in the aftermath of the pandemic.

The governments of Japan and South Korea have been key drivers for the countries' internationalization. Both countries have experienced a sharp decline in childbirth rates (1.26 in Japan and 0.78 in South Korea as of 2022), leading to decreasing college student populations. Therefore, smaller scale higher education institutions, especially in rural areas, face difficulties in filling their student quotas and experience bankruptcies. In Japan, 53.3 percent of private universities experienced difficulties in filling their student quotas in 2023. In South Korea, 20 universities have shut their campuses since 2000, 19 of which are in rural areas outside Seoul. Therefore, attracting diverse student populations, including international students, has been a key initiative for the governments of Japan and South Korea.

International Student Policy in Japan

Japan introduced the 300,000 International Student Plan in 2008 to attain this number of international students by 2020. The country achieved this goal by 2019, one year before the target year. However, the students' number declined to approximately 230,000 in 2022 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, in June 2022, the government announced the aim for Japanese higher education institutions to recover from this sharp decline and return to the student numbers from before the pandemic by 2027.

Following this announcement, the government introduced its new internationalization policy: the "Japan-Mobility and Internationalization: Re-engaging and Accelerating Initiative for Future Generations," or J-MIRAI on April 27, 2023. The initiative has two-fold goals to achieve by 2033: attract 400,000 inbound students to study in Japan (380,000 in universities and Japanese language schools and 20,000 at the high school level) and send 500,000 outbound students (150,000 seeking degrees or pursuing long-term credit-bearing programs and 230,000 engaging in mid- and short-term programs at university level, 110,000 joining short-term programs of less than three months and 10,000 participating in programs of more than three months at the high school level).

The country's past initiatives have focused on tertiary-level education, but this new initiative has set target goals for each level, starting with secondary-level education. Moreover, through this initiative, the government aims to shift the idea from simply

Abstract

Higher education institutions in Japan and South Korea have strived to attract target numbers of international students. While each country had (nearly) reached its goals, the COVID-19 pandemic affected student flows. Recently, three years after the pandemic, the governments of Japan and South Korea announced new policies to reattract international student populations. This study examines how Japan and South Korea are reinvigorating their efforts.

The governments of Japan and South Korea have been key drivers for the countries' internationalization.

increasing the number of inbound and outbound student populations toward enhancing both the quantity and quality of students, teaching and learning, academic services, and support infrastructure. In addition, industry, academia, and government need to work collaboratively to establish a seamless transition for students from academia to the professional world in Japan. This will help elevate the post-graduation employment rate of international students in Japan from 48 percent in 2018 to 60 percent by 2033.

International Student Policy in South Korea

In 2012, the South Korean government launched the “Study Korea 2020 Project” to attract international students by 2020. The target year was extended to 2023. South Korea successfully attracted 207,125 students as of June 2023 and achieved its target goal. However, it experienced a decline in international students because of the pandemic. At the end of August 2023, the government announced a new international student policy—the “Study Korea 300K Project”—to further promote the internationalization initiative and boost the number of international students to 300,000 by 2027.

This new policy aims to increase international student populations, help skilled students settle in South Korea after graduating from tertiary education, and enhance international competitiveness at higher education institutions. To achieve this, the government aims to expand government scholarship, or the Global Korea Scholarship, which prioritizes students studying in STEM fields at schools outside the Seoul region. In addition, the government has eased language and visa requirements to study in South Korea, increased English-taught courses, and offered easier and faster pathways to permanent residency for students with advanced degrees in specific science and technology fields.

Similar to the situation in Japan, international students in South Korea tend to leave the country after graduating from higher education institutions. According to the National Statistical Office, 62 percent of international students go back home after gaining a doctoral degree in South Korea. Therefore, South Korea aims to counter the outflows of skilled professionals through the implementation of this new international student policy.

Challenges and Concerns

The pandemic provided both governments and higher education institutions with the opportunity to reexamine the internationalization of higher education and to develop new approaches and strategies. Now that international student mobility has returned to prepandemic levels, Japan and South Korea are poised to reenter the evolved international student market with fresh initiatives. Reflecting on past international student policies and lessons learned, they are prepared to engage in the new international student market with clear objectives.

Historically, internationalization policies prioritized quantity, such as the numbers of international students, over quality. The new initiatives aim to balance both the quantity and quality aspects of internationalization. However, concerns persist regarding the quality of education and students, especially because policies intend to achieve specific numbers of international students by a target year.

Internationalization was once a strategy primarily reserved for higher education institutions. Now, it is a vital concern for entire nations. Both countries aspire to attract talented international students to their higher education institutions and hope to retain them postgraduation, so that they stay to live and work within their borders. For effective implementation of these new international student policies, it is essential to understand that higher education institutions cannot function in isolation as the sole drivers of internationalization. A collaborative approach involving industry, academia, and government is crucial. To ensure a seamless transition from the academic to the business community, support for international students from both sectors is necessary.

A disparity exists between urban and rural higher education institutions in their internationalization efforts. Urban institutions tend to attract both local and international students more than their rural counterparts. Consequently, urban and rural higher education institutions should develop distinct internationalization strategies to address their specific challenges.

Japan and South Korea face similar challenges and share common objectives in their international student policies. They need to make a transition from competing

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for international students to collaborating in attracting them to the East Asian region. They could learn from each other's experiences, and jointly draw international students to the region. ▲

Academic Personnel System Reforms in China: Trajectory and Tensions

Qi Li

A homicide on a university campus in Shanghai made headlines in June 2021, stirring up public emotions and sentiments about the tenure system in academe. According to the media, the suspect, a mathematics faculty member, killed the head of the School of Mathematical Science for alleged failure to have his three-year job contract renewed at Fudan University. Prior to that, he had worked at another university for three years after returning from the United States, with a PhD from Rutgers University and a few years of postdoctoral research at the National Institutes of Health and Johns Hopkins University.

While such a tragedy is extremely rare, it reveals two major isomorphic changes that have crept into human resource management in China's higher education. On the one hand, the trajectory of change is toward homogenization in the context of globalization. The adoption of tenure at Fudan University and other upper-tier institutions is not only indicative that they can afford the resources to adopt and maintain the system, but also that they need the institutional legitimacy it provides in quest for world-class status. After all, North American higher education is the envy of the world. On the other hand, however, the trajectory of change is pulled by idiosyncrasy which is largely grounded in governmental mandates, institutional requirements, and local cultures and traditions. It is necessary to ask why tenure can trigger a homicide and stir up public emotions and sentiments. If tenure is embraced just as a trade-off between economic security and individuals' ability to meet the designated quantity/level requirements for articles, awards, research projects, and talent titles, as witnessed at many higher education institutions (HEIs), then the system may no longer be the same as recognized in the larger academic community. Apparently, tenure and other academic personnel system reforms (APSR) are important and relevant to an international audience who are interested in the changing landscape of China's higher education.

The Trajectory

Theoretically, three models have evolved over the past four decades of APSR, transforming the relationship between faculty and their institutions from the career-based cadre identity model to the position-based public contractual model and to the current dual-track model. In the first model, faculty hold cadre identity and are given permanent appointments when hired to a regular faculty position. In the second model, faculty are appointed on a fixed-term contract, which is position-based and competition-driven. In the third model, the position-based public contractual model coexists with tenure, particularly at upper-tier institutions. A literature review reveals, however, that there is a mismatch between labor law and contract law theories in some relevant judicial decisions.

Chronologically, the four decades of APSR can be divided into the following three phases.

Abstract

While the past four decades of academic personnel system reforms have changed the relationship between faculty and their institutions and boosted the competitiveness of China's higher education in the international arena, further reforms or change will be required to reduce tensions and achieve a sustainable future.

In the first or the experimental phase from 1985 to 1993, APSR began to move away from the state authority toward the market. In 1986, two government policies were issued to require that faculty appointment systems be adopted at IHEs, that there be a quota of positions staffed by state-salaried faculty, and more. In the second or the consolidation phase from 1994 onward, personnel management began to move from a state authority model to a contractual model, with individuals' performance tied to rewards and sanctions, promotion and demotion, and hiring and firing. In the third or the quest-for-world-class phase from 1998 onward, over 100 institutions have adopted tenure and, at the same time, maintained the position-based public contractual model, reconciling the dual track systems based on the principle of "old rules for old faculty and new rules for new hires."

Tensions

Overall, the four decades of APSR have changed the relationship between faculty and HEIs, increased institutional autonomy in personnel decisions, developed a culture of competition in the workplace, fostered the emergence of an academic labor market, and boosted the competitiveness of China's higher education in the international arena. To achieve a sustainable future, further reforms or change will be required to address the following tensions.

First, a lack of alignment between stated institutional values and how well these values play out in reality is a source of tension that needs to be addressed. A survey of litigation in the database of China Judgements Online reveals that, from 2007 to 2020, there were approximately 168 civil cases arising from personnel disputes between faculty and their institutions. The causes of action include civil disputes over resignation (37 percent), employment contract (36 percent), dismissal (25 percent), and appointment contract (2 percent). In addition to civil litigation, there are also administrative claims filed against HEIs. To a large degree, the exhaustion-of-remedies doctrine has prevented many prospective faculty plaintiffs from filing administrative lawsuits against their institutions. Simply put, the poor fit between individuals and institutions has resulted in some academics feeling exploited, some exploiting their institutions, and/or both becoming victims.

Second, faculty tiering is another source of tension that needs to be addressed. In fact, since 1993, under the push of a series of government-initiated talent programs, APSR have created a four tiers of faculty at top-tier institutions: faculty with specific talent titles, tenure-line faculty, non-tenure track state-salaried faculty, and non-tenure track and non-state-salaried faculty. Tier 3 and 4 faculty by far outnumber those in tiers 1 and 2, but the latter tend to earn substantially more than the former. This policy and practice may help attract the designated types of talent, but it may not necessarily help discover and inspire the previously unknown talent and motivate the majority of faculty.

Third, academic inbreeding is an additional source of tension that needs to be addressed. Notwithstanding the fact that academic inbreeding may limit the scope of hiring the best possible candidates, solidify hierarchical relationships in the workplace, and perpetuate unfair power dynamics, it is still a practice at some HEIs. Usually, inbred faculty are those who have obtained their PhD from the institution where they are employed and have personal connections with individuals who have legitimate power there. More often than not, inbred faculty are expected to be loyal members of the leader's group that competes with other groups (or individuals). Needless to say, academic inbreeding can easily turn an academic unit into a political one in which power, alliances, and networks tend to be valued above integrity, fairness, and excellence.

Conclusion

The four decades of APSR have promoted the transformation and development of China's higher education. To achieve a sustainable future, further reforms or change will be required to improve the misalignment between stated institutional values and how well they play out in reality, discover and inspire the previously unknown talent, motivate the majority of faculty, and translate collegueship into esprit de corps. ▲

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The Contexts of Governing Universities in the Former Soviet Countries

Peter D. Eckel

Institutional level governance is the mechanism by which policy intentions are translated into action. Governance structures dictate which stakeholders come together and how, including who has access to what information and how decisions are made and transmitted. Governance structures created by universities and governments vary with no single model fitting every situation. As universities in various countries reconsider governance, often adopting Western-style (and consultant-driven) models, how should they think about structuring governance? What model is appropriate for the context in which they operate?

For the past three decades a unique experiment has been taking place across former Soviet states. In 1991 universities in these 15 countries had a common state-mandated governance model. 30 years later, these countries' approaches evolved in response to a variety of situations. Four models emerged. First, the *academic-focused model* with an elected rector from within the university, and members predominantly from the academic and staff. Second, the *state-extended model* in which the government appoints the rector and head of the governing body, and plays a direct and heavy role in governance and management decisions. Third, the *internal/external model* in which the governing body's membership consists of individuals from within the university and individuals external to the university. Finally, the *external civic model* with its members and its leadership coming from outside the university and representing various stakeholder groups. There are also variations within each model by country.

While the four models are interesting in and of themselves, an important question is: how well do they work? Does this variation matter? To answer these questions, one should remember that governance cannot be considered in isolation but rather in its operating context. Governance effectiveness is notoriously challenging to determine, thus the next best question may focus on the appropriateness of structures to the governance contexts.

The Governing Context: Pairing Autonomy and Competition

Despite a common start, those 15 former Soviet countries now operate in a variety of contexts, from the West-facing Baltic countries to inward-looking Turkmenistan and Belarus, as well as Kazakhstan and Russia. Two elements can be helpful to illustrate the governance context. The first is autonomy. Variations in autonomy will impact what governing bodies do, the types of decisions they must make, and what they can offer their universities. The second element is competition. Depending on its breadth and depth, competition imposes different demands on universities and their governing bodies. In what ways are universities competing for students, research, and funding? The latter focuses on what universities need to do to thrive, the former on the degree to which they have permissions to act. Economist Philippe Aghion and colleagues argue that competition and autonomy are linked: too much competition without autonomy means universities cannot act, while too much autonomy without competition means that universities may pursue their own directives and not what their societies need.

Our aim was to generate a sense of autonomy and competition. Most are aware of the European Universities Association (EUA) autonomy scorecard. It made the previously abstract notion of autonomy in higher education concrete. We use this framework to understand some aspects of the governance context. For the second component, we considered four factors to create a parallel competition index. The first competition factor

Abstract

From a common Soviet governance approach four different university governance models emerged in former Soviet states after 1991. The models, while interesting in their evolution, might best be considered in light of the operating contexts. Determining governance effectiveness is notoriously challenging, but a contextual understanding through the dual lens of competition and autonomy may help policy makers, university leaders, and academic researchers pursue aligned and appropriate governance structures.

There seemed to be mismatches between competition and autonomy in some countries.

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is scholarly research. The act of gaining acceptance in international journals requires scholars to conduct research that competes with other submissions, making successfully published research an indicator of competitive success. We used country-level research productivity scores (h-index scores obtained from Scimago). Two other dimensions focused on competition for students. One was the extent to which public universities compete domestically with private universities. The greater share of students enrolled in private universities indicated a greater level of competition within the system. The second focused on international student competition, both to keep domestic students at home and to compete for international ones. For the latter dimension we used international mobility data (from UNESCO) to create a student competition ratio. The final element is funding via competition for student-paid tuition fees. For each of these dimensions we created comparison rankings within the set of countries.

Appropriate Models (or Not)

These aforementioned dimensions provide the framework in which governance modules were situated. The following impressions emerged.

First of all, there seemed to be mismatches between competition and autonomy in some countries. In several states the level of autonomy corresponded with that of competition. Both were low in Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Moldova and Ukraine had moderate competition and autonomy, and Latvia exhibited moderately high levels of both. However, in other countries (such as Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia) competition seemed to surpass autonomy levels, while in countries like Estonia, Kazakhstan, and Lithuania autonomy surpassed competition levels. This means the policy context is asking for two different things from universities and their governance structures.

Thus, some of the governance structures were suited for context, but not all. Some of the countries with low autonomy and competition had the *state-extended* model of governance. The state directs higher education, provides the needed resources, and limits competition. But a more complicated picture emerged in other countries where governance models seem not aligned with context. Russian governance uses the *state-extended* model, yet it operates in a moderately competitive context and one with low autonomy. This governance model may handcuff universities when they need to compete. Both Georgia and Kyrgyzstan have *academic-focused* models in which university-level governance is focused inward given its members and leadership. Yet, Georgia is in a high competition/low autonomy context, and Kyrgyzstan in a moderate competition/low autonomy context, so they might be better served by different models that would allow more external focus, such as the *internal/external model* seen in Ukraine and Moldova. The three Baltic countries all had moderate to high autonomy. Latvia had correspondingly high competition. The other two, namely Estonia and Lithuania, have less competition. They all had *internal/external* bodies, where governance involves both internal and external stakeholders, which might well reflect their needs. However, compared to Kazakhstan, which had the most externally focused governance model composed of outside stakeholders (including government officials), Latvian universities, for instance, might benefit from a more externally driven governance structure to be able to compete and to take advantage of their high competition and autonomy. The ambitiousness of this model for Kazakhstan may be ahead of its time given its context.

Implications

Three implications emerged. On the academic side, competition would benefit from a more rigorous index akin to the EUA Autonomy Scorecard. Second, policy makers should look at implementing policies that intentionally align competition and autonomy. Finally, university leaders should advocate for a structure that would allow them to advance their governance needs in ways consistent with the demands of the context in which they operate. Better context–structure consistency will allow governing bodies to operate in ways most beneficial, effective, and efficient. Some structures that reflect too much centralized control are insufficient when universities need to compete. Other structures that reflect autonomy without adequate guard rails of competition risks inefficiency, mission drift, and—in extreme cases—possibilities of corruption. ▲

Challenges of Ukrainian Higher Education in Times of War

Nadiya Ivanenko

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which began on February 24, 2022, has significantly impacted various aspects of Ukrainian society, with higher education facing unique and huge challenges. Educational institutions, forced to adapt to restrictions and threats of pandemic times, are now facing the task of guaranteeing safety, continuity, and accessibility of education in the most difficult circumstances of the ongoing military conflict. In the first days of the full-scale invasion, the educational process at higher education institutions (HEIs) was suspended, and a two-week vacation was announced. Many students and staff were forced to move to safer regions of Ukraine or beyond, and some actually remain in the temporarily occupied territories. During the 2022 relocation, 131 tertiary education institutions moved to other regions, with a total number of 91,000 students and over 11,000 faculty. These institutions are usually hosted in just a few rooms of their partner educational institutions. Meanwhile, faculty and students continue to work and study remotely, regardless of their physical location. According to available data, 665,000 higher education and school students (16 percent of the total number) and 25,000 educators (6 percent of the total number) left the territory of Ukraine. As of the start of the 2021–2022 academic year, over 76,000 foreign citizens from more than 150 countries were enrolled in Ukrainian HEIs, but with the outbreak of the full-scale war, most foreign students were forced to leave Ukraine.

According to the interactive map of the Ukrainian ministry of education and science, 3,798 education institutions have suffered bombing and shelling throughout the country since February 24, 2022, and 365 of them have been destroyed completely. 63 institutions of higher education were badly damaged or completely destroyed. The Mykolaiv, Kharkiv, and Chernihiv regions suffered the highest losses, with 25, 23, and 12 HEIs destroyed respectively.

The level of public funding of higher education was reduced by 10 percent after the start of the full-scale armed aggression. In 2022 and 2023, the ministry of education and science did not distribute performance-based funding, a policy instrument which was introduced in Ukraine in 2019. The lack of funding for the research activities at HEIs is considerable. In 2023, the ministry of education and science cut funding for fundamental (by nearly 60 percent) and applied research, scientific and technical development (by nearly 70 percent), and for all research by young scientists (by nearly 80 percent).

Educational Losses of the Higher Education Sector

In 2022, the absolute majority of Ukrainian universities had to deal with geographically dispersed students and staff, and switched to distance or mixed forms of education. Displaced universities are grappling with the task of assisting displaced students in continuing their studies, often requiring innovative solutions such as online and remote learning. HEIs in safer regions had to return to a hybrid format and adapt their educational process to new conditions in order to ensure safety and security for students and faculty. As a result, they had to arrange shelters, but not all of them can accommodate all of their students.

A month after the introduction of the martial law, on March 24, 2022, the Verkhovna Rada—the Ukrainian parliament—adopted a law introducing a new HEI admission procedure. This simplified procedure made it possible to enroll into undergraduate programs upon the completion of the online National Multidisciplinary Test (NMT) rather than the paper-based External Independent Testing (EIT). The procedure expanded entry opportunities for individuals from territories with active hostilities or nearby settlements. Furthermore, to give the school graduates who were forced to move abroad a

Abstract

Ukrainian higher education is facing unprecedented challenges due to Russia's ongoing military invasion of Ukraine. Universities are striving to adapt to the new realities, maintaining their commitment to providing quality education while prioritizing safety of all the participants of the educational process. Educational losses get worse and have a negative impact on the country's human capital and its economic well-being.

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chance to enter Ukrainian HEIs, temporary examination centers were established in 46 cities of 26 countries, where 23,098 young people took the NMT. Likewise, paper-based admission tests for master programs were replaced with digital testing in 2022 and 2023.

The major decline in the quality of higher education in Ukraine pertains to restricted access to academic pursuits. As a report of the Grinchenko University Think Tank indicates, a significant share of surveyed students—47 percent—claimed that the quality of education in their academic programs remained unchanged, while 38 percent reported a slight deterioration. While the primary concern in the spring of 2022 was to establish safe conditions, the fall brought new challenges such as blackouts, disruptions in electricity and heating supply, and unstable Internet access, which exacerbated the remote learning crisis in Ukraine.

In the fall semester of 2022–2023, students, faculty, and administrative staff were confronted with the need to be exceptionally motivated and efficient during specific intervals when they had access to electricity and Internet. Distance learning is far from suitable for all areas of education, and some specialists simply cannot be trained in this way.

The emotional toll of war cannot be overlooked either, and universities in Ukraine are struggling with the deteriorating mental health and well-being of their students and staff. Uncertainty, fear, and trauma associated with living in a conflict zone significantly impact academic performance. According to an online survey of students, faculty, and staff of Ukrainian HEIs who remained in the country, 97.8 percent of the respondents said their psychoemotional state had worsened and reported struggling with such complaints as depression (84.3 percent), exhaustion (86.7 percent), nervousness (84.4 percent), loneliness (51.8 percent) and anger (76.9 percent). There are students and faculty in different circumstances: some are in occupied and unoccupied territories, some have no contact, some have moved within Ukraine, and some have relocated abroad. Some of the academic staff collaborated with the aggressor, some resigned out of fear of captivity, and others have been held captive for months. HEIs students and staff who find themselves in the temporarily occupied territories are confronted with a markedly disparate environment. They fight with an array of adverse psychoemotional factors akin to their counterparts living in the territories under Ukrainian control.

Ukrainian Higher Education Survived

It is imperative to acknowledge that, despite ominous trends such as infrastructure destruction, displacement of students and faculty, student, and staff loss, security concerns, cyber threats for universities' information systems, financial strains, organizational issues, and students' and staff's mental health and well-being, Ukrainian HEIs persist in functioning and providing educational services. Having conducted two rounds of admission, continuing to fulfill their missions during the 2022–2023 and 2023–2024 academic years, Ukrainian universities are still facing crucial challenges. These challenges, stemming from quarantine restrictions and exacerbated by the war, primarily revolve around the imperative need for well-organized distance learning in both synchronous and asynchronous modes. This involves adapting academic courses, programs, and task types, evaluation systems, schedules, teaching methods, etc. The Ukrainian system of higher education has survived, despite having suffered significant losses due to Russia's military invasion. The authorities partially managed to stabilize the higher education system in the difficult conditions of the ongoing armed conflict. The cohesion of the Ukrainian educational community, the motivation to continue teaching and learning, and the sufficiently effective internal policy of Ukrainian HEIs were of great importance in this process. There is also an invaluable input of the international community in providing assistance to Ukrainian educators.

The resilience and determination of students and faculty, coupled with support from the global academic community, are crucial in overcoming war challenges and rebuilding a stable and vibrant higher education landscape in Ukraine. Now is the time to focus on assessing educational losses and supporting further development of the Ukrainian higher education system. ▲

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Is the *Grandes Écoles*/Universities Divide about to Disappear in France?

Christine Musselin

The *grandes écoles*/universities divide is a well-known characteristic of French higher education. It started under the monarchy with the creation of the École des Ponts et Chaussées (school for bridges and roads, 1747) and the École des Mines (school about mining, 1783) and developed under the French Revolution when universities were suppressed and the revolutionaries opted for the creation of new schools (École Polytechnique or École Normale Supérieure, for instance). University faculties were subsequently recreated by Napoleon but the *grandes écoles* sector went on developing and acquired the reputable role of training the French intellectual, economic and administrative elites, while universities welcomed most of the students but trained middle managers, teachers, and academics.

This has been criticized many times, but the two sectors are still there today. Nevertheless, two important trends have occurred, bringing the universities and the *grandes écoles* closer. But is the divide about to disappear?

Post-1980s “Universitarization” of the *Grandes Écoles* and “Professionalization” of Universities

Two different processes have reduced the differences between the two sectors in terms of their curricula, their activities, and their staff.

The first one is linked to the policy led by the government since the mid-1970s to “professionalize” university curricula, i.e., to develop job-oriented programs. Expectations on the capacity of universities to prepare students for the job market have increased, specific “professional” diplomas have been created at all levels (bachelor and master), and internships in firms have developed. In recent years, the concept of apprenticeship has also been introduced in French universities.

Parallel to this trend, since the mid-1980s, the most prestigious business schools have undergone an important transformation. Imitating their counterparts in the world, they created campuses abroad, tried to attract international students, and looked for international accreditations such as the AACSB, AMBA, and the European EQUIS. But to obtain these labels, they had to accelerate their internal transformation and to comply with the model promoted by the accreditation bodies. This meant recruiting a certain level of international students, but also of international academic staff with PhDs. They stopped hiring their former students as permanent professors and looked for more academic profiles: PhD holders with strong publication records. Some business schools even started to deliver their own PhDs, and research became a priority. They thus introduced more university-like standards. Engineering schools have taken this international turn later but are also heading in this direction today.

The Bologna process accentuated this convergence trend: the diploma delivered by the *grandes écoles* has since then been called “master,” like the final diploma delivered by universities.

The Reform Waves of the Last 20 Years

Since 2005, a more structural transformation has been undertaken. The idea is to favor the relationships between the two sectors by locally creating meta-organizations where universities and *grandes écoles* could cooperate. Thus, the 2005 act gave the possibility to create PRES (*pôles de recherche et d'enseignement supérieur*), i.e., consortia within which member institutions could develop and manage joint labs, joint teaching

Abstract

This paper describes the evolution of the *grandes écoles*/universities divide in France. It first shows that while universities have adopted professional training programs, the *grandes écoles* have “universitarized.” Furthermore, in recent years, the policies aimed at the transformation of the French higher education landscape have led to some mergers including universities and *grandes écoles*. Nevertheless the divide between the two sectors remains consequent.

The grandes écoles/universities divide is a well-known characteristic of French higher education.

programs, deliver joint PhD and share the management of some of their competences. By the beginning of 2010, there were around 20 PRES in France, but the member institutions had not delegated much to this meta-level, and common projects remained rather rare.

To dynamize the PRES, the government decided that only PRES could apply for the highly selective Idex calls first organized within the French initiative of excellence framework in 2010 and 2011, and then again in 2016 and 2017. After the 2010 and 2011 calls, eight PRES (Bordeaux, Marseille, Strasbourg, Toulouse and four in or around Paris) had been selected and received extra funding. If they were positively evaluated after four years, they would be confirmed as Idex (excellent institutions) and allocated a permanent endowment that will sustain their budget forever.

The results of these calls reveal that this process has been more complex for PRES that included not only universities, but also universities and *grandes écoles*. With the exception of two PRES, all of them either failed in the calls of 2010 and 2011, or lost their Idex funding upon the results of the evaluation four years later (Toulouse and one of the Parisian PRES). Furthermore, again with one exception, all the Idex-confirmed consortia underwent a merger of two or three universities within them in the first four years. By mimetic isomorphism (copying the winners) many other universities have merged in France after the first calls but none of these mergers included *grandes écoles*.

This changed in 2018. Up to this date, the statutes of all French higher education institutions allowed to be called “universités” had to follow the rules defined by the University Act. But in December 2018, the ministry produced a memo allowing universities to depart from the University Act passed in 2013 on a voluntary basis. They could become an EPE (public experimental institution) and define their own specific statutes. The circular also specified that if an EPE resulted from the merger of universities and *grandes écoles*, the latter could keep their legal personality. This opened the doors to a new phase of mergers that include some *grandes écoles*. In addition to the already completed mergers, this has seriously transformed the French higher education landscape.

A Revolution ? Maybe... Maybe not!

This is thus an important move—and a promising one... if these recent weddings hold. But has France finally left the path of dependence that existed since 1747?

This is all but sure, and not only because divorces may happen within the EPE. First, when the most reputed *grandes écoles* decided to integrate into EPEs, they chose one without university. For instance, the École Polytechnique—the top of the top—has created an EPE made of five *grandes écoles*.

Furthermore, competition for students between the two sectors has never been higher. Many *grandes écoles* have recently introduced a four-year bachelor degree, allowing students to enter the school directly after the *baccalauréat* (instead of preparing the highly selective examination after two years of preparation). Some of these bachelor students can then join the master programs of the *grandes écoles*. The latter therefore increased their number of students and their fees revenue. This year, the share of students enrolled in the private sector has reached 25 percent, and universities have for the first time experienced a decrease in their student numbers!

Since the research potential is primarily located within universities, they remain less prestigious in the heads of many parents or students, as well as in the heads of French politicians and high civil servants. So, the *grandes écoles*/universities divide has been shaken but is still well alive. ▲

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