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Session 4: Transparency Tools – impact and future developments

Transparency in higher education, the emergence of a new perspective on higher education governance, *Ben Jongbloed, Hans Vossensteyn, Frans van Vught, Don Westerheijden (Center for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS), Netherlands)*

Reliable information and transparency on the benefits that higher education institutions offer their students, funders and communities is key for their legitimacy, their funding and their competitiveness. Worldwide, relationships between governmental authorities and higher education institutions are changing, particularly because of the increased demands for transparency about outcomes and impacts of higher education.

In our contribution, we discuss three higher education 'transparency tools': accreditation, rankings and—briefly—performance contracts. We present some recent developments regarding these tools in the broader context of governance and policy making and analyse how they aim to address the growing need for more transparency. The transparency tools are part of a recently emerging governance paradigm in higher education, networked governance; a paradigm that explicitly acknowledges the diverse information needs of a wide variety of higher education stakeholder groups.

The impact of rankings on institutions and policy makers – ten years on, *Marian Mahat (University of Melbourne, Australia), Angel Calderon (RMIT University, Australia)*

The arrival of university rankings—an outcome of increased effects of globalization and neoliberalism on higher education—has changed the landscape of higher education. As part of an increased appetite for performance measurement regimes, rankings have become an integral management tool for many universities and national systems. Drawing on insights from around the world, this paper discusses the impact of ranking systems on institutional and national policies. It discusses issues such as the legitimacy, intentionality and ideology in the provision of statistical information to ranking schemas, integrity and robustness of quality assurance frameworks; accountability, and the pervasive effect they have on institutions. Central to this discussion are calls by which a more transparent rankings process can be attained, including ethical considerations on the construct and dissemination of ranking schemas. This paper concludes by considering the broader implications of ranking schemas on national systems of education.

What Is Transparency of Higher Education in East Asia? Case Studies of China and Japan, *Futao Huang (Research Institute for Higher Education, Hiroshima University)*

Since the early 1990s, tremendous changes have occurred in the landscape of higher education in East Asian higher education systems, including both China and Japan. One of these changes is the emergence of national frameworks of quality assurance (QA) of higher education and an increasing

emphasis on transparency of higher education. Truly, western ideas and practices on shaping the current QA of higher education in the two countries are evident and considerable, but both China and Japan have formed their own national QA systems of higher education, including transparency instruments over the past two decades. Previous studies have suggested that very limited research has been conducted on the relationship of transparency or accountability of higher education with existing schemes of QA of higher education in the two countries and what role (s) transparency plays in QA higher education systems of the two countries. Much less is known of what main instruments are used to seek for or to enhance transparency of higher education, and especially what effects of transparency instruments have had on institutions and teaching & research activities, and students learning outcomes. The purpose of this study is to discuss historic background, major characteristics, issues, and especially effects of the transparency instruments of higher education in China and Japan based on the analysis of documentation, relevant findings from national surveys and fieldwork. This paper addresses three main research questions as follows:

- a. What are main characteristic of transparency instruments of higher education in China and Japan?
- b. How valid, effective and efficient are the transparency instruments of the two countries in relation to management and governance of universities, teaching, research and learning activities, and academic productivity, etc.?
- c. How significantly current practices of transparency of East Asian higher education could be applied to other regions, including European countries?

Performance of the Ontario (Canada) Higher Education System: Measuring Only What Matters, Harvey Weingarten, Martin Hicks (Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, Canada)

This paper describes the thinking behind the development of an improved tool to measure the performance of the postsecondary system in Ontario. The rationale is relevant to other jurisdictions. Ontario's public higher education system consists of 24 community colleges and 20 universities and constitutes 40% of higher education enrolments in Canada. HEQCO has a legislated mandate to conduct performance assessments of the postsecondary sector and to make these evaluations public. In contrast to the approach of others who use a broad range of performance indicators, we are developing a performance measurement tool with a very limited number of indicators that are tied directly to the high priority goals of the Ontario government and that are designed to assess the effectiveness and impact of government policies and actions (e.g., tuition, financial aid, funding formulas, institutional differentiation). The instrument measures system performance, not that of individual institutions (or their ranking). This approach, which measures only what matters, forces definition and measurement of the most relevant, meaningful and revealing measures. The indicators address equity of access, sustainability of institutions and academic quality, the three highest priorities for the postsecondary system in Ontario. The indicators selected reflect outcomes and impact, not inputs. Academic quality was the domain hardest to measure but our bias was to measures that are direct, embedded, meaningful to students and government, and validated by the institutions. We describe significant research trials we are currently conducting to determine the best and most efficient ways of obtaining these academic quality measures that, in our view, should form the centrepiece of any instrument that purports to measure the performance of a higher education system or institutions.

Transparency instruments in Wales: Bringing higher education performances into focus?, *Huw Morris (Higher Education and Lifelong Learning, Welsh Government)*

There has been significant growth in the UK over the last thirty years in the number and variety of transparency tools designed to provide assessments of the performance of universities, their staffs, students and other contributing partners.

The transparency tools available to stakeholders in the UK and wider European Union fall into five categories.

1. Audits and reviews by national university regulators.
2. Accreditations provided by national and supra-national bodies in specific disciplines.
3. League tables and other composite measures produced by newspapers and other agencies
4. Measures of graduate achievement and/or value added.
5. Indicators of the longer term educational and economic outcomes achieved by graduates.

These different types of transparency tool focus with different degrees of resolution on inputs, like money and staffing, processes like teaching, supervision, learning and assessment, as well as outputs and outcomes, like completion rates, employment levels, further study, impact, subsequent earnings or wider measures of social benefit.

This paper will describe how higher education stakeholders in Wales have shaped or not the development of these transparency tools. The research questions addressed are as follows:- a) What are the key features of the transparency tools available? b) Where and when were they developed and by who? c) Which of these tools are used, how and by which stakeholders? d) how do the different tools interact with one another? e) How have new tools have been layered on existing tools? E) Finally, how have these tools and measures changed and been re-rationalised over time?

The paper will end with comment on how the pattern of current practices may change in the wake of the passage of the Welsh Welfare of Future Generations Act (2015) and the publication of the Diamond and Hazelkorn reports on student finance and the oversight of higher education, as well as the influence of the English Higher Education and Research Act (2017) on practice across the UK, including Wales.

The UK Teaching Excellence Framework: the Development of a New Transparency Tool, *Andrew Gunn (University of Leeds, UK)*

The results of the first UK Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) were published in 2017, with each HEI receiving a Gold, Silver, or Bronze award. The TEF comprises of three components: teaching quality, including student satisfaction; the institutional environment in which students learn; and student outcomes, including the performance of under-represented groups. This new classification, solely assessing the 'teaching mission' of the university produced an unfamiliar hierarchy of institutions. This chapter provides an overview of the rationales for the TEF as set out by policy makers. It also accounts for the development process of a new transparency tool which involved defining and measuring 'teaching excellence'. It argues the TEF can be viewed as a multi-purpose instrument which seeks to provide accountability (by providing performance data to inform applicant choice and fee rises) and drive improvement (through raising the importance of teaching and learning within HEIs). The analysis explores where the TEF is situated relative to established Quality Assurance agendas on the one hand, and wider government ambitions to reconfigure the higher education sector on the other. The paper concludes with a summary of what the wider EHEA community can learn from the implementation of the TEF.

Learning outcomes policies for transparency: Impacts and promising practices in European Higher Education Regulation, *Mary Catharine Lennon (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto)*

This paper examines the activities and strategies of European Quality Assurance Agencies (QAA's) and their use of learning outcomes as a means to make higher education quality transparent. Literature contends that learning outcomes provide useful indications of quality for a variety of stakeholders and for numerous purposes. Yet, there is a gap in both literature and policy understanding of how impactful learning outcomes have been in supporting educational improvement, coordination, transparency or any other intended goals. Given the considerable attention, political and financial support devoted to competency-based education and learning outcomes the question of 'impact' is critical. This paper triangulates the results of a survey of European QAA's, case studies of evaluations of learning outcomes policies, and a meta-evaluation of those cases, to examine the types of strategies the QAA's employ and examine the impact of elements such as goals and audience. The results demonstrate the limited value of current learning outcomes strategies, which leads to a discussion of the strategies as policies. The findings of the study suggest that the potential of learning outcomes as a transparency tool is hindered by learning outcomes policies that are misaligned with goals, misapplied in implementation, and misdirected in goal choice.

Is higher education ambivalent towards inclusion of non-formal qualifications in national qualifications frameworks (NQFs)? A policy-learning analysis of seven country reports, *Anne Murphy, Horacy Dębowski (Dublin Institute of Technology)*

This paper focuses on the discrete topic of including non-formal qualifications in national qualifications frameworks, and how higher education interfaces with that process. It set out to establish if there is evidence that the higher education sector is pro-actively assisting the process of inclusion, indifferent to it, or overtly hostile.

Data were drawn from policy and academic literature, from conference proceedings and from initial analysis of seven country reports produced by the Erasmus+ Project 'NQF-IN' Developing organisational and financial models for inclusion of non-formal qualifications in NQFs in 2017.

The paper argues that the higher education sector continues to wield significant power with regard to the design and function of NQFs and its sub-frameworks, and with regard to how non-formal qualifications are regarded within them. It suggests that additional research is now required on the practice and quality assurance aspects of this issue in advance of the deadline for the development of non-formal and informal learning policies due at national level in EU member states by 2018.

Fostering Trust and Transparency through Quality Assurance, *Melinda Szabo, Colin Tuck (European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education – EQAR)*

While quality assurance (QA) frameworks are often strongly rooted in academic traditions and national systems, some notable shifts and developments at European level are reshaping the narrative. One significant development came with the adoption at the Yerevan Ministerial Conference, in 2015, of the second version of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), linking QA more clearly to other transparency tools, i.e. qualifications frameworks, ECTS and diploma supplement. A further development shows that more and more countries are demonstrating that they implement the key commitment on external QA i.e. a higher number of QA agencies working in compliance with the ESG. Not least, the development of a central database (as of 2018) that will provide easy access to results and reports of external quality assurance

procedures across EHEA plays a further role in the provision of public information and in fostering the transparency of European higher education systems.

Against this backdrop of developments and synergies between QA and transparency tools are the challenges of changing and revising national legal frameworks. Most countries show hesitation in their commitment of recognising the activity of foreign external quality assurance agencies working in line with the ESG or making provision to implement the [European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes](#).

The article provides an in-depth analysis on the path taken by the Bologna signatory countries to achieving trust and transparency within the EHEA. In order to gauge the success of realising trust and transparency a number of indicators are proposed and discussed. The article concludes with lessons learned.