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**Rethinking the links between vocational and higher education.** *As the labour market becomes more competitive and as employers’ needs for specialised skills intensify, the role of vocational and further education is being reevaluated. This could have lasting effects on HE systems and policies, especially if the twin pressures on enrolment and funding continue. [\[Read more\]](#)*

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**Shaping the strategy to 2020 – the World Bank’s education consultations**

Given its dominance in shaping development policy, and with its commitments for the last fiscal year ‘unprecedented’ (US\$72 billion in total and US\$4.5 billion respectively for education), the World Bank’s development of a new ten-year education strategy is a significant event. The issues raised will be influential for donors and host countries alike. Last month the Bank made summaries of the regional consultative meetings available on its website; a draft of the strategy is now due to be published in August, and a final version in January 2011.

The summaries are valuable in that they record some of the current hopes and criticisms which surround the Bank’s work. Yet inviting such a range of opinion – regional, national, governmental, NGO, and sector – inevitably reveals some contrasting interests. Common ground is found in the several appeals for a ‘holistic’ approach to education, recognising not only the links between the basic, secondary, vocational, and HE sectors but also their inter-dependency (‘if you want good secondary teachers you need good higher education systems’). The summaries also acknowledge that the emphasis on progress in one area (eg the MDGs, and thus primary education) has placed stress elsewhere, higher education among them.

The importance attached to skills training reflects current labour market concerns and international economic competitiveness, but some have gone further in suggesting that ‘the principles of entrepreneurship need to be a key part of the tertiary learning experience’. Interest in more ‘learner-centred’ policy may also be linked to appeals for *learning* for all (rather than ‘education for all’) – the emphasis being on access to learning generally rather than simply to schooling – and more flexible curricula. Significantly, innovative technologies are valued, but emphasised as tools to empower rather than replace staff.

The need for greater integration is repeated in the vision for development policy, whether in the sense of partnerships with the 'wider development community', collaboration with other sectors (health, technology), or the responsibility for the Bank to ensure a more coordinated approach within its own administration. It reflects a perception of overlapping and sometimes competing donor interests, the increasing profile which education has in development thinking, and the co-operation which globalisation has the potential to enable. One specific concern was the relationship between finance and education ministries. An inherent weakness of education in many countries comes not simply from an over-dependence on aid, but from the 'evolving role of Ministries of Finance as arbiters of education and social policy', with their emphasis on monitoring, assessment, and accountability. But it was also acknowledged that the World Bank could be particularly effective where it is able to act outside of local or national politics, helping to influence central planning where this has been compromised. Private sector support, it was felt, could be better engaged, with the Bank using its strength as a convening body to share strategy and good practice. Anxieties over quality – in practice issues of effective regulation and accreditation – were repeated.

Strengthening the Bank to counter the 'central lack of overarching leadership in the global education sector', or the arguments for it developing a more assured advocacy role, confirm its continuing influence. At the same time some consultations suggested that more should be made of the locally specific research on which the Bank's analyses have drawn, and ensuring its findings are translated into policy. The consultative process itself, and the directness with which some of the meetings have been conducted ('the Bank is here to understand what it can do better to serve its clients'), reflect the priority placed on accountability, accessibility, and collaboration. Yet given that the disparities within and between countries are shifting, the particular challenges faced by the world's most vulnerable states, and different stakeholder interests, the 2020 strategy will perhaps be most effective where it is most provisional – in what it *allows* for rather than what it aims to fully resolve.

Regionally a separate World Bank initiative in East Asia is underway with the familiar themes of skills and innovation, while the EU's 'Europe 2020 Strategy' also incorporates education and calls for 'strengthening knowledge and innovation as drivers of future growth'. Characteristic of all three strategies is the 'growing political realisation of the key role that education plays in driving economic growth'. Collectively these recent strategies concentrate on interrelated goals and a now familiar logic: improved education, employability, research strength, and continuing economic growth. Yet the current climate for education remains uncertain: rising aid needs and reduced public sector budgets, graduate unemployment, changing skills, less predictable global markets. An overemphasis on the economic role may distort the achievement of what are fundamentally long-term – and significantly more flexible – aims and contributions. Particularly if these anticipated outcomes are not realised. Education and research policies both driven and shaped by economic growth targets may falter, particularly in a decade of change, and when the use and application of education, rather than its values, dominate.

Sources:

- World Bank Education Strategy 2020 <http://go.worldbank.org/DTQZ9EKJW0>
- Demand for World Bank Group Support Tops \$72 Billion as Developing Countries Face Continued Financing Gaps (World Bank Press Release (2011/001/EXT) (1/7/10) <http://go.worldbank.org/UN7VL2UIS0>
- Higher Education in East Asia (Where does the path to higher education lead?) <http://go.worldbank.org/JTFOQZP670>
- Europe 2020 Strategy [http://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/index_en.htm)

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## Tools for sustainable systems – financing higher education in Africa

In June the Kenyan government announced a doubling of the subsidy to its seven public universities, taking it to \$640 million in 2010-11. While such a substantial increase is undoubtedly a positive step, the response has been mixed. Public HE currently faces an estimated 100 billion Kenyan shillings (US\$1.2 billion) shortfall and some commentators have noted that the extra \$340 million is insufficient to meet the rapid rise in admissions, and the urgent need to improve facilities. An annual increase in enrolments of around 40% over the last 5 years has reportedly been met with just a 4-5% increase in the annual government subsidy, and universities are to be asked to double their intakes in 2011 and 2012. In parallel, tuition fee and student loan rate rises have been suggested, while the government is also reportedly considering a plan to launch new education bonds on the Nairobi exchange.

Enrolment pressures, financing shortfalls, and concerns around quality in Kenya offer a useful context in which to set the World Bank's 'Financing Higher Education in Africa', the latest in its 'Directions in Development: Human Development' series. The book builds on the Bank's existing work on HE financing, drawing on the expertise of other well-known writers in the field. Specifically it follows the Bank's 2008 agenda for HE reform, providing the practical 'how to pay for it' component of the argument set out in

'Accelerating Catch-up: Tertiary education for growth in Sub-Saharan Africa'. A portfolio of tools and strategies is recommended, entailing 'A comprehensive approach that would combine all the tools that can ensure more financially sustainable higher education systems'.

Specific recommendations surround improvements to the way existing budgets are managed, and a move to performance-based formulae to correct 'major institutional imbalances', improve transparency, strengthen autonomy, and generate a stronger link to national development priorities. Measures to re-direct 'student flows' over the education system as a whole, to provide a better fit with labour market needs, and an engagement with employers and professions, are also suggested. Diversified funding, greater student and family cost-sharing and increased involvement of the private sector receive attention, as do the enhanced information and data capacity which will be needed to monitor and report on the system as a whole.

As a relatively concise compendium of options and their implications for central and institutional accounting, it is a useful for policymakers and those with 'operational' responsibility (and perhaps also outside of Africa). Most of the book's recommendations and its proposed toolkit make for familiar reading, and the prescriptions for Africa seem very much to fit those applied internationally. There is a clear sense that HE must pay for itself, and that while local contexts must be acknowledged the continent is not to be regarded as a 'special case' when it comes to the toolkit to be applied.

Given the funding shortfall in Africa and internationally it is not surprising that HE is tasked with finding more of its own money, and to be freed to do so. But there are unresolved questions about how less marketable subjects, or those with less clear links to economic targets, are to be safeguarded. Worryingly for those outside of the more applied disciplines, and with an eye to the recent debates surrounding – and advancing – the value and contributions of the social sciences and humanities, it argues that 'restructuring the education supply... may involve the gradual elimination of disciplines not particularly relevant to a country's development'. This is linked elsewhere to the observation that relatively little of African HE work addresses agricultural needs, despite its economic importance, or more broadly to technical and vocational areas. Notably it places a specific emphasis on distant learning in helping to meet access targets whilst also controlling cost (although it acknowledges substantial up-front investments are need to ensure quality). By contrast it also argues that overseas scholarships, where these are funded from the national pot, should be limited as these tend to accrue to the 'most favoured social classes'.

There is welcome acknowledgement of the myriad institutional constraints that universities face and the need to be very context-specific and sensitive in addressing some of these, particularly given the difficulties – and unhappiness – that dramatic changes are likely to provoke: a recent report to the Kenyan government by a Bank-backed project ('*Financing University Education in Kenya*') generated an angry reaction from the University Academic Staff Union. Thoughts on sequencing, reform environments, the need for consultation and consensus building, the provision of incentives, and the need to accept and plan for unexpected consequences are therefore of particular importance. Perhaps most interesting for a book of this type, which at heart focuses on the 'technical' aspects of financing, is the extent to which it addresses the 'political economy of tertiary education reforms', remarking – in perhaps one of its most prescient lines – that 'when it comes to implementation, political reality invariably proves stronger than the technocratic vision'.

#### Sources

- World Bank (2010). *Financing Higher Education in Africa*. Washington DC: World Bank. ([http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EDUCATION/Resources/278200-1099079877269/Financing\\_higher\\_edu\\_Africa.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EDUCATION/Resources/278200-1099079877269/Financing_higher_edu_Africa.pdf))
- Kenya: Funding boost for public universities (<http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20100617191414330>)
- Varsities plan double intakes (<http://www.nation.co.ke/News/Varsities%20plan%20double%20intakes/-/1056/940622/-/8mrxap/-/index.html>)
- Kenya: Experts Want Universities to Increase Tuition Fees (<http://allafrica.com/stories/201002222064.html>)
- Kenya: New Financing Plan for Public Universities (<http://allafrica.com/stories/200907100794.html>)
- Kenya: Academics attack finance plans (<http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20100326123343753>)

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#### Rethinking the links between vocational and higher education

The role of vocational education is receiving greater emphasis, as the labour market becomes more competitive and as employers' needs for specialised skills intensify. While this trend predates the economic downturn, the current financial climate has generated greater interest in 'practical employment skills'. In Australia, Canada, and the UK much recent analysis has focused on the connections between the HE and

further/vocational sectors, particularly on how distinctive or complementary they may be. Meanwhile regional initiatives have argued for shared solutions to economic recovery. Though contexts and goals vary, the current re-evaluation of vocational and further education could have lasting effects on HE systems and policies, especially if the twin pressures on enrolment and funding continue.

A joint project of Universities Australia (UA) and TAFE Directors Australia (TDA) was commissioned last September, following the ambitions of the Australian Bradley Review for a more co-ordinated and inclusive education system. Its focus was on improved collaboration to meet participation targets, but it emphasised wider needs for new tertiary protocols, consistent funding, and a 'common [comparative] data dictionary'. TDA have since expanded this as 'A (Draft) Blueprint for Australia's Tertiary Education Sector', arguing that a more integrated system would provide both a 'better deal for students' and a 'well-educated and highly-skilled workforce'. It notes that 'it is possible for a provider to offer tertiary qualifications without necessarily being regarded as a tertiary education institution'. TAFE's role in shared or expanded tertiary provision represents, it is stressed, not competition to universities but rather a view of a 'cohesive...institutionally differentiated sector'. The need for a single regulatory authority is accepted, not least to ensure mobility between institutions and across qualification; for its part the UA is concerned that any widening of degree-granting provision should be preceded by national regulation to guarantee quality.

In the UK recent speeches by the new Universities and Science Minister (David Willetts) have referred to the importance of 'links between vocational and academic pathways', whether in terms of improved vocational qualifications or 'routes into further and higher education, including through high-quality apprenticeships'. Linking widening participation with standards he has recommended investments be made to enable colleges to teach externally validated degree programmes. This would also help 'FE colleges looking to improve their higher education range and their progression routes'. Efficiency and improved social mobility are cited as additional potential benefits (two-year intensive courses have also been suggested), complemented by the proposal that all HE and FE colleges publish employability statements which set out the link between academic study and careers. The argument is likewise made that 'it's possible to provide good quality HE in an institution that doesn't award its own degrees'. HEFCE's latest 'Regional Profiles of HE' details 271 FE colleges in England which were already offering recognised courses in 2007/08, as a result of various collaborations and franchise arrangements. The drive for increased collaboration therefore builds on an expansion of existing arrangements - rather than representing much greater integration within the sector.

An Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC) submission re-iterates the key value of the skills base in securing economic development, notes the current 'acute shortage of advanced skills', and draws attention to the resulting pressure now placed on the vocational sector 'as the newly unemployed flock to colleges to re-skill'. Recent coverage has also identified the role which community colleges are playing in providing practical training and more assured routes into employment specifically for university graduates. At the European level, an EC statement argues that recognising VET as part of a wider system also encourages social inclusion by raising student expectations and community links: 'the more vocational education and training goes beyond the pure labour market aspect, the more it will promote equity'.

The focusing of minds and budgets which the economic crisis has encouraged, as well as the recurrent vocabulary of 'integrated' sectors and learning 'pathways', explain increasing collaboration in HE and FE/VET. But the distinctive strengths and needs of national education systems remain. Powerful research universities may more readily prioritise international co-operation; others may already be well-engaged with local business and communities. Equally vocational institutions have well-established profiles and ambitions, particularly in offering practical skills and experience, which they may seek to strengthen independently. As a result HE policy – or simply how a university determines what it does – could increasingly be influenced by college provision, be it collaborative or competitive.

Sources:

- Towards an Australian tertiary education system (TDA/UA Joint Statement (4/10))([http://www.tda.edu.au/resources/Joint\\_TDA\\_UA\\_agreement.doc](http://www.tda.edu.au/resources/Joint_TDA_UA_agreement.doc))
- Designing Tertiary – TAFE, Structures and Budgets & News from Community Colleges in America (AFR Conference 2010 - Financial Review Presentation (M. Riordan))(<http://www.tda.edu.au/resources/AFR%20Conference%20-%20MR.pdf>)
- BIS – David Willetts – 'University Challenge' (10/6/10) (<http://www.bis.gov.uk/news/speeches/david-willetts-oxford-brookes-university-challenge>) and Vince Cable – 'Higher Education' (15/7/10) (<http://www.bis.gov.uk/news/speeches/vince-cable-higher-education>)
- HEFCE - Regional Profiles of Higher Education (2007-08) (June 2010/15) ([http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2010/10\\_15/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2010/10_15/))
- A model worth emulating or a plan that risks creating a two-tier system? (Independent) (Hodges, L.) (24/6/10)(<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/further/online-degrees-a-model-worth-emulating-or-a-plan-that-risks-creating-a-two-tier-system-2007719.html>)
- Post-Secondary Transfers: ACCC Submission to the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology (ACCC) (5/10) ([http://www.accc.ca/ftp/briefs-memoires/201005\\_SocialAffairs.pdf](http://www.accc.ca/ftp/briefs-memoires/201005_SocialAffairs.pdf))

- Canadian University Graduates Are Going Back to the Classroom for Vocational Training (Chronicle of Higher Education) (Birchard, K.) (28/6/10) (<http://chronicle.com/article/Canadian-University-Graduates/66078/>)
- A new impetus for European cooperation in Vocational Education and Training to support the Europe 2020 strategy (9/6/10) (<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:0296:FIN:EN:PDF>)

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## Other news

### ACU Secretary General

Prof. John Wood CBE FREng has taken up his role as the ACU's Secretary General, to succeed Prof. John Tarrant who retired at the end of June, having led the ACU since 2007 ([www.acu.ac.uk/about\\_us/professor\\_john\\_wood](http://www.acu.ac.uk/about_us/professor_john_wood)).

### Academic workforce studies [see VC-NET 94, April 2010]

- Investigating the Ageing Academic Workforce: Stocktake [Hugo, G.; Morriss, A.; GISCA; University of Adelaide; 2010 ([www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/documents/publications/policy/Academic\\_Workforce\\_Study.pdf](http://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/documents/publications/policy/Academic_Workforce_Study.pdf)) ([www.gisca.adelaide.edu.au](http://www.gisca.adelaide.edu.au))]
- UK (Changing Academic Profession conference) (22/6/10) Presentations from last month's UK CAP conference are available with, separately, a detailed bibliography (to June 2010, CHERI). ([www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/Events/Pages/TheChangingAcademicProfession.aspx](http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/Events/Pages/TheChangingAcademicProfession.aspx)) ([www.open.ac.uk/cheri/pages/CHERI-Projects-CAP.shtml](http://www.open.ac.uk/cheri/pages/CHERI-Projects-CAP.shtml))

### Humanities/Social sciences: impact/value [see VC-Net 95, May 2010]

Recent contributions to the continuing debate on the role and value of the humanities and social sciences include:

- Past, Present, and Future: the Public Value of the Humanities and Social Sciences (British Academy) (2010) ([www.britac.ac.uk/policy/uni-funding.cfm](http://www.britac.ac.uk/policy/uni-funding.cfm))

From the perspective of one institution:

- Assessing the Impact of Arts and Humanities Research at the University of Cambridge (RAND technical report) (Levitt, R.; Claire, C.; Diepeveen, S.; Ni Chonail, S.; Rabinovich, L.; Tiessen, J) (2010) ([www.rand.org/pubs/technical\\_reports/TR816](http://www.rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/TR816))

### HE marketing/branding

Several initiatives have been developed as national HE systems seek to compete in an international education market:

- Australian Education International/Austrade: Responsibility for the international promotion and marketing of Australian education has been transferred from AEI to Austrade (wef 1/7/10) ([www.aei.gov.au/Aei/Default.aspx](http://www.aei.gov.au/Aei/Default.aspx))
- Canadian Consortium for International Education Marketing: A new consortium has been established to 'provide leadership, coordination and added value to the sector's marketing efforts to attract international students to Canada' (29/6/10) ([www.aucc.ca/publications/media/2010/consortium\\_int\\_edu\\_marketing\\_06\\_29\\_e.html](http://www.aucc.ca/publications/media/2010/consortium_int_edu_marketing_06_29_e.html))
- Malaysia. Branding & Marketing Asia Higher Education Conference, 22-3/3/10, Kuala Lumpur: Many of the conference papers/presentations from the SEAMEO-RIHED Branding & Marketing Conference are now available on their site ([www.rihed.seameo.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=136&Itemid=1](http://www.rihed.seameo.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=136&Itemid=1))
- World 100 Reputation Network Conference, Hong Kong, 22-23/6/10: The first such conference of the World 100 Reputation Network ([www.theworld100.com](http://www.theworld100.com))

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## Key publications

A selection of recent publications on higher education:

### Challenges of Developing and Retaining the Next Generation of Academics: Deficits in Academic Staff Capacity at African Universities [Tetty, W; Partnership for Higher Education in Africa; 2010]

Comparative analysis of academic staff capacity in SSA countries (staff shortage being a 'critical issue'), with useful national and institutional profiles. ([www.foundation-partnership.org/pubs/pdf/tetty\\_deficits.pdf](http://www.foundation-partnership.org/pubs/pdf/tetty_deficits.pdf))

**Good Practices in Educational Partnerships Guide: UK-Africa Higher & Further Education Partnerships** [Wanni, N.; Hinz, S.; Day, R.; Africa Unit; BIS, DELNI, ACU; 2010]. Principles and guidelines for effective HE/FE partnerships, both in planning and implementation. ([www.ukafricapartnerships.org](http://www.ukafricapartnerships.org))

**University News (48:28) (July 12-18, 2010) Special Issue: Higher Education: New Challenges and Emerging Roles** [Association of Indian Universities (AIU); eds: Shah, B.; Singh, K.; Pani, S.] Papers on HE policy in India, including foreign education provision. ([www.aiuweb.org](http://www.aiuweb.org))

### World Development Indicators (WDI) Online [World Bank; 2010]

Detailed regional and national statistics, now available free through the Bank's open data site. ([http://publications.worldbank.org/e-commerce/catalog/product-detail?product\\_id=631625&](http://publications.worldbank.org/e-commerce/catalog/product-detail?product_id=631625&))

**World Social Science Report (Knowledge Divides)** [International Social Science Council (ISSC); Unesco; 978-92-3-104131-0; 2010] A study of social sciences internationally – their role, status, use, and value. The first such study for over a decade. Confirms the achievement of the social sciences, but also continuing divides (geographical, theoretical, disciplinary, etc.) ([www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/resources/reports/world-social-science-report](http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/resources/reports/world-social-science-report))

The authors, Nick Mulhern and Jonathan Harle are always pleased to receive comments on the usefulness and content of this briefing. News from other Commonwealth countries, which might be of wider interest, is also most welcome. They can be contacted by e-mail on [vcnet@acu.ac.uk](mailto:vcnet@acu.ac.uk) or by fax on +44 (0)20 7387 2655. This and previous issues can also be accessed online at: [www.acu.ac.uk/member\\_services/research\\_and\\_policy\\_analysis/vc\\_net](http://www.acu.ac.uk/member_services/research_and_policy_analysis/vc_net)

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