

## **VC-NET**

***The news service for the network  
of Vice-Chancellors and Presidents  
in membership of the  
Association of Commonwealth Universities***

**No 91**

**September/October 2009**

---

### **Building capacity in Pakistan in the shadow of rising instability**

A Higher Education Support Program (HESP) for Pakistan was confirmed by the World Bank last month. The project, amounting to some US\$100 million, is part of a development programme which aims to 'overhaul the entire education system'. HESP is to help enable the 'rehabilitation' of the higher education sector, particularly by promoting the reforms which the country's Higher Education Commission (HEC) has developed and begun to introduce. What in detail, though, are the aims of HESP, and given the current political context and vulnerable security situation, its prospects?

HESP's principal goals are increased participation, improved quality and relevance, whether in teaching or research, and strengthened management and sustainability in the institutions themselves. The long-term aim is to better match the needs of the economy, especially one oriented to technology and knowledge, with a skilled graduate workforce. HESP is therefore integral to Pakistan's Medium-Term Development Framework (MTDF) which necessarily identifies national growth with educational opportunity.

Pakistan has low levels of participation in higher education in comparison both with regional and more general international indicators. This has begun to be addressed in recent years however, as the project document for HESP states, higher education in Pakistan 'remains an elitist system, catering to a small proportion of the eligible population'. As well as improving participation HESP also seeks to:

- Improve university teaching through faculty support and in professional development courses.
- Improve research quality through a more systematic peer review funding process, continued support for the national educational intranet (PERN), Digital Library Program, and its Quality Assurance Agency.
- Support better institutional management through changes in governance, planning and the development of a comprehensive management information system.
- Support the development of a revised funding framework based on a new, and transparent, formula.

As a project it builds on previous World Bank supported research, notably its 2006 MTDF analysis, as a strategy it echoes the recent Bank report for Sri Lanka, and as a funding commitment it parallels that recently confirmed for Bangladesh (see VC-NET nos. 89 & 90). As a programme though it is distinctive. In formal terms it is the first Development Policy Credit (DPC) in higher education in South Asia and as such the way its accountability, for example, is measured reflects 'specific national circumstances' rather than 'abstract theory or dogma'. HESP is also to be implemented through the HEC. Potentially this strengthens HEC as an autonomous agency, particularly given the level and ambition of the project, but could

also make both - the Commission and its proposed reforms - more vulnerable if expectations are ultimately unrealised. Nevertheless it is clear that the Government's National Education Policy (NEP), revised in August this year, directly endorses the Framework on which the project is based.

A dilemma which HESP faces is that some of its reforms are dependent on required changes at other educational levels. Moreover both HESP and the NEP value a co-ordinated education system and 'policy coherence', yet both recognise that independent parallel systems exist whether as private provision or as, for example, Madrassahs. The development of a Karachi Education Initiative (KEI) is one recent example of a private sector approach; it seeks to be the country's first international business school and is motivated in part by the need to 'take responsibility' in the face of current crises.

Among the stated aims of the NEP is that education should promote 'national cohesion', and 'social and cultural harmony', but the success of projects such as HESP also depend on this stability being secured. General economic uncertainty and national political rivalry, in addition to 'the backdrop of local fundamentalism, regional conflicts, and intense international pressure', are among the wider risks which the project acknowledges. These threats have become more immediate with terrorism now including a university in Islamabad among its targets, resulting in the temporary closure of all universities (and schools) across Pakistan at the time of writing. The NEP and HESP represent substantial and valuable programmes for education in Pakistan; they also highlight the difficulties in promoting education when it is expected to contribute to national development, while both being dependent on and helping to strengthen an uncertain and fragile infrastructure.

Sources:

- Pakistan: Higher Education Support System Project (World Bank Project Description 10/9/09)  
<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/NEWS/0,,contentMDK:22309121~pagePK:34370~piPK:34424~theSitePK:4607,00.html>
- World Bank Provides Support to Strengthen Social Safety Nets, Higher Education in Pakistan (World Bank Press Release 10/9/09)  
<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/NEWS/0,,contentMDK:22309190~pagePK:34370~piPK:34424~theSitePK:4607,00.html>
- Pakistan. Ministry of Education - National Education Policy  
[http://www.moe.gov.pk/nepr/NEP\\_2009.PDF](http://www.moe.gov.pk/nepr/NEP_2009.PDF)
- Will a new initiative in Karachi that aims to set high moral standards cure Pakistan's ills? (with reference to proposed Karachi Business School) (Independent (1/10/09))  
<http://www.independent.co.uk/student/postgraduate/mbas-guide/will-a-new-initiative-in-karachi-that-aims-to-set-high-moral-standards-cure-pakistans-ills-1795524.html>
- Attack shuts all Pakistan schools (BBC news (South Asia) (21/10/09))  
[http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south\\_asia/8317676.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/8317676.stm)

## **HE Funding Strategies in New Zealand, Australia and the UK**

The challenge of expanding higher education provision in response to labour market needs while simultaneously reducing government education budgets, is addressed in several recent national HE strategies. New Zealand, Australia, and the UK each outline simplified funding systems, and in some cases forecast radical change, but their targets differ. In part these reflect local economies and distinct planning timescales. Underlying them, though, are different expectations of higher education's role in reacting, or contributing, to economic policy.

New Zealand's draft Tertiary Education Strategy (2010-2015), released last month, includes among its priorities: increased graduate - and tertiary-level student - numbers, specific support for Maori and Pasifika students, and a continued commitment to adult education. Emphasis on the improved 'educational and financial performance of providers', and reduced central bureaucracy, are presented as integral to the government's 5-year funding programme and its plans for economic growth. Funding is to be transferred from 'low-quality qualifications (such as those with low completion rates or poor educational or labour market outcomes)' with, in time, future funding being linked to past performance. Fee levels are to remain at

'reasonable levels' though the Strategy also acknowledges that the government will, in its words, 'explore ways of giving providers some additional flexibility to raise revenue'. The overall emphasis of the draft Strategy is on relevance and efficiency. It is a wide-ranging plan but the focus on supplying skills relevant to the labour market, and to a lesser extent links with industry and innovation, are pronounced. Reducing costs rather than - as the NZVCC has recommended - increasing investment could therefore in practice make universities compete to provide more vocationally-based courses. A plan produced in response to the current pressures of budget deficits and the uncertain development of the recession also risks making immediate goals strategic ones: training for specific but changing workforce needs for example, or reference to readily accountable, but perhaps short-term, research priorities.

In Australia, the Higher Education Support Amendment (2009 Budget Measures) Bill, passed last month, represents a contrasting approach to funding reform. The government will fund all offered student places, direct university funding will increase, and further incentives will be provided to support widening participation measures. The Bill effectively implements several proposed reforms of the Bradley Review, and as such benefits from being driven by a detailed strategic study of the sector rather than current political and economic pressure (2025 is its long-term target date for its increased graduation rate). It also reflects wider, though related, innovation, and international student policy. Some of the more urgent 'vocational education and training reforms to respond to ongoing changes in economic conditions' are instead, being addressed for example by a new Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment (MCTEE). Its inaugural meeting was held at the end of last month.

Recent policy announcements in the UK have similarly addressed skills needs, though they have been tempered by the expected release of a wide-ranging 10-15 year 'higher education framework' next month, and the probability of imminent sectoral and political change. Both the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), in its revised Strategic Plan (June 2009) and Universities UK in a recent report, have emphasised the need for greater employer engagement and the development of a more highly skilled workforce. As with the recent incorporation of higher education into the new governmental department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), the emphasis, heightened by the economic crisis, is on higher education's links with innovation and skills development. Last month, a comprehensive review of the whole higher education funding system was announced by the Secretary of State for BIS, while the current opposition has already put forward plans to review various policy agencies several of which are education-related, in line with other government budget efficiency plans. Given that HEFCE is already being reviewed independently for its effectiveness, it is unclear how fixed current funding structures - and some specific funding proposals - for UK higher education are.

Financial pressures are making all national budgets subject to review, with education and research increasingly being made not only more accountable but also being seen to contribute directly to economic recovery through specific skills and innovation agendas. Framing strategy with reference to short-term priorities, however, risks embedding these agendas just when future labour and industry needs seem less predictable, and when internationalisation now links migration and work incentives with study abroad opportunities.

Sources:

New Zealand

- New Zealand. Ministry of Education - Tertiary Education Strategy (Draft) 2010-2015 (29/9/09) <http://www.minedu.govt.nz/theMinistry/Consultation/TertiaryEducationStrategyDraft.aspx>
- Consultation for Tertiary Strategy (29/9/09) <http://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/consultation+tertiary+strategy>

Australia

- Higher Education Support Amendment (2009 Budget Measures) Bill [http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/Gillard/Media/Releases/Pages/Article\\_090908\\_130140.aspx](http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/Gillard/Media/Releases/Pages/Article_090908_130140.aspx)
- Australia. Department of Education, Employment & Workplace Relations (DEEWR) – Inaugural Meeting of MCTEE – Communique (Media Release 28/9/09) [http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/Gillard/Media/Releases/Pages/Article\\_090929\\_075622.aspx](http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/Gillard/Media/Releases/Pages/Article_090929_075622.aspx)

UK

- Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) – HEFCE Strategic Plan 2006-2011 (updated June 2009) [http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2009/09\\_21/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2009/09_21/)

- Universities UK – From Recession to Recovery (28/7/09)  
<http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/Newsroom/Media-Releases/Pages/UniversitieswilldrivetheUKfromrecessiontorecovery.saysUUK.aspx>
- Progressive state reformers v ideological state retrenchers: framing the electoral choice between Labour and Conservative (Progress Lecture Series) – Lord Mandelson (Secretary of State, BIS) (London School of Economics, 14/9/09)  
<http://www2.lse.ac.uk/PublicEvents/events/2009/20090902t1359z001.aspx>

### **Where does the Commonwealth sit in the 2009 World University Rankings?**

It is that time of year when many universities clamour to check on their position in the latest international university rankings. With the UK's Times Higher Education-QS World University rankings released earlier this month and the other major international league table – the Shanghai Jiao Tong University Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) – due at the beginning of November, international rankings are once again in the spotlight. While debate and controversy surround academic league tables and rankings, they nevertheless generate considerable coverage and have become an influential reference tool in the national and international higher education landscape. In a major study of academic league tables, commissioned by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) last year, it was concluded that the impact and influence of league tables is increasing, especially as higher education becomes more competitive. This was echoed in a more recent publication by the US based Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) the authors emphasised that rankings are a “durable fixture in the marketplace of information on colleges”, informing public notions of quality. They also note that rankings have the potential to shift institutional behaviour in ways that might negatively impact upon longer-term policy goals. The risk is that the influence of league tables is not sufficiently counter-balanced by the limitations of the data and methodology on which they are based.

So where do Commonwealth universities feature in this most recent list and how have they fared this year compared with previous years? Among the top 200 universities listed 58 (29%) are from Commonwealth countries (an additional two institutions are ACU members from Hong Kong). The majority of these are from the UK (29 entries) which has the second highest representation after the US (54 entries). There is also strong representation among Canadian universities, sitting joint third with 11 entries and Australia with nine. Of the 58 Commonwealth universities featured, 57% (33) are in the top one hundred.

There has not been significant change in the representation of the Commonwealth compared with last year. The same number of Commonwealth institutions feature in the top 200 (and top 100). The only countries to change their representation were Canada (which fell from 12 to 11) and Malaysia which re-entered the top 200, after being absent since 2006, with the University of Malaya rising from 230 to 180. The biggest difference however was in the proportion of institutions that improved their position. In 2008 two thirds of the universities from Commonwealth countries slipped down the rankings, whereas in 2009 over half (57%) maintained or improved their position. The UK saw 16 of its universities maintain or improve their position and four of the top five ranked institutions were from the UK (last year it was two). In addition, the only African university represented in the top 200, the University of Cape Town, moved up 33 places from 179 to 146. Compared with the Commonwealth, the dominant presence of the US fared less well with 42 (78%) of its institutions slipping down the rankings with only 12 maintaining (5) or improving (7) their standing and its overall representation fell by four. Further details of Commonwealth country representation are available in the table below.

It is clear that while they may be methodologically flawed and unavoidably reductive, rankings are here to stay. Taken in isolation this year's list might offer some comfort that universities within the Commonwealth are holding their own among the world leading universities. More broadly however, it highlights the relative exclusion of the vast majority of Commonwealth universities and countries from the higher ranks of league tables with around 85% of Commonwealth countries never featured (nor likely to feature any time soon) in the Times Higher's top 200. The danger implicit in this exclusivity is that those institutions that do not

compete on the terms set by the rankings criteria are sidelined and overshadowed both nationally and internationally.

**Commonwealth representation in the World University rankings since 2004 (first year of rankings)**

Country	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Australia	14	17	13	12	9	9
Canada	7	8	7	11	12	11
India	1	3	3	3	2	2
Malaysia	2	1	2	-	-	1
New Zealand	3	3	2	3	3	3
Singapore	2	2	2	2	2	2
South Africa	-	-	-	1	1	1
UK	30	24	29	32	29	29
<b>Total</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>No. of CW universities in top 100</b>	<b>33</b> (56%)	<b>33</b> (57%)	<b>31</b> (53%)	<b>36</b> (59%)	<b>31</b> (53%)	<b>33</b> (57%)
<b>Rankings increased or stayed the same as previous year</b>	-		34	44	18	33
<b>Rankings decreased from previous year</b>	-		24	17	40	25

Sources:

- Times Higher Education World University Rankings: 2009. Available from: <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/WorldUniversityRankings2009.html>
- HEFCE: Counting what is measured or measuring what counts? League tables and their impact on higher education institutions in England. April 2008. Available from: [http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2008/08\\_14/08\\_14.pdf](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2008/08_14/08_14.pdf)
- Institute for Higher Education Policy: Issue Brief; The role and relevance of rankings in higher education policymaking. September 2009. Available from: <http://www.ihep.org/publications/publications-detail.cfm?id=130>

**ACU launches new website**

The ACU has a new website! Re-launched in August, the new site features information on all of the ACU's activities, together with a revamped Coursefinder service, featuring all member institutions, and a comprehensive publications section. The site is now easy to navigate and locate information about the range of services provided by the ACU. Members now have exclusive access to large areas of the site, including reports, conference proceedings and professional networks resources. Past editions of VC Net, dating back to 2000, can be searched and accessed through the site using your username and password. To obtain your member log-in details, visit [www.acu.ac.uk](http://www.acu.ac.uk) and to access the VC Net page go to: [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)

---

**Key publications**

A selection of recent publications on higher education:

- **Appointing Heads of Higher Education Institutions: a Resource for Governors; Appointing Senior Staff in Higher Education Institutions: a Resource for Higher Education Institutions** [CUC; Guild HE; UUK; 2009 ([www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/Newsroom/Media-Releases/Pages/UniversitiesUKpublishesguidetorecruitingseiorstaff.aspx](http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/Newsroom/Media-Releases/Pages/UniversitiesUKpublishesguidetorecruitingseiorstaff.aspx)) ([www.oakleigh.co.uk/page/4032/Experience/Experience-Articles/Universities-UK,-Management-Guidance-for-the-appointment-of-Vice-Chancellors-](http://www.oakleigh.co.uk/page/4032/Experience/Experience-Articles/Universities-UK,-Management-Guidance-for-the-appointment-of-Vice-Chancellors-))]  
Two reports with advice for:

- a) governors and university staff in recruiting vice-chancellors/principals,
  - b) recruitment of registrars/secretaries and financial directors.
- Published in the UUK's management guidance series.

- **Education at Glance** [OECD; 2009 ([www.oecd.org/edu/eag2009](http://www.oecd.org/edu/eag2009)) ([www.oecd.org/dataoecd/41/25/43636332.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/41/25/43636332.pdf))]  
Annual statistical analysis, including this year economic returns outcomes and long-term unemployment rates, as well as participation, expenditure, and student mobility indicators.
- **International Organisations and Higher Education Policy: Thinking Globally, Acting Locally** (International Studies in Higher Education series) [Bassett, R.M.; Maldonado-Maldonado, A.; (eds.); 978-0-415-99043-1; Routledge; 2009 ([www.routledge.com/books/International-Organizations-and-Higher-Education-Policy-isbn9780415990431](http://www.routledge.com/books/International-Organizations-and-Higher-Education-Policy-isbn9780415990431))]  
Series of perspectives on the World Bank, Unesco, OECD, and the WTO as examples of how the development of higher education policy, nationally and internationally, has been influenced by international agencies.
- **Learning Abroad: a History of the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan** [Perraton, H.; 978-1-4438-0600-8; 2009; Cambridge Scholars Publishing ([www.c-s-p.org](http://www.c-s-p.org))]  
A study of the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan (CSFP) from its launch fifty years ago to its later expansion and development, showing the impact on individual careers, as well as with reference to wider trends in international student mobility
- **UNESCO in AFRICA (cooperation in the field of higher education in Africa)** [Unesco; 2009 ([www.unesco.org/en/education/dynamic-content-single-iew/news/unesco\\_launches\\_journal\\_on\\_education\\_in\\_africa/back/9195/](http://www.unesco.org/en/education/dynamic-content-single-iew/news/unesco_launches_journal_on_education_in_africa/back/9195/))]  
A new Unesco journal, the first issue focusing on higher education. Includes several papers presented at a WCHE preparatory regional meeting.

---

The authors, Nick Mulhern and Jay Kubler 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.

---