

Stéphan Vincent-Lancrin



Stéphan Vincent-Lancrin is a senior analyst at the OECD Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI). He is responsible for the project on the Future of Higher Education (University Futures), which aims to inform and facilitate strategic decision making by governmental and other key stakeholders in higher education. He is also the co-leader of the human capital working group of the OECD Innovation Strategy. His past work includes work on internationalisation and trade in higher education as well as on e-learning in tertiary education. Before joining the OECD, Stéphan worked for 7 years as lecturer and researcher in economics at the University of Paris-Nanterre and the London School of Economics. He holds a PhD in economics and Master's degrees in business administration and philosophy.

In your view, what is the most probable or desirable future scenario for higher education access and attainment?

In most OECD countries, I believe the most probable scenario is an increased and to some extent widened access to higher education, because both country policies and people's individual interest will contribute to it. I also believe this is a desirable scenario because it is good for people to be more knowledgeable and cultured, and for society to have citizens who are learned, demanding and who can be critical. I believe access will continue to widen to international and older students in many countries, but that progress might continue to be slow for students from less advantaged backgrounds. This will depend considerably from one country to another, especially as starting points are different. Attainment may not increase proportionally to access, and student achievement is a dimension of quality that will need to be addressed in a more proactive ways in the decades to come. The most probable is that attainment will increase though, thanks to inclusive admission and delivery policies and more emphasis on the actual graduation of students.

In your opinion, what is or should be the most important objective for higher education in the future? Why?

The most important objective for higher education is to continue to develop and keep alive culture and knowledge in their highest forms, to share them with all, regardless of their personal or social background, and to help people conduct a happy life.

What do you consider to be the main future challenge(s) for higher education systems? Why?

The main future challenge will be to reach the right balance between some of the tensions (and sometimes even contradictions) between the different missions and aspirations of tertiary education. A first important challenge will be to better address the variety of needs and aspirations of students in an expanded system. A second challenge will be to strengthen primary and secondary education so that eligible students to tertiary education have the appropriate academic preparation regardless of their individual and social characteristics. These are two conditions for higher education to deliver appropriate quality to all. A third challenge will be to keep a research of quality

in all areas of human knowledge, acknowledging that research is not just about producing new knowledge but also about keeping alive past knowledge and cultures.

In your opinion, what would be the worst, but possible, way to tackle these future challenges? Why?

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The worst way to tackle these issues would be for an excessive hierarchical stratification to develop within systems, keeping quality only at the top end of the system but inducing more social inequity, or a total lack of diversification, as it would lead to low quality and social inequity. For different reasons, very egalitarian and very elitist systems would be a possible response to the challenges, but in my opinion both would have serious pitfalls: the first would be unrealistic while the second would inequitable and reduce the creativity in the system.

What do you consider to be the best possible way to tackle the above mentioned future challenges? Why?

The best way to tackle this issue would be for higher education institutions and policy-makers to promote innovative teaching and learning methods, in the tailoring of tertiary education offerings to the variety of interests and abilities of students, and to open up and give more chances to new social groups. For that the systems should try to have a good balance between demand-side and supply-side forces, between competition and cooperation, between the drive for excellence and for equality: tertiary education systems have to be responsive to society, but it should not be too responsive either.