SYSTEMIC INNOVATION, THE RESPONSE OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING TO THE CRISIS

Education systems, and Vocational Education and Training (VET) systems in particular, are often in the centre of policy debates at times of economic crises and rising unemployment, as it is a widely held assumption that a well-functioning training system can protect against unemployment, especially among the young. Periods of economic crisis can, therefore, be an opportunity for countries to examine how well equipped their VET systems are to deal with change and to innovate. This was addressed in the project on Systemic Innovation in VET, recently completed[1] by the OECD Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI).

Systemic innovation can be defined as any kind of dynamic, system-wide change that is intended to add value to educational processes and outcomes. Systemic innovation aims to improve the operation of systems, their overall performance, the perceived satisfaction of the main stakeholders with the system as a whole, or all of the above. The analysis of systemic innovation involves the comparative investigation of how education systems or sectors go about initiating innovation, the processes involved, the knowledge base which is drawn on, and the procedures and criteria for assessing progress and outcomes. These questions were addressed in the CERI project, drawing on empirical findings from 14 case studies in innovation in VET in six OECD countries: Australia, Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Mexico and Switzerland.

In times of economic crisis, the capital and margin of risk required to fund innovation and systemic change is often considered a disposable luxury. Funds earmarked for innovative projects, or funds set aside to enhance and support innovative processes, often find themselves radically trimmed in leaner budgets. In the VET system, the dual contribution of the public (education) and private sector (employers, firms) means that systemic innovation in VET risks getting cut twice, as both sides seek to rein in expenditures. Moreover, during financial crisis, a number of enabling factors can disappear due to financial constraints and, as such, become barriers to innovation.

Most countries are currently facing difficult times and OECD member states are no exception. The immediate programmes that many governments have launched to address the financial crisis have been coupled, in many cases, with in-depth reflection about the functioning of our economies, as well as strategies to promote longer-term development and vision. In the context of this reflection it becomes apparent that, in the medium and long-term, innovation will increasingly be key not only to economic growth, but also to social welfare. A systemic approach to innovation, including innovation in VET, is therefore particularly relevant in the current climate. Two particular issues would need to be addressed:

• While in the current economic cclimate there might be a general pressure to cut or rein in expenditures, innovation should not be considered an unnecessary expenditure, but rather the essential ingredient that would differentiate resistant VET systems from those hardest hit by the crisis and should thus be protected to the extent possible.

• The ability to use the elements of the innovation process (planning, monitoring, evaluation) as a cost-effective mechanism to guide product and process development could, in the long run, save money. Effective feedback mechanisms on what worked and what didn't is key for both continuing innovative development and transferring innovation across VET systems (or across firms). The role of systemic innovation in developing a long-term strategy for VET (or business) was argued to be an essential element in the crisis response and a necessary component in accompanying immediate, short-term cuts/stimulus packages. A long-term strategy would also be necessary for getting the system (and firm) back on track after the initial shock of the crisis has passed.

To set up the conditions for such a system, governments, in particular, with the support of other stakeholders, will need to develop a systemic approach to innovation in VET as a guiding principle for innovation-related policies. Such a systemic approach includes at least five basic elements:

• A clear policy intended to support VET research in light of national priorities, both at policy and practitioner levels;

• An evolving framework for sustaining both top-down and bottom-up innovations in VET, including monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that can contribute to the generation of new knowledge about VET policies and practices;

• A unified knowledge-base that includes both VET research evidence and the new knowledge emerging from the assessment of innovations, including links to international knowledge bases on these topics; and

• Regular efforts to synthesise and disseminate new knowledge on effective VET policies and practices, so as to challenge the status quo of the system, set new horizons and contribute to incremental change.

• Capacity building (structural, personal) to enable all the elements above.

As the case of VET demonstrates, for those interested in innovation in education – whether from a practitioner, researcher or policy maker perspective – the systemic approach to innovation offers a good starting point for examining how a particular educational sector, institution or organisation, goes about innovation.

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1. More information about this project can be found at www.oecd.org/edu/systemicinnovation. The final report will be published in September 2009.

STRENGTHENED OR REGULATED GOVERNANCE?

A comparative analysis of guides to institutional governance and quality assurance in higher education

The need for good governance has dominated the debate on the effectiveness of higher education and has increased with establishments' growing autonomy and the expansion of their mission. In several countries this development has been accompanied by the emergence of guidelines for establishments drawn up on the initiative of governments or university organisations. Since the start of the millennium, most countries have created national or regional quality assurance systems and prepared codes or principles that integrate a dimension of institutional governance.

The IMHE has sought to highlight those areas where these guides (a generic term for the various codes, guidelines and principles created to strengthen and/or assess the quality of institutional governance) converge and where they differ. Its comparative report also sought to find any connections between the governance guides and the quality assurance guides. Eleven governance guides and 25 quality assurance guides from IMHE members, ministerial departments and agencies (Europe, the United States, Canada, Japan, Australia, China (Hong Kong), South Africa, Russia, India and Israel) were selected for the purposes of the report, including international guides such as the European quality standards and guidelines. The report will be published soon. It retained a systemic conception of institutional governance: the complex interaction between legislative frameworks, institutional characteristics, financial regulations, the types of structure in the establishment and relations between players, as described in the OECD's thematic study of higher education (2008).

The three aims of governance guides

Most of the governance guides are used by establishments to solve and anticipate problems. Typically, these guides deal with the role and responsibility of managerial bodies, risk and quality management, the values that influence decision makers and transparency.

They differ according to the intentions of their creators, which are an indication of the circumstances of their preparation:

Governance guides can allow establishments to consolidate the confidence they inspire in the public authorities and,
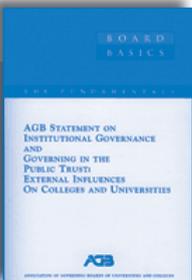
The Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB) has published an AGB Statement on Institutional Governance and Governing in Public Trust that encourages trustees and presidents to examine their institution's governance structures, policies and practices. This statement endorses the multi-power concept of institutional governance and emphasises notably the importance of the dialogue with faculty, administrative or technical staff, students and other voices.

This statement belongs to a set of booklets on board structure and the responsibilities of trusteeship. One of them is the Guide for Governing Boards of Public Institutions, which presents the 12 basic responsibilities of a governing board and distinguishes them from individual trustee functions, and it poses specific questions trustees might consider to guide good practice.

incidentally, protect their autonomy. The main aim of this kind of guide is to strengthen the effectiveness of institutional governance.

Reforms in public management have encouraged the creation of guides to accompany the emergence of entrepreneurial universities. This kind of guide is aimed more at establishments playing an active role in their development strategy.

Some countries have designed governance guides following cases of fraud or bad management in establishments. Their aim is to guarantee establishments' integrity.

Quality assurance and governance: implicit links

In parallel with the recent expansion of national quality assurance systems, quality assurance guides promote a culture of internal quality. They discuss various components of quality, such as programmes, staff, exams and explicit governance or otherwise. These guides deal first and foremost with the technical aspects of managing establishments, but they also look at the strategic and political dimension of governance. They often underline the need for an establishment to define its mission, create organisational structures and effective decision-making paths, encourage participatory measures and, similar to the governance guides, ensure transparency and the protection of the institution's values.

These guides are points of reference, both for establishments and the accreditation and assessment agencies, and therefore appear to be rather prescriptive.

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HIGHER EDUCATION SPACES AND PLACES: FOR LEARNING, INNOVATION AND KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

UNIVERSITY OF LATVIA, RIGA, LATVIA 6-8 DECEMBER, 2009

In collaboration with the OECD Centre for Effective Learning Environments (CELE) the conference will explore how to plan, design and manage higher education facilities to support the changing needs of learning, research and knowledge exchange. The aim is to share knowledge on good practice and innovative facilities.

The demands of students and research are changing and HEIs play an increasingly important role within communities and local economies in terms of education, but also by working with local businesses providing research and training. The conference

will examine how the facilities can support the interaction between an institution and the regional and city context.

The conference will also discuss innovative approaches to the design of the physical environment, the opportunities and challenges for redeveloping existing new campuses, the role of the facilities to support HEIs working with the community and business, and the approaches, challenges and opportunities to managing a property portfolio.

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IMHE NEWS

THE ASSESSMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION LEARNING OUTCOMES (AHELO)

AHELO will potentially be the largest, most comprehensive assessment of higher education institutions (HEIs) yet devised. The aim is to measure various types of learning outcomes and to examine as wide a range as possible of criteria to assess their influence on those outcomes.

But before that, a feasibility study of AHELO has been launched to determine how far such an assessment can be taken. Indeed, although there exist a number of methodologies to assess learning outcomes, they will need to be adapted to assess whether valid and reliable comparisons can be made across diverse countries, languages and institutional types. The AHELO feasibility study is composed of 4 "strands" of work: 3 assessments to measure generic skills, discipline-related skills in economics and in engineering, and a fourth research-based value-added strand.

A second meeting of the AHELO Group of National Experts was held on 27-28 April in Paris to discuss draft terms of reference for an AHELO call for tender, which will be launched in the second half of June. The meeting was also an opportunity for participating countries to discuss the timeline of the work, activities involved for participating countries and institutions, as well as the involvement of stakeholders in the study.

The AHELO feasibility study has also been recently discussed with students (seminar of the European Student Unions), and academic communities (meeting of the OECD Trade Union Advisory Committee). To share information about the study with a broader public, an AHELO brochure has also been prepared. It can be downloaded from the AHELO web page at www.oecd.org/edu/ahelo

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OECD REVIEWS OF HE IN REGIONAL AND CITY DEVELOPMENT

NEW REGIONS, ROLLING PROGRAMME AND BETTER COMMUNICATION

Fifteen regions will undergo the OECD review in 2009-10. IMHE is now collaborating with the World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, Lumina Foundation and OECD programmes and directorates to guarantee the quality of and robust evidence for this work. IMHE is also negotiating with a new set of regions eager to sign up for the Rolling Programme of Reviews.

Campinas Metropolitan Regions has withdrawn from the reviews for the time being. Their place has been taken by the State of Sonora in Mexico. Under the leadership of Gonzalo Rodriguez , the rector of Instituto Tecnológico de Sonora (ITSON), the State of Sonora has quickly taken steps to set in place the review machinery. Key partners include the State Ministry of Education and Culture, HEIs and the State Commission for Higher Education Planning (COEPES).

The Review is a major effort for the regions and their HEIs. Communication is one of the keys to success. To facilitate shared learning and reaching out within and between the regions and their HEIs, IMHE has launched an interactive web 2.0 community, using Clearspace platform. It allows members to:
• share knowledge and experience on HE in regional and city development and on the review process
• submit related blog entries and articles

Enhanced communication for adding value to regional reviews

• receive OECD documents and consult them at all times.
Key partners in the reviews have been invited to join this community. Ernesto Flores, on loan from ITSON, is in charge of the conceptual development of this community.

Read more: www.oecd.org/edu/imhe/regionaldevelopment
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PUBLICATIONS OF INTEREST

In 2009, the three principal contacts for IMHE members have access to all OECD publications online. To access this service, contact Emily Groves, emily.groves@oecd.org for the user name and password. This user name and password, valid until the end of 2009, is meant for your personal use only.

Education Today: The OECD Perspective
OECD Publishing. ISBN 9789264059894

Presents the OECD's current main messages regarding the state education, covering early childhood, schooling, transitions beyond initial education, higher education, adult education, lifelong learning, outcomes and returns, equity and innovation.

Measuring Government Activity
OECD Publishing. ISBN: 9789264060722

The size and the economic significance of the public sector make it a major contributor to economic growth and social welfare. This book summarises the available OECD and other international data on public sector inputs and processes. It also examines the existing internationally comparable data on outputs and outcomes and recommends new approaches to measurement.

OECD Economic Outlook, What is the Economic Outlook for OECD Countries?: An Interim Assessment September 2008
OECD Publishing. ISBN 9789264061767

Financial market turmoil, the bursting of the housing bubble and high commodity prices continue to weigh on global economic growth, according to the OECD's latest interim economic assessment of the G7 countries.

Mapping the Higher Education Landscape: Towards a European Classification of Higher Education, Frans A. van Vught, Springer, 2009

The book reviews existing one-dimensional international rankings and suggests a new multi-dimensional approach to map higher education institutions and create effective transparency in the diversity of higher education systems in Europe.

Handbook of International Associations in Higher Education, Academic Cooperation Association (ACA), Brussels, 2009

This publication presents one hundred higher education associations from various continents, as well as their global counterparts. This book can only be obtained via the ACA Secretariat.

The Power of Partnerships: A Transatlantic Dialogue

The report is the result of a gathering of 28 college presidents, rectors and vice chancellors who met in Vancouver in June 2008. The transatlantic dialogue is an ongoing initiative between ACE, the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, and the European University Association. www.acenet.edu

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IMHE CALENDAR

29-30 June 2009 — *Higher Education at a Time of Crisis: Challenges and Opportunities* in co-operation with the Copenhagen Business School, Denmark.
«○ www.oecd.cbs.dk

10-11 Sept. 2009 — *OECD reviews of Higher Education in Regional and City Development.* Stocktaking meeting for regions and their higher education institutions.
«○ Contact: jaana.puuka@oecd.org

12-13 October 2009 — "What Works" on *Quality Teaching*, Istanbul, Turkey.
«○ Contact: fabrice.henard@oecd.org

6-8 December 2009 — *Higher Education: Spaces and Places: for Learning, Innovation and Knowledge Exchange,* organised by CELE and the University of Latvia, Riga, Latvia.
«○ Contact: alastair.blyth@oecd.org

13-15 Sept. 2010 — IMHE General Conference, Paris, France.
«○ Contact: valerie.lafon@oecd.org

OTHER MEETINGS OF INTEREST

5-8 July 2009 — UNESCO, World Conference on *Higher Education: The New Dynamics of Higher Education and Research for Societal Change and Development.*
www.esd-world-conference-2009.org

23-26 August 2009 — EAIR conference. *Fighting for Harmony,* Vilnius Lithuania.
www.eair.nl

16–19 Sept. 2009 — *21st Annual EAIE Conference,* Madrid, Spain.
www.eaie.org

5-6 November 2009 — IAU Annual Conference. *The Role of Higher Education in Promoting Inter-cultural Dialogue and Understanding*, Beirut, Lebanon.
www.unesco.org/iau/conferences/upcoming.html

Find all our meetings on www.oecd.org/edu/imhemeetings

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