

Chapter 4

Higher Education

Countries share a very rapid expansion of higher or tertiary education which means that instead of this being an experience enjoyed by a privileged minority it has now become even the majority experience of each new cohort. There are other broad trends visible across the OECD – for instance, the growing international tertiary education market and the greater formalisation of quality assurance. There has been prominent OECD work on higher education latterly, with the Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education, a major review of tertiary education, and new work underway on assessment of higher education outcomes (AHELO). OECD policy orientations have included acceptance that students should contribute to the costs of their study (with appropriate safeguards), the need to develop e-learning and guidance systems, and reinforcement of the regional and innovation role of higher education institutions (HEIs).

4.1. Key findings and conclusions

Many more young adults are now in education even compared with a decade ago, accounting for a quarter of 20-29-year-olds and with university programme entry up more than 20 percentage points: An average of one quarter of young adults aged 20-29 are enrolled in education across OECD countries, and 30% or more are in Australia, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Iceland, Norway, Poland, and Sweden, and in the partner economy Slovenia. In contrast, only Denmark had 30% of 20- to 29-year-olds enrolled in education in 1995. Enrolment among 20-29-year-olds doubled or more since then in the Czech Republic, Greece, and Hungary. Entry rates to tertiary-type A education went up by more than 20 percentage points across the OECD since 1995, and by more than 15 points since 2000 in Australia, the Czech Republic, Greece, Italy, the Slovak Republic, and partner country Israel.


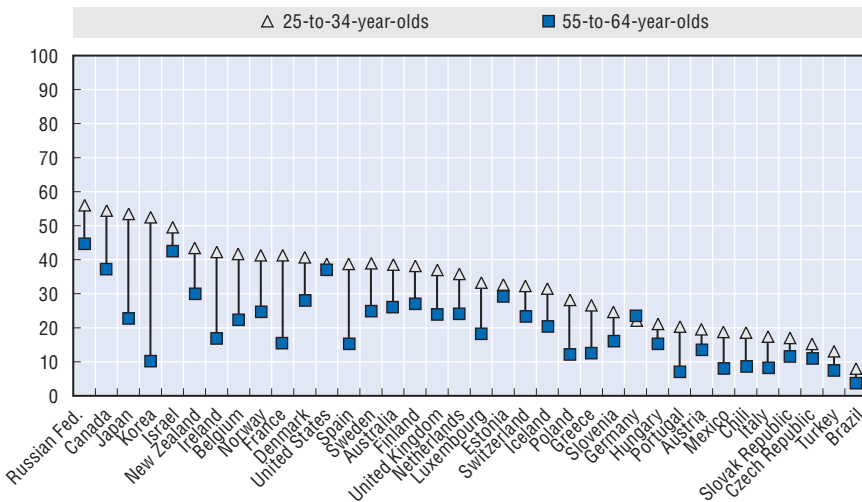

 Education at a Glance: OECD Indicators – 2008 Edition, Chapters A and C.

Figure 4.1. **Population that has attained at least tertiary education (2006)**
Percentage, by age group




Source: OECD (2008), Education at a Glance: OECD Indicators – 2008 Edition, OECD Publishing, Paris.

StatLink  <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/401474646362>

Over half the population of OECD countries will participate in tertiary education at some stage of their lives based on current patterns of entry:

Participation rates of tertiary education of over 50% for a single age cohort are becoming the benchmark for OECD countries. (This refers to “net entry rates” which are calculated as the proportion in a synthetic age cohort who go into tertiary education at some point in their lives based on current enrolment patterns.) For some countries in 2006, such entry rates are substantially higher again: over 70% can expect to enter university-type programmes (tertiary A) in Australia, Finland, Iceland, New Zealand, Poland, and Sweden. Other countries – Denmark, Greece, Israel, Korea, the Russian Federation, Slovenia, and the United Kingdom – reach levels of 80% combining net entry rates in university-type programmes and non-university type programmes.

 *Tertiary Education for the Knowledge Society: Volume 1, 2008, Chapter 2; Education at a Glance: OECD Indicators – 2008 Edition, Chapter C.*

Nearly a third of university students fail to graduate and such “dropout” is higher still in non-university tertiary programmes:

On average across the 24 OECD countries for which data are available, 31% of university (tertiary type A) students fail to successfully complete the programmes they undertake. Survival rates differ widely. The countries where over three-quarters of university students complete the programme are Japan (91%), Denmark (81%), the United Kingdom (79%), Germany (77%), Flemish Belgium and the Netherlands (76%). In contrast, in Hungary, Italy, New Zealand and the United States less than 6 in 10 of those who enter go on to complete. The non-completion rate in vocational, non-university programmes stands even higher than in university-type programmes at 38%, and is highest in New Zealand, Sweden and the United States at around two-thirds.


 *Education at a Glance: OECD Indicators – 2008 Edition, Chapter A.*

Just over a quarter of expenditure on educational institutions across the OECD is accounted for by tertiary education:


Large differences between countries in the size of systems, pathways available to students, programme durations and the organisation of teaching, mean that there are large differences in the level of expenditure which countries spend on tertiary education. Korea and the United States spend 2.4% and 2.9% of their GDP respectively on higher education institutions – the highest among OECD countries – but far less than this from the public purse as these two countries are also those with the highest proportion of private expenditure. (In the case of Korea, the 2.4% figure is made up of 0.6% public and 1.8% private). Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Poland, Sweden, and partner economy Chile also show high overall levels, at 1.6% or more of GDP.

 *Education at a Glance: OECD Indicators – 2008 Edition, Chapter B.*


Whether tertiary education is treated as a public or private good varies considerably across countries, including the extent of public subsidy to students and their households: There are no tuition fees charged in university-type tertiary education in the five Nordic countries, the Czech Republic, Ireland, and Poland. In contrast, in the United States, tuition fees for nationals in public institutions reach more than USD 5 000. Most OECD and partner countries charge higher fees in private institutions; Finland and Sweden are the only countries with no fees in either public or private institutions. An OECD average 18% of public spending on tertiary education is devoted to supporting students, households and other private entities, and this rises to a quarter or more in Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, a third in Australia, and over 40% in New Zealand, Norway and Chile. It is less than 10% in the Czech Republic, France, Greece, Korea, Mexico, Poland, Portugal, Spain, and Switzerland.

 *Education at a Glance: OECD Indicators – 2008 Edition, Chapter B.*

OECD analysis has identified five groups of countries in their approach to assisting students financially: Of the countries participating in the OECD Tertiary Education Review, first there are those which base their student support exclusively on a public loan fund without grants (Iceland and Norway). A second group – Australia, Japan, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Sweden, and the United Kingdom – combines a public loan system with a publicly-funded grant scheme. A third group – Estonia, Finland, Poland, and Portugal – is like the second except that the loans are provided by commercial banks with public subsidy and/or public guarantee. A fourth group of countries – Chile, China, and Korea – offers a wide choice of schemes through a mix of a public loan fund, commercial banks, and grants. A fifth group – the Flemish Community of Belgium, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Greece, Mexico, the Russian Federation, Spain, and Switzerland – has no loan scheme and bases student support on grants.

 *Tertiary Education for the Knowledge Society: Volume 1, 2008, Chapter 4.*

OECD countries share the trend of moving to more highly developed and sophisticated quality assurance systems in higher education: Increased autonomy over a wide range of institutional operations has gone hand-in-hand with more sophisticated quality assurance based on national quality agencies. At the beginning of the 1990s such agencies existed in only a handful of countries; by the end of the decade they had been established in almost all of them. This has shifted responsibility for quality assessment from being a mainly internal judgement by institutions themselves to an external process by the national agencies and by peer review and funding bodies.

 *Education Policy Analysis – 2003 Edition, Chapter 3.*

There has been a fourfold increase in foreign students since the mid-1970s, highly concentrated in a small number of destination countries: In the 1990s, there was a sharp increase in cross-border higher education – the international mobility of students and teachers, educational programmes and higher education institutions – which has continued since. The number of foreign students worldwide stood at around 0.6 million in 1975 and has now risen to an estimated 2.9 million by 2006. The mobility of students alone was estimated as worth more than USD 40 billion in export income in 2004. Foreign students are highly concentrated in a few countries. Two-thirds of them are studying in only seven destination countries: nearly half (49%) attend higher education in the top four destination countries (the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany and France), with another 16% accounted for by the next three (Australia [6.3%], Canada [5.1%], and Japan [4.4%]).


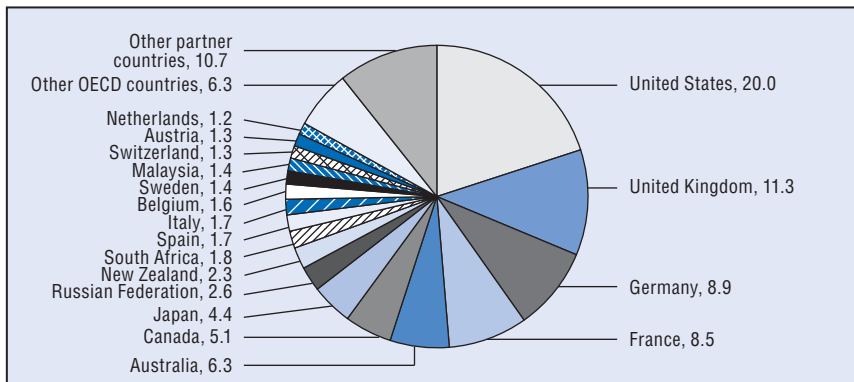

 Education at a Glance: OECD Indicators – 2008 Edition, Chapter C; Education Policy Analysis – 2006 Edition, Chapter 2.

Figure 4.2. **Distribution of foreign students in tertiary education, by country of destination (2006)**

Percentage of foreign tertiary students reported to the OECD who are enrolled in each country of destination




Source: OECD (2008), *Education at a Glance: OECD Indicators – 2008 Edition*, OECD Publishing, Paris.


StatLink  <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/402158641726>

An internationalisation policy centred on importing higher education is more appropriate for many countries which cannot afford to base policies on exporting higher education: The benefits to a country of a developed international policy are especially obvious in those countries which are net “exporters”. They include the “skilled migration” benefits of attracting talented students and academics to promote the knowledge economy and the “revenue-generating” benefits of advancing human capital investment using income from


foreign students' fees. The "capacity-building" benefits, on the other hand, stem from the use of imported higher education as a relatively quick way to build an emerging country's capacity, and this has proved particularly effective in several Asian and Middle Eastern countries.

 *Education Policy Analysis – 2006 Edition, Chapter 2.*


E-learning has not yet revolutionised learning and teaching in higher education systems: The current immaturity of on-line learning is demonstrated by low adoption of content management systems. This refers to electronic content being split into "learning objects", to be manipulated and reconstituted for multiple pedagogic purposes: only 6.6% of those responding to the UK-based Observatory on Borderless Higher Education (OBHE) survey of 122 Commonwealth institutions reported institution-wide adoption in 2004. ICT has had more impact on administrative services than on the fundamentals of teaching and learning.

 *E-learning in Tertiary Education: Where do We Stand?, 2005, Conclusion; Policy Brief, 2006.*


Career guidance has generally not caught up with the changing face of tertiary education: The changing situation in tertiary education – expanded participation, increased diversity, choice and competition – poses major challenges for career guidance that few countries seem well equipped to handle. At this level, such services tend to be limited both in scale and in focus, and inconsistent in quality. Ireland and the United Kingdom are two examples where comprehensive tertiary services have been developed and it is being addressed elsewhere.

 *Career Guidance and Public Policy: Bridging the Gap, 2004, Chapter 3.*


Higher numbers of young science graduates reflect both larger total graduate numbers and student choices, with smaller gender differences in science graduation tending to go along with fewer science graduates overall: The countries with higher than the OECD average of 1 694 science graduates per 100 000 25-34-year-olds are: Australia, Finland, France, Ireland, Korea, New Zealand, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. In the highest, Korea at 3 863, the male science graduates far outnumber the females by 4 735 to 2 596 (35% female). The smallest gender differences are found in Iceland (45% female), Italy (45%), Mexico (45%), Poland (45%), the Slovak Republic (43%), and indeed in Turkey (57%) where there are more women science graduates per young population than men. The contrast with Korea is clear, and the contrast is found also with Ireland (33% females) and France (32%), and it is even greater in Switzerland (21%) and Japan (20%).

 *Education at a Glance: OECD Indicators – 2008 Edition, Chapter A.*

The participation of students with special needs in higher education is increasing, sometimes markedly: In the United Kingdom, for instance, the number of students with a disability increased from 2% of the higher education student population to 5.3% between 1994 and 2003 while in France the equivalent number increased tenfold from the early 1980s. Countries with a medical approach to defining disability (*e.g.* France, Germany) tend to have more students with impairments or long-term illnesses at higher education while those following a needs-based approach (*e.g.* Canada, United Kingdom) tend to enrol more students with learning difficulties.

 *Disability in Higher Education*, 2004.

Despite the major demographic changes taking place in OECD countries, the evolution of the academic workforce is not primarily a reflection of these wider demographic trends: The age pyramid of academic staff reflects less the ageing of populations in general, and more an employment system in higher education whose hallmark is permanence with efforts to maintain relatively fixed student-teacher ratios. Similarly, the changing composition of academic staff reflects less general demographic developments and more the diversification of the profession and the restructuring of relationships between academics and their institutions.


 *Higher Education to 2030 – Volume 1: Demography*, 2008, Chapters 3 and 4.

4.2. Orientations for policy

While recognising differences of culture and approach in national tertiary education systems, there is a number of common main elements that underpin sound planning and policy-making:

- **Develop and articulate a vision for tertiary education:** Countries should as a priority develop a comprehensive and coherent vision for the future of tertiary education, to guide the medium- and long-term in harmony with national social and economic objectives. Ideally, it should result from a systematic review and entail a clear statement of strategic aims.
- **Establish sound instruments for steering towards and implementing that vision:** Tertiary education authorities need to develop their review and monitoring capacity for the system as a whole as opposed to the standard instruments of institutional administration. Within the overall vision, steering instruments need to establish a balance between institutional autonomy and public accountability. Allowing the play of student choice can help to improve quality and efficiency.
- **Strengthen the ability of institutions to align with the national tertiary education strategy:** Institutions should be encouraged to develop an outward focus, including via external representation on their governing

bodies, and be required to establish strategic plans. The national policy framework should give institutions the means effectively to manage their wider responsibilities.

 *Tertiary Education for the Knowledge Society: Volume 1, 2008, Chapter 3.*


Lessons drawn from OECD review about the implementation of tertiary education reforms suggest that they should:

- **Recognise the different viewpoints of stakeholders** through iterative policy development.
- **Allow for bottom-up initiatives** to come forward as proposals by independent committees.
- **Establish *ad-hoc* independent committees** to initiate tertiary education reforms and involve stakeholders.
- **Use pilots and experimentation.**
- **Favour incremental reforms** over comprehensive overhauls unless there is wide public support for change.
- **Avoid reforms with concentrated costs and diffused benefits.**
- **Identify potential losers** from tertiary education reform and build in compensatory mechanisms.
- **Create conditions for and support the successful implementation of reforms.**
- **Ensure communication about the benefits of reform and the costs of inaction.**
- **Implement the full package of policy proposals.**


 *Tertiary Education for the Knowledge Society: Volume 2, 2008, Chapter 11.*

Among the principles and pointers for quality assurance in tertiary education, in addition to the general requisites of building the focus on student outcomes and the capacity for quality assurance, are:

- **Design a quality assurance framework consistent with the goals of tertiary education, and ensure that quality assurance serves both improvement and accountability purposes.**
- **Combine internal and external quality assurance mechanisms.**
- **Make stakeholders such as students, graduates and employers visible in the evaluation procedures.**
- **Enhance the international comparability of the quality assurance framework.**


 *Tertiary Education for the Knowledge Society: Volume 1, 2008, Chapter 5.*

Graduates should contribute to the costs of study so as to increase resources for higher education, with safeguards to support students from poorer backgrounds: A large and growing body of international evidence suggests that individuals who gain higher education qualifications enjoy substantial private benefit. There are important efficiency gains to be made in increasing the share of non-public sources of funding where these are low, though the equity concerns are real. The change in the proportion of public *versus* private funding will not itself produce inequity so long as adequate financing overall exists and concerted efforts are made to improve the accessibility of higher education.

 *Education Policy Analysis – 2006 Edition, Athens Ministerial summary.*

Among the main principles guiding funding strategies in tertiary education, beyond ensuring that they promote the wider goals and societal benefit, are:

- **Use cost-sharing between the State and students as the principle to shape the sector's funding:** This means, *inter alia*, providing public subsidies to tertiary education studies, regardless of the sector of provision. But, it also means charging tuition fees to students, especially if limited public funds would either ration the number of students, jeopardise levels of spending per student, or restrict financial support for disadvantaged groups.
- **Make institutional funding to teaching formula-driven:** The criteria for the distribution of funds to institutions need to be clear, using transparent formulae which shield allocation decisions from political pressures while tailoring incentives to shape institutional plans towards national goals.
- **Improve cost-effectiveness:** Inefficiencies should be addressed through such means as linking funding more closely to graduation rates, reducing public subsidies for those who stay too long in their studies; eliminating some duplicated programmes; rationalising low- or declining-enrolment programmes; increased use of shared facilities; and expanding student mobility across institutions.
- **Back the overall funding approach with a comprehensive student support system:** A mixed system of grants and loans assists students in covering tuition and living costs, alleviating excessive hours in paid work or disproportionate reliance on family support. In many countries student support needs to be expanded and diversified.

 *Tertiary Education for the Knowledge Society: Volume 1, 2008, Chapter 4.*

In the international market for higher education, the different stakeholders need to contribute to protect students from low-quality provision and disreputable providers: The OECD, in close co-operation with UNESCO, has published a set of international *Guidelines for Quality Provision in*

Cross-border Higher Education (2005) recommending actions for different stakeholders. For governments, it is recommended that they:


- Establish, or encourage the establishment of a comprehensive, fair and transparent system of registration or licensing for cross-border higher education providers wishing to operate in their territory.
- Establish, or encourage the establishment of a comprehensive capacity for reliable quality assurance and accreditation of cross-border higher education provision.
- Consult and co-ordinate amongst the various competent bodies for quality assurance and accreditation both nationally and internationally.
- Provide accurate, reliable and easily accessible information on the criteria and standards for registration, licensure, quality assurance and accreditation of cross-border higher education, their consequences on the funding of students, institutions or programmes where applicable, and their voluntary or mandatory nature.
- Consider becoming party to and contribute to the development and/or updating of the appropriate UNESCO regional conventions on recognition of qualifications and establish national information centres as stipulated by the conventions.
- Where appropriate develop or encourage bilateral or multilateral recognition agreements, facilitating the recognition or equivalence of each country's qualifications based on the procedures and criteria included in mutual agreements.
- Contribute to efforts to improve the accessibility at the international level of up-to-date, accurate and comprehensive information on recognised higher education institutions/providers.

Create an effective interface between innovation and higher education systems: Such an interface is essential in order to reap the benefits from public and private investments in research and to ensure the vitality and quality of higher education systems. Directions for creating such an interface include:

- **Improve knowledge diffusion rather than commercialisation via stronger intellectual property rights (IPRs):** Innovation is not only a discovery process to then be commercialised; R&D is often problem-solving along a pathway of innovation. The diffusion capabilities and support activities of tertiary education institutions may thus be as important as discovery processes and policy should consider methods and instruments to promote them.
- **Improve and widen channels of interaction and encourage inter-institutional collaboration:** Linkages between the tertiary education sector and other actors in the research and innovation system, such as firms and

public research organisations, need to be actively developed to ensure effective knowledge diffusion. When programmes are designed, they need to consider in particular the engagement of small- and medium-sized enterprises from all technological sectors as they tend to be under-represented in such collaborations.


- **Foster mobility across the research and innovation system:** Inter-sectoral mobility is one of the main vehicles for knowledge diffusion; mobility between firms, tertiary education institutions and public research organisation should be actively promoted.

 *Education Policy Analysis – 2006 Edition*, Chapter 1; *Tertiary Education for the Knowledge Society: Volume 2*, 2008, Chapter 7.

Government has a key role to play in joining up a wide range of policies and creating supportive environments to promote the *regional role* of higher education institutions. These include to:

- **Create more “joined up” decision-making** (finance, education, science and technology, and industry ministries, etc.) to co-ordinate decisions on priorities and strategies in regional development.
- Make **regional engagement and its agenda for economic, social and cultural development explicit** in higher education legislation and mission strategies.
- **Develop indicators and monitor outcomes** to assess the impact of higher education institutions on regional performance and encourage their participation in regional governance structures.
- Provide a **supportive regulatory, tax and accountability environment** for university-enterprise co-operation.

Higher education institutions themselves should change so that what is now active regional engagement in particularly forward-looking and entrepreneurial institutions becomes more widespread across the sector.

 *Higher Education and Regions: Globally Competitive, Locally Engaged*, 2007, Chapter 9.

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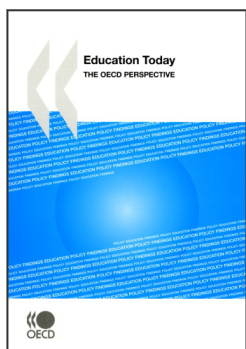


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