



Global Seminar on Strategic Issues in Higher Education

27 September 2012

Venue: Conference Hall, Centre for Advanced Academic Studies of the University of Zagreb,
Don Frana Bulica 4, 20000 Dubrovnik, Croatia, **acronym CAAS**

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In cooperation with:

Higher Education Authority of Ireland and Swedish National Agency for Higher Education

The Global Seminar on Strategic Issues in Higher Education is a summit meeting of international higher education experts, with four panel debates in two sessions: Each panel involves a number of panellists with complementary points of view responding to each other, and will be followed by a question and answer session with participation of HEIs and HEAs leadership from WB.

Session 1: Ownership of Higher Education

Panel 1.1: Changing patterns in the relationships of universities to national / supranational states and international financial and trade interests.

Moderator: Muiris O'Connor, Principal Officer, Policy and Planning, HEA of Ireland,

Rationale: Apart from legislation, funding is the main mechanism used by the state to manage or control universities. The introduction of, or increases in, fees paid by students for higher education could lead to the biggest reform of universities since the expansion of higher education in the 1960s. Direct state funding could become less important which could lead to a paradigm shift in the relationships between universities and the state.

The issue of the ownership of higher education has become particularly important in the context of the current stress on our knowledge based economy and society. The preoccupation of governments with higher education and its central role in economic and social development potentially holds a danger - a danger that in its quest for accountability and reassurance, governments will weaken the walls of separation which in many countries for centuries have protected the higher education system from undue government involvement. In doing so governments will damage irreparably that which it most needs to cherish - an independent, innovative, higher education system.

One of the concerns of those who work in higher education is the maintenance of an appropriate separation between higher education and governments and the maintenance of an effective buffer between higher education and powerful international financial and trade interests. Another wide spread concern is that increased treatment of students as "consumers" could strengthen the view on higher education as a global commodity.

Panel 1.2: Competing Leadership for Reform of Higher Education in Europe

Moderator: Anne Corbett, Visiting Fellow, European Institute, London School of Economics and Political

Rationale: The issue of the ownership of higher education raises the question of competing leadership for reform of higher education in Europe (national governments, European Commission, UNESCO, OECD, WORLD BANK, WTO ...). Different players in the course of higher education reform introduce different flavours in the development of higher education. The question is: are they converging? Decisions taken today and in the next few years could define how the future develops.

As universities recruit and serve in a global higher education situation, the importance of both the global market and trans- national bodies and agencies, become paramount. Whereas state funding for any particular university

may be subject to local needs and considerations, it is not possible for a university to meet its wider responsibility without acknowledgement of the global marketplace for students, and hence the need for global recognition for the qualifications, the skills, knowledge and understanding that they obtain.

Being at the turning point of higher education reform in Europe, after ten years of intensive campaigns a question arises: whether it is right time for letting in some new ideas into the current ruling policy agenda.

Session 2: Quality between/beyond QA and Ranking

Panel 2.1: QA vs. Ranking

Moderator: Ellen Hazelkorn, Director, Higher Education Policy Research Unit, Dublin Institute of Technology

Rationale: There is a continuing move towards increased attention on quality of provision within universities for the use of public funds. Most universities already operate in a highly competitive environment. There is strong competition for student recruitment, for research funds and for best staff. Most universities also face pressure on resources and the need to justify expenditure.

Quality assurance/control, as one of instruments to uphold the quality of higher education, is a crucial point in the articulation of the relation between state, different economic players and the university system. A constructive criticism says that although important, QA in many countries does not provide much more than a threshold of quality, leaving a huge space for other attempts to measure quality, including international rankings of higher education institutions.

On the other hand, the concept of an “objective ranking” is still highly controversial, because of the choice of indicators and weightings reflected the value judgements or priorities of rankers, and also because of the weakness of methodologies used in ranking. Nevertheless, ranking of universities is used by a variety of stakeholders for a number of purposes and is here to stay.

The main idea behind this panel is to provide complementary points of view (QA vs Ranking) aiming to develop a critical but constructive dialogue.

Panel 2.2: Quest for Quality in Higher Education

Moderator: Anna Glass, Secretary General, Magna Charta Observatory

Rationale: Continuous enhancement of quality, as a vital part of higher education, presumes genuine collective involvement of higher education institutions and should be an inherent part of their global open networking and self-organisation. Benchmarking should be a core ingredient aiming to improve the capacity and quality of the whole system, and not just reward the achievements of elites and flagship institutions.

There is major concern that QA as a global process led mostly by governments (national and supranational), without strengthening a role of inter-university benchmarking, could increasingly become an issue of religious dogma. The question asked by Pauline Ravinet in her article, “why European countries feel increasingly bound by their (voluntary) commitment to the Bologna Process” could be rephrased as “why higher education institutions feel increasingly frustrated by the ruling policy of suspicion, rather than trust”.

On the other hand, concerning the issue of national rankings as one BFUG report says: “the risk of improper usage of national rankings should not be underestimated”. Commercial ranking, although flourishing dynamic field, still does not have visible influence on governmental agendas.

In the future, any genuine quest for quality in higher education between/ beyond QA and Rankings should increasingly rely on collective self-inspection of higher education, within the space left by governments, secured by a sensible list of societal values along with occasional crossovers. Concerning these perspectives, it is most intriguing why governments (national and supranational) still put much more faith in the free market and its self-regulation than in collective ability of higher education institutions for self-regulation.

Presentations and case studies will be published in the **Proceedings of Dubrovnik Global Seminar**.

A collection of comprehensive contributions (book chapters) will be compiled in an **Edited Book**, after the Dubrovnik event.
