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Ref.:
5/2017

Press Release

Worldwide boom in post-secondary education

Study: Many higher education systems are growing without long-term strategies

Hamburg/Berlin, 22 February 2017. As the knowledge-based society grows, so too does the global requirement for academics and highly trained professional staff. The rising demand for higher education and growing worldwide economic competition are putting governments under enormous pressure and resulting in rapid rates of change in education systems throughout the world. This includes the expansion of existing institutions and an increase, in some cases a surge, in the establishment of new institutions. This boom has given rise to national post secondary education systems that are heterogeneous and diverse in themselves. What is missing are long-term strategies and coherent development. That is the result of a study commissioned by the Körber Foundation, "Responding to Massification: Differentiation in Postsecondary Education Worldwide" by the Boston College.

The study was undertaken in preparation for the Hamburg Transnational University Leaders Council to be held 7 to 9 June 2017 in Hamburg, at which university presidents from around the world will be discussing differentiation in higher education systems. The study analyses trends in higher education and vocational education systems in 13 countries – Australia, Brazil, Chile, China, Egypt, France, Germany, Ghana, India, Japan, the UK, Russia and the USA. Experts from politics, universities and research organisations came together yesterday in Berlin on the occasion of its publication in order to evaluate the results from a German perspective and to identify key challenges and possible options for action in Germany.

Philip G. Altbach of Boston College, who headed the study, calls the current situation in post-secondary education a "period of anarchy": "We found a broad spectrum of educational institutions in all the countries investigated,

A joint initiative of



but no differentiated system of institutions with clearly defined tasks and objectives.” The study shows that education policy in all countries investigated is facing comparable challenges. Altbach says: “The way forward consists in turning that anarchy into a coherent, integrated system of good-quality post-secondary institutions.”

Overview of trends according to the study:

Sustained trend towards academisation

Where access to higher education was once the privilege of a social elite, today in many countries over half of an age cohort will go on to study. Emerging countries such as China or India have also been expanding their education systems for decades and are aiming for comparable ratios. In India today, over 35 million students are enrolled. However, this only represents around one-quarter of 18- to 24-year-olds in the country. The increasing influx into post-secondary education systems is continuing across the world. Comprehensive participation has been achieved in Germany. However, the trend to academisation continues there also.

Increasing diversity of students

Post-secondary education systems must react not only to increasing demand, but also to the increasing diversity of students, who have differing educational backgrounds and expectations. “Today the traditional university model with a strong academic orientation meets the needs and aspirations of only a small segment of the current enrolment,” says Altbach. Many countries in the study have therefore created alternatives that are designed to address specific needs of the labour market and are oriented towards people without the desire or capacity to pursue academic study. However, these programmes can turn out to be dead ends: often there is no option to link into the academic system.

Booming private sector

Globally there is a trend towards more and more private, for-profit universities, as well as towards an increasing privatisation of public universities, accompanied by rising tuition fees. Growth rates vary; however, the private university sector is growing in all 13 countries investigated. The private sector is also growing in Germany, but only reaches a small proportion of students. It is burgeoning most of all in those countries where public universities and other state-funded educational institutions cannot meet the



demand. Private providers quickly fill the gaps. The quality and benefits of their courses vary greatly. One of the consequences of this development is that state influence is dwindling. “In most cases governments have moved away from policies oriented towards guiding enrolments and educational opportunities, and have given way to market forces and international trends,” says Altbach.

Establishment of globally competitive elite universities

Most of the countries investigated are working towards creating an elite sector of research-intensive universities that can compete internationally and find a place in global rankings. Excellence initiatives offer additional funding to universities that aim for world class status, not only in Germany, but also in France, Japan, Russia and China. The problem is that the role of these top institutions within national education systems is not clearly defined. “This is imperative, however, if the post-secondary educational sector is to function as a coherent system of programmes and institutions that is perfectly tailored to the needs of the individual and the labour market,” says Philip G. Altbach.

About the study

The study “Responding to Massification: Differentiation in Postsecondary Education Worldwide” was carried out by the Center for International Higher Education at Boston College, with academic oversight by Professor Philip G. Altbach. The study, commissioned by the Körber Foundation, analyses the realities, dynamics and trends in post-secondary education systems in 13 countries.

The study paves the way for the Hamburg Transnational University Leaders Council to take place in June 2017, a platform for exchange concerning global higher education development which is designed to provide impetus for the strategic design of higher education worldwide. The Council is a joint initiative of the German Rectors’ Conference, the Körber Foundation and Universität Hamburg.

[Materials for download](#)

- Full study (English, PDF)
- Executive Summary (German translation, PDF)



Interview opportunities (enquiries via press contact please):

- **Prof. Dr. Philip G. Altbach**, Boston College Center for International Higher Education, head of the study
Topic: Results of the study, comparative international perspectives
- **Prof. Dr. Andrä Wolter**, Humboldt University Berlin, author of the chapter of the study on Germany
Topic: Key challenges for Germany

- **Prof. Dr. Horst Hippler**, President of the German Rectors' Conference
- **Dr. Lothar Dittmer**, Chairman of the Executive Board, Körber Foundation
- **Prof. Dr. Dieter Lenzen**, President of the University of Hamburg

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