

Executive Summary

This volume of *Higher Education to 2030* discusses trends and prospects regarding changes in the population of students, academic teaching staff and graduates in higher education in OECD countries, from both a quantitative and qualitative standpoint. It examines in particular the link between these developments, demographic changes and higher education policy. The book is thus concerned no less with trends in the size of higher education systems than with changes affecting the academic teaching profession. It also shows how changes in policies for students with disabilities might eventually transform conventional attitudes towards access to higher education. And it examines too how the growth of migration might lead to the emergence of new issues concerning inequality. Even though demographic changes raise numerous questions for higher education policy, they do not pose major new problems as is often thought. The central future issues for many countries will be of a qualitative nature, such as inequalities in access and participation, the diversity of paths, provision and institutions in higher education, the possible social marginalisation of those persons least educated, and the need to rethink the role of the academic profession.

The following trends are apparent from the various possible scenarios for the future of higher education examined in the book:

As regards students:

- student participation will continue to expand and will in most cases be evident from growth in the size of higher education systems. Contraction will affect only a small number of countries;
- women will be in the majority in the student population;
- the mix of the student population will be more varied, with greater numbers of international students, older students and those studying part-time, etc.
- the social base in higher education will probably continue to broaden, along with uncertainty about how this will affect inequalities of educational opportunity between social groups;
- novel attitudes and assumptions regarding access to higher education will emerge and be more concerned with real student attainment, reflecting trends in access policies for students with disabilities;
- changes will occur in issues and policies relating to access and the fight to reduce inequality, as well as some broadening and changes among the groups concerned, depending on the particular country.

As regards teachers:

- the academic profession will be more internationally oriented and mobile, but still structured in accordance with national circumstances;
- the activities of the profession will be more diversified and specialised, and subject to varied employment contracts;
- the profession will move gradually away from the traditional conception of a self-regulated community of professionals, and towards a model and consensus to be based on fresh principles.

As regards society:

- the population will contain a greater proportion of graduates with positive implications for social well-being and economic growth;
- women graduates will be in the majority, while the inequalities they experience in remunerative terms will be reduced but still present;
- half or almost half of all people in the youngest age cohorts in many countries will be graduates;
- the gap between the absolute number of graduates (but not the relative number) in the OECD area and in the major emerging countries, in particular China and India, will become smaller;
- demographic trends seem likely to have little effect on higher education expenditure as a percentage of national wealth;
- challenges will arise linked to the possible social exclusion of groups not involved in higher education.

Although demographic trends appear to change little, they are often subject to unforeseeable turning points linked to political action or technological developments

Chapter 1 (Le Bras) explains how demographic trends that remain stable over a long period may undergo sudden turning points, or how apparently rapid changes are in reality brief deviations from a basic underlying trend. Political action or technological changes may suddenly transform well-established trends or patterns of conduct, and suggest that care should be taken when drawing up projections. Indeed, the chapter serves as a word of warning for the entire book: extrapolation of past trends is not necessarily foolproof, and good sense dictates the need to speculate about the future solely in terms of possible scenarios, which political action in particular may influence.

In a steady trend scenario, demographic changes can be expected to have a moderate impact on size, expenditure and policies in higher education

Chapter 2 (Vincent-Lancrin) thus considers various scenarios for projections of student enrolments, expenditure, student-teacher ratios and graduates in the population for the period up to 2025. Even though the situation varies markedly across OECD countries, growth in the size of higher education systems should remain the norm within the OECD

area, allowing for just a few exceptions. It should not lead to any radical changes in expenditure as a percentage of national assets. Neither should the replacement of academic staff constitute a major problem: in fact, existing tensions are more related to particular academic subject areas than to demographic changes. The proportion of graduates in the population should have substantially increased by 2025, but in a very varied manner across countries. Continued growth should also alter the qualitative composition of the student population: while participation in higher education should become increasingly broadly based, the impact of expansion on inequalities of opportunity among different social groups appears far less certain. As in the past, the various policy responses to changes in the size of higher education systems may involve diversification of the student population, institutions and courses, or new cost-sharing arrangements. Yet far from being determined by demography alone, these policies will be part of a broader debate on subjects such as globalisation, excellence or an appropriate match between higher education and the labour market.

Ageing in the academic teaching profession is not a function of ageing among the general population; it is a consequence of the growth or shrinkage in student enrolments in an employment system typified by permanence

Following an introductory review of major demographic trends in OECD countries, Chapter 3 (Willekens) examines key factors shaping the age pyramid of academic teaching staff, and considers the impact of population size differences between the OECD area and two countries with massive populations, China and India, on their future highly educated workforces. While it might be thought that the ageing of academics broadly reflects ageing among the population as a whole, this chapter demonstrates how the age pyramid of these staff depends above all on an employment system whose hallmark is permanence and on efforts to maintain a fixed student-teacher ratio. Rising student enrolments are conducive to a relatively stable age structure, whereas staff are collectively subject to rapid ageing or rejuvenation if student numbers fall or level out. A second demographic consideration is the size of the age cohorts: because of the differences in size of the younger age cohorts in India and China, only a slight increase in higher education participation rates in these countries would be needed to inject into their economies the same amount of work performed by graduates in OECD countries.

Despite the process of ageing, major changes in the academic teaching profession have less to do with demographic factors – as exemplified by changes in the proportion of foreign or women teachers – than with the way the profession itself develops

Chapter 4 (Enders and Musselin) examines trends and transformations in the academic teaching profession, with the growth in staff, their differing status, and the emergence of an international market for academics increasing the importance of mobility, even though the profession remains conditioned by national circumstances. While the profession is ageing in some countries and contains only a modest proportion of women, the chapter

shows that changes in the profession and the main challenges facing it are not so much the outcome of demographic trends, as symptoms of a more fundamental ongoing transformation: the diversification of the profession, the restructuring of the relations between academics and their institutions, along with the fact that the employment relations of academic staff are increasingly coming to resemble those of an employee/employer relationship, mean that the search for a consensus regarding the essential nature of the profession will be the top priority for the future.

The past expansion of higher education systems puts the significance of demographic expansion in perspective

Chapter 5 (Teichler and Bürger) highlights the fact that demography has only recently become a concern in debate on higher education policy, and that the past growth of systems in OECD countries has had little to do with demographic changes. The increase in rates of admission to higher education has been of greater importance than the size of age cohorts. Furthermore it has been fuelled by changes in the coverage of the sector and more differentiated forms of provision, especially with the introduction of short courses. The growth in numbers of foreign or international students does not appear to have been a decisive factor in the growth of systems. The chapter also examines changes in the subsequent careers of graduates and demonstrates that expansion has not weakened the advantages they enjoy in terms of pay, even though they appear slightly more vulnerable to unemployment. One of the major issues arising from the expansion of systems may in fact concern the possible exclusion of those who have not benefited from higher education.

Contraction in the size of higher education systems has begun in Japan and Korea, and demographic changes in the United States point to changes in policies for equity vis-à-vis new minorities

Chapter 6 (Anderson and Cook) shows once more how there is little connection between demography and the size of higher education systems, while stressing the significance that changes in the qualitative composition of the general population may have for the student population. In the United States, the system grew when the size of the younger age cohorts was decreasing, and was also noteworthy for a big proportion of older “less typical” students. With renewed expansion of the young age cohorts, the size of the system should continue to increase. But changes in the composition of the population, with a lower proportion of whites and an increase in minorities – and especially Hispanic minorities – among young people, seem to present the main demographic challenge for the system. In some States, the majority of students are from a minority background. Given that the Hispanic minority is going to overtake the African-American minority, one may well speculate as to how this change will affect the “affirmative action” policy for equity in higher education, whose main past developments are reviewed in the chapter, and on its cultural and linguistic implications in particular. As relatively few Hispanics indeed enter higher education, an effective drive against inequalities appears essential to raise once

more the percentage of tertiary graduates in the population, which recently has altered very little.

Chapter 7 (Yonezawa and Kim) examines the reaction of two OECD countries, Korea and Japan, in which the size of systems has started to decrease and in which this trend is very likely to continue. It explains in detail how the higher education policies adopted in these countries may be interpreted in the light of the trend, with rationalisation of the system encouraging lifelong learning, the internationalisation of higher education and balanced regional development in the broader context of globalisation and a “neo-liberal” reform model. While the hierarchical stratification of the two systems does not seem to be destined to change subsequent to their contraction, both countries are only just beginning to develop long-term policies, with a fresh emphasis on the issues of social cohesion and equality.

The issues of inequality or the composition of the student and graduate population seem likely to remain major challenges in decades ahead, whether in relation to social inequalities or those associated with disability, immigration or gender

Chapter 8 (Ebersold) deals with the access of students with disabilities to higher education, which has sharply increased in recent years. It reveals in particular how two distinct sets of attitudes and perceptions regarding disability lead to different policies, one of which concentrates on minimising barriers to access and the other on supervising students and ultimately ensuring that they do well. Recent decades have witnessed something of a shift from the first to the second approach in many countries. The chapter suggests that the greater responsiveness to diversity, which the approach to disability exemplifies, should become more widespread in the interests of all students, such as mobile students in the Bologna process. This outlook is already apparent to some extent in the United States community colleges. By examining several models for inclusiveness, with their own particular tensions, the chapter demonstrates how greater openness towards diversity presupposes that, in practice, higher education institutions regard themselves as learning organisations which attach importance to diversification in their search for excellence, efficiency and fairness.

Chapter 9 (Marmolejo, Manley-Casimir and Vincent-Lancrin) shows how the growth of migratory flows may pose new problems of inequity in access to higher education. The situation in the United States and France shows how these population flows have both foreseeable and unexpected consequences for the public authorities and societies. A variety of factors restrict and in some cases prevent migrants or their children from gaining access to higher education in their host country, including language and cultural barriers, lack of information, limited financial means, their previous education, their migrant status and the negative prejudices and stereotyping that often accompany it. Restricted access to higher education hinders the social integration of immigrants in their new environment. It also limits the possibility of them improving their economic and social well-being, thus aggravating their socio-economic marginalisation. Providing access to higher education for certain immigrant groups thus appears to be a significant issue for the future.

Chapter 10 (Vincent-Lancrin) considers the reasons for the reversal of gender inequality in higher education and its possible implications. While men were numerically superior by

far among students and graduates in higher education two decades ago, women are now in the majority in nearly all OECD countries. Yet there is still significant discrimination between the sexes in some academic subjects, which partly accounts for the labour market income inequalities experienced by women. The reversal of inequalities between the sexes can be attributed to educational, social, economic and demographic factors that are not expected to disappear in the years ahead. Women should thus remain in the lead in terms of participation and graduation in higher education. While it remains hard to fully appreciate the implications of this social change, policies designed to revive the participation of young men might be justified in the interests of ensuring a more satisfactory (or varied) mix of students and preventing poorly educated men from being marginalised, and also because such policies might help to lessen the labour market income differentials that penalise women, if sexual discrimination within academic disciplines were reduced.