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Regional higher education areas: Bologna and beyond

Last month saw the launch of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), prompting further analyses of the Bologna Process and the drive for more comparable education systems. Simultaneously, the second Bologna Policy Forum – the outward looking aspect of the Process, attended by over 25 countries outside Europe – indicates continuing interest in Bologna's wider impact ([see VC-NET 87](#)). How valid or achievable, then, are the Process' original ambitions, and how transferable is this model of a 'higher education area'?

An EC-commissioned study ('Focus on Higher Education in Europe 2010: The Impact of the Bologna Process') brings together 46 national level reports and argues that the Process has 'brought about fundamental and dramatic change in higher education structures' in parallel to greater co-operation in quality assurance. But it admits that goals in widening participation, lifelong learning, and even student mobility remain variable. A shorter briefing acknowledges progress in agreeing structures and principles, but notes the problems of implementation within distinctive systems; Bologna of course represents a voluntary, co-operative model.

'Trends 2010: a Decade of Change in European Higher Education' (EUA), demonstrates that European policy change has 'altered deeply all activities of HEIs' but that Bologna's rapid implementation probably peaked in 2007. It anticipates that internationalisation will become the most important driver of change within the next five years; Europe remains the priority area for international exchange, followed by Asia, North America, and Latin America. The most thorough analysis (CHEPS, INCHER, ECOTEC) considers the extent to which compatibility, comparability and attractiveness will be achieved 'still partly an open question', while an emerging EHEA is characterised by varying speeds of implementation and levels of commitment. The assessment recognises the value of promoting agreed systems in qualifications and quality, but notes 'the risk of the process becoming administration without much impact on the reality of higher education'. Political momentum, the perception of a 'top-down approach', and a critical dependence on the commitment of

academics and administrators are acknowledged, as well as the need for practical outcomes in addition to policy reform.

Inevitably wider change since Bologna's launch in 1999 have challenged its original aims. International markets, mass HE, the accessibility of information, the impact of rankings, the growth of borderless and private HE, more mobile labour markets, and specific skills and training needs – all have dramatically altered the HE environment in which it was initially conceived. Compatibility and comparability within fixed education systems could seem less practical now the form of HE has changed and as study and career opportunities abroad widen. (The CHEPS/INCHER/ECOTEC study admits that 'for internationally mobile learners the EHEA has little reality; they choose to study in countries and institutions without considering if they are part of the EHEA'.)

Some recent initiatives have paralleled the Bologna Process albeit with different emphases. The East African Community (EAC) last year commissioned a comparative study from IUCEA 'with a view to harmonizing [the] national goals and philosophies of education, curriculum content, education structures, policies and legal frameworks'. Independently the first 'East African Universities Year Book' was published by the IUCEA, while similar regional HE guides have been issued by SARUA, showing how 'dominant historical trends... have influenced the development of national higher education efforts'. At a wider level an 'African Higher Education Area (AHEA)' continues to be mooted; it is also one of the schemes considered in next month's Access to Success conference which has regional academic mobility as its theme (see [VC Net 93](#)).

In contrast an alternative trend focuses not on a coherent HE 'area' but on measures to promote mobility. China, Japan, and Korea are co-operating on a new 'Campus Asia' project, with student exchange seen as key to human resource and economic development. Similarly in India the UGC has recently approved fee reductions to the home rate for students from other SAARC countries. These practical initiatives link student mobility to regional needs and economies.

With internationalisation integral to policy and planning, Bologna's ambition for comparable standards and structures remains significant. But just as its practical application has varied, so the unified HE region remains to be realised. The continuing development of parallel projects, such as the European Area for Recognition (EAR) scheme – confirms the need for more practical guidance: Bologna has been recognised as influencing structural reform and strategic change, but the goal of increased student mobility is driven by immediate and changing incentives: subject choice, fees, career opportunities, reputation. More recent regional initiatives are able to respond to the new pressures which national budgets and wider economic demands are having on HE policy.

Sources:

- Eurydice/European Commission: *Focus on Higher Education in Europe 2010: the Impact of the Bologna Process* http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic_reports/122EN.pdf
- Bologna Policy Forum: www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/forum2010/index.htm
- European University Association (EUA): *Trends 2010: a Decade of Change in European Higher Education* http://www.eua.be/fileadmin/user_upload/files/Publications/Trends_2010.pdf
- Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS), International Centre for Higher Education Research Kassel (INCHER-Kassel) & ECOTEC: *The Bologna Reform Reports Vol. 1 and Vol. 2:* www.utwente.nl/cheps/news/Bologna%20Reform%20Reports%20Available.doc/
- Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA) www.iucea.org; Southern African Regional Universities Association (SARUA) www.sarua.org
- 'Campus Asia' project www.mext.go.jp/english/koutou/1292773.htm
- India: Students from SAARC countries to pay lower fees www.deccanherald.com/content/52586/students-saarc-countries-pay-less.html

The international academic workforce: sustaining and developing HE careers

Research as part of the 'Changing Academic Profession' (CAP) project, an international study of over 20 countries (including Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, Malaysia, South Africa, and the UK), has continued to appear in recent months. Five linked reports have also been issued in the UK from a government-commissioned study (the Higher Education Workforce Framework), its aim being to inform a debate about how HE should respond to the most pressing challenges for the people working within it. The impact and breadth of internationalisation is repeatedly noted: research collaboration, student recruitment, wider patterns of income, and the linked nature of economies in recession. The dilemma is to 'attract, retain, and motivate talented staff' through national strategies, but in a sector which rewards international academic experience.

The INCHER-led CAP project, the most comprehensive international survey of academic staff on the factors driving change within their work, has led to an annual conference series hosted by Hiroshima University. Its

most recent meeting in January focused on the balance of teaching and research; previous conferences covered academic roles, career paths, and the wider context of educational reform. In Australia CAP data informed a recent LH Martin Institute paper which reviewed the sustainability and development of the academic workforce and identified a 'clear imperative to develop a cogent strategy for planning and building' it. Regional perspectives from the CAP project are reproduced in this month's special issue of the 'European Review'. Diversity, different systems and converging trends are leading themes. Finally a supplementary (CHERI) report to the HEFCE Workforce Framework uses CAP data to detail not just the internationalisation of academic work, but a comparative international context for academic roles, career trajectories, and levels of criticism of institutional management and governance. (A more detailed CHERI/UUK report on the UK will be issued this summer.)

The HEFCE Workforce Framework studies consider the diversification of academic roles, rising pension commitments, staff development and retention strategies, and effective human resources management. Changes in responsibilities, and the need for additional or 'updated' skills, reflect widespread pressures on HEIs as they have become larger, more international, and tied to new ways in which research is managed, made accountable, and communicated. New demands could also threaten what the report refers to as the "psychological contract" that exists between the academic workforce and their employers; where a range of freedoms, customs, practices and expectations form an important, unwritten, relationship between the individual and the organisation'. The need for 'flexibility' in response to a changing HE environment is repeated (negatively this could also lead to increased administrative workloads, casualisation, and job insecurity.) At the same time there is the increasing specialisation of support roles as a LFHE report ('Professional Careers in Higher Education'), acknowledges.

Both the HEFCE and CAP projects confirm the uncertainty to which the HE sector is subject, not least because of the wider markets on which it is dependent, from research grants to student recruitment. The global labour market has also meant that comparative working conditions become more important: 'in an increasingly competitive market, whether national, regional, or international, there is a recognition that it is no longer sufficient to rely on salary incentives alone'. Research quoted in the various HEFCE Workforce Framework studies report that non-UK nationals represent 22% of the UK's academic staff. (The highest level of international recruitment overall is from the EU; for professors/lecturers it is North America; for researchers East Asia).

Valuing internationalisation in terms of staff and research, as well as student numbers, mobility, and ranking, suggests that workforce frameworks or plans need to be part of wider strategies, not simply to retain current international staff but to support future recruitment.

The latest ACU Salary Survey will be issued later this year

Sources:

- HEFCE: *The higher education workforce framework 2010* www.hefce.ac.uk/news/HEFCE/2010/workforce.htm
- LH Martin Institute: *The attractiveness of the Australian academic profession: a comparative analysis* www.mihelm.unimelb.edu.au/conference_events/2009/attractiveness_of_the_australian_academic_profession_research_briefing.pdf
- Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS): *The changing academic profession: part 2* www.utwente.nl/cheps/research/projects/changing_academic_profession_vervolg.doc/
- *European Review*, Vol. 18, May 2010 - Supplement S1 ('Diversification of Higher Education and the Academic Profession') <http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayJournal?jid=ERW>
- Research Institute for Higher Education, Hiroshima University: *Report of the International Conference on the Changing Academic Profession Project, 2008 and 2009* http://en.rihe.hiroshima-u.ac.jp/pl_default_2.php?bid=95244; http://en.rihe.hiroshima-u.ac.jp/pl_default_2.php?bid=100132
- UUK/CHERI/HEFCE Conference (22/6/10) www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/Events/Pages/TheChangingAcademicProfession.aspx
- Leadership Foundation for Higher Education: *Professional Careers in HE: Institutional Perspectives* www.lfhe.ac.uk/publications/shine.pdf

Quality, performance and impact in Asia-Pacific

The intimately linked issues of quality and performance are global concerns, as HE participation grows and expansion continues. But as belts are tightened in universities across the world, ministries and research agencies are increasingly seeking to measure, and often to link funding to, performance in research and teaching, or to economic and social outcomes. More often a combination of both.

Quality assessments have been used in research for several years, but are now beginning to be applied to teaching. At the same time expectations of, or demands for, 'impact' in research are also growing. Such

moves of course predate the current squeeze on government budgets, but they have undoubtedly begun to earn greater weight as new priorities are determined and public spending must be justified. There are also suggestions (CSHE) that the downturn may serve to push through reforms targeted at efficiencies, quality and course growth. Several recent developments in the Asia Pacific region are noteworthy.

Last month the New Zealand government announced that from 2012 a proportion of its funding will be allocated according to universities' 2010 teaching performance. It marks a shift away from the allocation of central government funding solely on the basis of student numbers, and towards a greater interest in linking funding to actual educational outcomes. Full plans and details of the measures to be used have yet to be decided, but course and qualification completion and progression to further study are named as three likely indicators. The move is reportedly in part a response to 'a large number of tertiary programmes, particularly below degree level, that have course pass rates as low as 30 percent' and which 'fail to properly equip students for the jobs they seek' (see also [VC Net 91](#)). While research funding has been linked to measures of quality for some time, and now increasingly to assessments of outcomes and impact, the New Zealand announcement is notable for the emphasis on the quality of the student experience, completion rates, and skills/career needs.

As the UK Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) is replaced by the metrics-based Research Excellence Framework ([VC Net 84](#)), the new Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) also commences in June. The ERA is also primarily a metrics-based process, drawing for example on grades applied to some 20,712 reviewed academic journals - a 'Ranked Journal List' having been finalised earlier this year. The need to include elements of peer review is however acknowledged in some subjects (notably the humanities and social sciences). For now simply a 'policy tool', with no funding to be allocated based on its results, the ERA is still likely to cause ripples across the sector, with its anticipated rankings of academic departments and of disciplinary strengths and weaknesses expected to influence universities' international profile and student recruitment. If it is deemed successful a link to funding is likely to follow.

Demonstrating a very different approach, with targets specified in advance of funding being disbursed, Hong Kong's Research Grant Council (RGC) has identified key areas to which it wants research to directly contribute. Approximately HK\$ 200 million will be available each year to 'theme-based research' which tackles areas of strategic concern to the territory. In the first round these will include 'enhancing [its] strategic position as a regional and international business centre', contributing to good health, and 'promot[ing] a responsible form of development friendly to our environment'. Academics have subsequently been invited to submit 'grand challenges' white papers, to help determine researchable topics under each theme. The resultant call for proposals, based on subsequent consultation, is expected in September/October 2010.

Sources:

- *Higher Education Budgets and the Global Recession: Tracking Varied National Responses and their Consequences* (CSHE Research and Occasional Paper series, CSHE. 4.10) (Douglass, J.)
<http://cshe.berkeley.edu/publications/docs/ROPS.4Douglass.HEGlobalRecession.3.8.10.pdf>
- New Zealand Government Website - *Tertiary tuition funding to be linked to performance* (9/3/10)
www.beehive.govt.nz/release/tertiary+tuition+funding+be+linked+performance
- Tertiary Education Commission (NZ) - *TEC to publish educational performance information* (10/3/10)
www.tec.govt.nz/About-us/News/Media-releases/Media-release-TEC-to-publish-educational-performance-information/
- Performance Linked Funding www.tec.govt.nz/Documents/tecnw/TECNow-update-on-TEC-work%20programme-April-2010.pdf
- Australian Research Council – The Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) Initiative
www.arc.gov.au/era/default.htm
- Times Higher Education - *Preliminary measures*
www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?sectioncode=26&storycode=411286&c=2
- University Grants Committee (UGC) (Hong Kong) *The first round of the Theme-based Research Scheme launched* (12/4/10) www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/ugc/publication/press/2010/pr12042010.htm

Other news

ACU Conference of Executive Heads, 25-27 April, Cape Town ('Universities and the Millennium Development Goals')

The ACU's Conference, co-hosted by the universities of Cape Town, Stellenbosch, Western Cape, and the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, brought together representatives from 35 countries to review progress in achieving the MDGs, and the contribution of higher education towards them. In its concluding statement the role of universities was re-iterated with governments and intergovernmental bodies called on to 'create the conditions through which this contribution is appropriately resourced and recognised'.

A detailed report on the Conference will be included in the next (May) VC-NET.

(www.acu.ac.uk/view_news?id=39)

HEDBIB

HEDBIB, an international Bibliographic Database on Higher Education, developed by the IAU since 1988, has been upgraded and made available on the IAU site from the beginning of this month. It includes over 34,000 references on higher education.

(www.iau-aiu.net/~hedbib/)

ACER/IDP

Another, separate database - the Database of Research in International Education - developed by ACER and now supported by IDP, contains details and links to material published since 1990. In addition to monthly updates, a Twitter feed of recent releases is available.

(www.idp.com/research/database_of_research.aspx)

Key publications

A selection of recent publications on higher education:

- **Financing Higher Education in Africa** [World Bank; 978-0-8213-8334-6; 2010 (http://publications.worldbank.org/ecommerce/catalog/product?item_id=9721865)] Focused on Sub-Saharan Africa, a new comparative analysis of HE funding, particularly in the context of increased demand and reduced budgets.
- **Good Practice in Cost Sharing and Financing in Higher Education** [Asian Development Bank (ADB); 978-971-561-849-6; 2009 (www.adb.org/Documents/Guidelines/Good-Practice-Cost-Sharing-Financing-Educ/Good-Practice-Cost-Sharing-Financing-Educ.pdf)]
- **Good Practice in Technical and Vocational Education and Training** [Asian Development Bank (ADB); 978-971-561-849-6; 2009 (ADB) (2009) (www.adb.org/Documents/Guidelines/Good-Practice-Education-Training/Good-Practice-Education-Training.pdf)] Two guides in ADB's 'Focus on Education' series with planning strategies, comparative contexts, 'key lessons', and further sources.
- **Recognising Non-Formal and Informal Learning: Outcomes, Policies, and Practices** [OECD; 2010 (www.oecdbookshop.org/oecd/display.asp?SF1=identifiers&ST1=5KSKMBH6PMR1&CID=&LANG=EN)] International OECD review on valuing informal learning.
- South Africa (Council on Higher Education (CHE)) Several detailed reports in recent months: **Community Engagement in South African Higher Education** (Kagisano,6) [978-1-919856-74-2; CHE) (2010)]; **Higher Education Monitor: Access and Throughput in South African: Three Case Studies** [978-1-919856-75-9; CHE) (2010)]; **Universities of Technology: Deepening the Debate** (Kagisano, 7) [978-1-919856-76-06; CHE) (2010)] (www.che.ac.za/publications)

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 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
