

# New Perspectives for Learning

Insights into European Union funded Education and Training Research

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IMPROVING  
HUMAN RESEARCH  
POTENTIAL AND THE  
SOCIO-ECONOMIC  
KNOWLEDGE BASE

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## Who steers Higher Education in Europe?

The transformation of national higher education systems is on the political agenda of every country in Europe. The higher education (HE) sector is urged to 'modernise', 'adapt', 'diversify' and 'marketise'. It is expected to become 'entrepreneurial', 'competitive', more 'efficient' and more 'effective', more 'service oriented', and more 'societally relevant'. It also has to improve the 'quality of its processes and products', its 'relationship with the labour-market', and the 'governance and management' of its institutions, the universities and colleges.

For late 20<sup>th</sup> century HE much of this was a new vocabulary. A key driver of these changes has been the involvement of state authorities in higher education, which has produced considerable changes and refocusing over the last 25 years. The bigger picture is one of a general 'reshuffling' of relationships between the state and public sector organisations. It can be argued that higher education is one of the sectors where the 'reshuffling' has been most extreme and most successful.

In particular, the socio-political demands and expectations of higher education have grown - especially with respect to its economic role, whilst at the same time in most countries the level of public funding of higher education is stagnating or decreasing. This has led to a situation where many stakeholders make demands in an almost constant flow on higher education and expect a rapid reaction.

A recent study "Governmental Policies and Programmes for Strengthening the Relationship between Higher Education

Institutions and the Economy" has conducted research on changes in the balance between government attempts to steer University activities and local autonomy with respect to higher education in Europe.

It has found that there is a clear dichotomy between 'government rational planning' for HE and 'self regulation'. It is true that as part of the 'reshuffling' of relationships between HE and the state institutional efficiency has been strengthened, funding patterns have been made more competitive, and University governance structures have been modernised.

However there has been the undesirable outcome, as a result of both government steering and local action, of increasing convergence of institutional mission and activity for HE institutions in general. For example in most

Universities research policy and planning have come to play a much more central role in institutional strategic thinking – a change largely driven by the funding regime.

Where diversity does exist this is closely linked to local circumstances such as institutional history. These local circumstances are key factors in influencing institutions willingness and ability to respond to opportunities. Other factors of a resource and cultural nature, such as inherited staff and resources, common practice and values, subject mix, and management approaches, have often constrained institutions and profoundly, and adversely affected their market position.

Many institutions appear to be only at the start of a steep learning curve on how to focus on public service, deal with the tension

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### *"Reshuffling of relationships between State & Universities"*

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*“institutional efficiency has been strengthened”*

*“many institutions appear to be only at the start of a steep learning curve”*

*“politics should not interfere in the detailed operation of higher education”*

between competition and collaboration, and become more market oriented. Key to these areas is the development of approaches and methods to manage resources effectively so that change becomes a possibility.

In terms of the overall steering of institutions the research observed that there is a general move to a ‘supermarket steering’ model. In such a model the state becomes less dominant in steering HE and the (quasi) market becomes more influential. Hence the need to deal with the collaboration/competition issue and develop a service focus.

Part of the supermarket model means that HE institutions appear to have increasing autonomy. However governments, through regulation, will wish to ensure that this autonomy is used by institutions to achieve political expectations. It is often the funding strings that are pulled to ensure this. In areas where government expectation is more vision than action, such as lifelong learning, institutions have difficulty in delivering government expectations. The report suggests that, for example with under represented groups in HE, the sector may not be able to provide the expected increased participation.

Consequently the report advises that in order for governments to make policy making and implementation more effective they should acknowledge that their role is to design,

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*“move to a ‘supermarket steering’ model”*

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adapt, and monitor the ‘framework’ conditions within which HE operates. Deliberately involving appropriate HE professionals in this broad policy making is also recommended.

Within this framework higher education institutions should then be expected to operate autonomously in implementing policies and realising HE goals. What is clear from the report is that politics should not interfere in the detailed operation of HE institutions. However, if this is to become a reality, governments do need to develop more effective monitoring structures for evaluating and analysing the ways in which higher education

policies are handled in practice. One strategy is for individual politicians to become active in professional networks.

There is clearly a need for “harder” information on the way in which HE acts to deliver government aspirations and how they deal with any tensions this might create with their own distinctive missions. The report suggests that an independent, de-politicised European higher education policy monitor should be established, to provide data for future research on HE and that further comparative and longitudinal research on issues relating to change processes in HE is required.

**Students as “Journeymen” between communities of Higher Education and Work**

This new EU funded study will concentrate on the different cultures of education and work combined with cultural traditions. It will explore the adequacy of education establishments in preparing students for life at work.

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# Quality and Performance in Universities

Major changes have been taking place in higher education over the last twenty years. In most EU countries the HE sector has been transformed from an “élite” university system to one of “mass” higher education. Other changes have also deeply affected Universities. In particular the rapid growth in knowledge production and diffusion has fuelled disciplinary differentiation and fragmentation, over the last century. These dramatic changes, which have involved an increase in the number of institutions, greater numbers of students, an increase in the number of teaching staff, and a greater diversity of provision have brought with them a concern for the maintenance of quality and standards, and a range of systematic evaluation systems in new areas such as learning and teaching.

Rapid growth in the HE provision was initially driven by economic factors but as the prospect of economic crisis declined in the 1990s the focus moved, particularly at government level, to an interest in the societal importance of Universities. It is not surprising then that the core activities of teaching and learning have been a target for evaluation.

European research undertaken by the study “Evaluation and Self-Evaluation of Universities in Europe” has looked at how these evaluation systems have been implemented and how Universities have reacted to them. It found that whilst external evaluation, usually carried out by public bodies in all the countries of the study, is a relatively recent phenomenon, it is one that is here to stay. However, Universities appear to have accepted this and understand that the primary driver of accountability for public funding is a reasonable underlying rationale for systematic evaluation.

The research identified three types of institution, - general Universities, professional/vocational Universities, and

local Universities, which suggests that a single mode of evaluation is insufficient to meet the diverse needs of institutions. Therefore it concluded that there was a need to develop a new model of evaluation to deal with this complexity. Such a model should recognise a range of local, national, and international factors affecting each University and take account of the specific university environment including the university’s objectives and history. To be effective the model should also ensure that it recognises the links between all university activities.

Development of the instruments of evaluation is a key issue. The focus of external evaluation is largely to ensure that Universities adhere to the requirements of the public authorities that fund them. However, this external review system has to acknowledge that Universities are relatively autonomous institutions, and are evaluated, and evaluate themselves partly as a means of establishing their credibility in order to attract customers (students) and funding from sources outside of the public funding regime.

In addition to external evaluation Universities are continuing to develop their own internal evaluation systems. If institutions use information from external evaluation and internal evaluations effectively, it can inform the development of strategy. The goal of evaluation must be improvement in the quality and performance of teaching and research, and in more modern institutions, in levels of service to users, and not merely to ensure the best use of financial resources – although this must be part of the picture.

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*“from an “élite” university system to one of “mass” higher education”*

*“external evaluation by public bodies is here to stay”*

*“Universities appear to accept the primary driver of accountability for public funding as a reasonable rationale for systematic evaluation”*

*Some key recommendations -*

*“improve ‘objective and results’ based evaluation tools”*

*“find ways of improving the ‘quality assurance procedures and methods’ of administrative and support services”*

*“encourage partnerships with other universities that develop mechanisms for ‘teaching and organisational’ evaluation”*

*“develop effective ‘computerised information systems’ that enable the measurement and realisation of improvements”*

*“develop a new model of evaluation that is pluralistic, contextual, dynamic and integral”*

*“regulations governing the training of all teachers should be amended to include knowledge and skills in multicultural teaching”*

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Evaluation can also be used by Universities to manage tensions in strategy and direction such as those between the demands of traditional teaching, vocational provision, lifelong learning, and work-based courses. In research there are tensions between fundamental and applied research, and there are also tensions between the demands to increase the participation rate in Higher Education and participation in cultural and economic local development.

The study suggests that external evaluation is able to provide a basis for change in all these areas of strategy if the outcomes of evaluation are used by the senior management of the university. The contention is that strong university government makes use of evaluation and is strengthened by it.

In terms of future development in the area of University evaluation the report suggests that internal contracting between Universities and

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*“internal contracting can generate new models of funding”*

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## **Immigration and Cross-Cultural Teacher Training**

Many countries of Europe have experienced voluntary and involuntary inward migration that has resulted in pressures and raised issues concerning integration and educational policies for immigrants. However, education is strategically important for integrating foreign newcomers into the society of their new residence.

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government and within Universities between organisational units can generate new models of funding. For example resources may not only finance activities (funding by student numbers, or research by number of publications) target objectives and results. The development of a set of objective and results based measures would be a useful step in the development of evaluation tools.

The research found a service perspective in administrative and support services which was driven in part by quality assurance procedures and methods, which relate to the quality of services delivered to users (teachers, students, and

external agencies). How the quality of such service provision can be measured and improved is a key question requiring further investigative research. A key feature of this further investigation should be the development of effective computerised information systems, such as “digital dashboards” and sets of statistical indicators that enable the measurement and realisation of improvements.

The study “Immigration as a Challenge for Settlement Policies and Education: Evaluation Studies for Cross-Cultural Teacher Training” was conducted in the context of the on-going political debate within the European Community about drawing up common European immigration policies. This search for a common European approach is timely as the mobility of people within the EU countries is being encouraged.

The study made the following recommendations relevant across the European Community: -

1) A concerted effort needs to be made in all partner states to ensure that the regulations governing the training of *all* teachers should be amended to include knowledge and skills in multicultural teaching

2) Concerted efforts need to be made within the European Community to search for common acceptable standards for teacher training, in order to equip teachers with the multicultural competencies required to function effectively in culturally diverse environment.

## New Approaches to Work Experience

Recently completed research into the work experience for 16-19 year olds in six countries has concluded that there is a need to re-think the function of work experience in post-16 education including higher education.

The study "Work Experience as An Education and Training Strategy: New Approaches for the 21st Century" examined the purpose and assumptions about learning, the practice and outcomes of work experience in the light of changes in the European labour market and trends in workplace requirements and organisation. Innovative approaches to work experience were analysed with researchers, enterprises and schools working together. This has resulted in a number of case studies.

The following recommendations were made: -

1) The current policies on work experience should be informed by what is known about *learning* as well as what is known about changes in work.

2) Businesses, educational and vocational institutions should practically respond by using and developing the "connective" model of learning through work experience. It offer ways of: -

a) *Connecting formal and informal contexts of learning - relevant in course development.*

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b) *'Mediation' between formal and informal contexts of learning that are fundamental in achieving an effective relationship between classroom learning and workplace learning and can be developed by teachers and workplace educators/trainers in partnership.*

c) *Considering quality through the identification, development and transfer of learning that goes well beyond the 'checklist' approach to quality issues. The framework should be developed in the school/workplace context and in the context of the connective model.*

3) Change in educational institutions and in businesses in relation to education-business partnership innovation should also take account of such innovation – often involving applications of the learning technologies at the 'periphery' – in the knowledge that 'innovation without change' is ubiquitous.

## Labwork in Science Education

Within the broader issue of motivating young people to study science, is the issue of the cost of "labwork" experiments, which tend to be an expensive component of science education across Europe.

The study "Improving Science Education: issues and research on innovative empirical and computer-based approaches to labwork in Europe" based on seven EU countries focused upon the use of labwork in teaching physics, chemistry and biology to students in academic science streams in the years of upper secondary schooling and the first two years of undergraduate study. It examines the effectiveness of labwork and develops approaches designed to promote more effective teaching and learning outcomes.

Specific recommendations from this study are:

1) Labwork should address a broader range of learning objectives than the range currently addressed. In particular, labwork rarely addresses epistemological objectives and teachers rarely make these objectives explicit when designing labwork activities, sequences

*"increasingly, workers are expected to act as 'boundary crossers' between 'activity systems' - to possess the ability to contribute to the development of new forms of social practice and to produce new forms of knowledge"*

*"an innovative 'connective' model of pedagogy and learning in work-based contexts should be developed"*

*Some key recommendations -*

*"labwork should address a broader range of learning objectives than the range currently addressed"*

*"labwork could be better designed to address clearly defined learning objectives"*

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## Innovations in Education and Training

There are continuing demands on education and training to explore ways of improving learning and widening access to learning opportunities, including access for less favoured and excluded groups. This provides opportunities to develop new approaches to innovations in education and training.

The study "Looking at Innovations in Education and Training" aimed to deepen understanding of educational innovations. It has developed a new approach to innovations in education and training based on the idea of "learning patrimony" and the impact upon this by a set of social, cultural and, above all, political and economic factors.

Learning patrimony is defined as a *modus operandi*, that is a series of prevailing socio-institutional and educational practices, pedagogic arrangements and relations. It is a set of values, dispositions, attitudes and expectations in regard to education and training.

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of labwork or labwork sheets. Similarly, conceptual objectives, procedures to be learnt, data collection and processing are generally left implicit in the design of labwork.

2) Labwork could be better designed to address clearly defined learning objectives. Fewer objectives for each labwork session and a more coherent overall organisation of labwork ought to lead to improvements in student learning.

3) There is a need to improve the design of assessment along side the design of more effective targeted labwork.

4) Improvements to labwork practices need to be addressed at teacher education level.

The study has gathered empirical evidence of innovative education and learning arrangements and developed specific methodologies and guidelines for enhancing the design, implementation and evaluation of learning innovations. It has especially explored the issue of social disadvantage and exclusion, with a particular emphasis on exclusions from education and training.

Wide ranging recommendations were made based on the following key conclusions: -

### *"fundamental 'clash' on the role of education"*

1) There has been a fundamental "clash" between the view of education as an end in itself for living a human life and the view of education as a mere instrument of the economy and people as workers.

2) Policies in western countries are characterised by disengagement of the state from the economy and increasing involvement and intervention in education and training at all levels.

3) Intervention in education has generally been based on an economic rationale and focused on "re-designing" legislative arrangements in terms of different forms of centralization-decentralization.

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5) Collaboration between researchers, teachers and policy-makers should be one of the key aims of research in Science Education in Europe over the next few years.

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*"a 'learning patrimony' and the impact upon this by a set of social, cultural and, above all, political and economic factors"*

*"collaboration between researchers, teachers and policy-makers should be one of the key aims of research in Science Education in Europe over the next few years"*

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4) There has been a transfer control of services and resources from the professionals of education to managers from the business field. This has involved a major restructuring of the professional culture, working practices, college management styles and conditions of service, including the employment conditions of the teaching staff.

5) Performance models of assessment and systems of vocational qualifications based on “measurable competencies” has resulted in a specific pedagogy where learning objectives have to be stated in such a way that they can be unequivocally measured.

6) This has resulted in a conflict between the “democratic views of accountability” (education has to “respond” to society and its members) and economic or market-driven views of accountability (Judged in terms of the market).

7) Despite strong resistance from educational institutions and professionals, there has tended to be a convergence towards a process whereby values, criteria and procedures from the world of production are transferred, imposed or borrowed by the education and training sectors.

8) Education and training is experiencing a series of tensions coming from economic and political spheres. Whilst, some of these tensions can be creative and give rise to genuine innovations, others can considerably disrupt existing arrangements and do not contribute to innovations.

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9) Many opportunities for innovation are related to the introduction and deployment of ICT in education and training, particularly when it is embedded in well organised pedagogic practice and institutional arrangements

10) A balance between student-centred approaches and more teacher-centred education is still an unresolved ‘big issue’ in the schools sector.

11) Overall, pedagogic innovation is a less developed aspect of innovations in education and training.

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6. Language, finance and recognition of qualifications and/or admissions procedures were identified as key barriers common to all countries.

7. Other barriers included: -

- a) Cultural/attitudinal barriers
- b) Concern at an institutional level about quality and standards at institutions in other EU countries
- c) Different attitudes towards mobility by more and less prestigious institutions.

### Higher Education Reform Network

This new EU funded project aims to provide policy developers with a better understanding of the relationship between tomorrow’s university and societal changes across Europe in the lead up to EU enlargement.

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*“some of these tensions can be creative and give rise to genuine innovations, others can considerably disrupt existing arrangements and do not contribute to innovation”*

*Study results due to be published soon -*

*“Higher Education and Graduate Employment in Europe”*

*“University Adult Access Policies and Practices Across the European Union and Their Consequences for the Participation of Non-Traditional Adults”*

## Student Mobility in Europe

*Some key  
recommendations -*

*“Develop a fully  
portable financial  
support/loan  
scheme in the EU  
for students who  
wish to take a full  
course in another  
EU country”*

*“Consider a EU-  
wide economic  
compensation  
scheme for uneven  
exchange of  
admissions”*

*“Instigate a  
centralised body  
for the recognition  
of modules or  
courses, with a  
‘recognition  
ombudsman’ at  
each university”*

*“Develop a  
‘reward’ system for  
mobility in the  
careers of  
teaching staff”*

This research conducted in five EU countries explored the relationship between higher education admissions policies and practices at national and university levels and related these to student mobility. Mobile students have been defined as those who study abroad for either a degree or for a period of time. The mobility can be organised by another body or by the students themselves (self-organised or ‘free-movers’).

The following key conclusions were drawn: -

1. National policy relating to student mobility ranged from a focus on inward to a focus on outward mobility:

- a) In both France and Britain it is focused on inward mobility, especially of non-EU students.
- b) In Germany, there are also elements of this approach, but outward mobility of German students is promoted as well.
- c) In Sweden, policy focuses on both outward and inward student mobility and in contrast to France, Britain and Germany, stresses mobility as a means of trying to ensure international understanding and peace.
- d) Greece has a long history of outwardly mobile students.

2. In Germany, Sweden and the UK the need to recruit ‘free-moving’ students was a factor that affected university policy and practice. In some countries this was to remain viable, whilst in others it was tied in with the university funding mechanisms.

3. Two main strands of specific activities were evident: -

- a) Student mobility agreements - which may be linked with teaching innovations

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b) Programmes of European/international research.

4. Within these strands, a range of innovations were found: -

- a) Compulsory foreign language elements in courses
- b) New degree courses/international courses
- c) A new European dimension introduced into courses
- d) Language courses in the official language of the country
- e) Language courses in other languages
- f) Teaching in languages other than an official language of the country
- g) Induction/orientation courses for students new to the country
- h) Ongoing cultural/social programmes throughout the period of study.

5. Differing policies at a national level can impact on mobility e.g. Sweden has portable grants and loans which, in theory means there are more opportunities for Swedish students from lower socio-economic status backgrounds to study abroad than for students from other countries.

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This newsletter is the first in a series of occasional issues which aims to highlight for policy and decision makers, some of the key conclusions and recommendations of studies conducted under the TSER Programme and two tasks under the “Improving the Socio-economic Knowledge Base” Programme – “The implications of societal change for education and training (1999 call) and “New perspectives for learning” (2000 call).

More details at: <http://www.cordis.lu/improving/socio-economic/home.htm> or for Briefing papers and an online discussion of the topics go to: - <http://www.pjb.co.uk/npl/index.htm>