OECD project on the Future of universities
Experts meeting
24-25 June 2003
OECD Headquarters, Paris

Summary

List of participants:

Experts:
−   Philip ALTBACH, Professor of Higher Education, Boston College, USA
−   Dan ATKINS, Professor and Dean, The University of Michigan, USA
−   Jarl BENGTSSON, Consultant, Former Head of OECD/CERI, Sweden
−   Marek KWIEK, Professor and Director of Center for Public Policy, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poland
−   Ben MARTIN Professor and Director of Science and Technology Policy Research (SPRU), UK
−   Christine MUSSELIN, Research Director, Centre de Sociologie des Organisations, France
−   Jean-Claude RUANO-BORBALAN, Editor of *Sciences Humaines*, France
−   Margrethe VESTAGER, Member of Danish Parliament, Former Minister of Education, Denmark
−   Martin WOLF, Editorialist and Chief Economist at *Financial Times*, United Kingdom

OECD Secretariat:
−   Barry MCGAW, Director
−   Kurt LARSEN, Principal Administrator
−   Riel MILLER, Principal Administrator
−   Stéphan VINCENT-LANCRIN, Administrator
−   Keiko MOMII, Administrator
−   David ISTANCE, Principal Administrator
−   Dominique FORAY, Principal Administrator

Missions/Functions of the university and driving forces of change

After a brief tour de table and the presentation of the project, the morning was devoted to the discussion of the evolution of the missions and functions of universities and to the identification of the major driving forces shaping their future. The discussions have been introduced by short introductions by the invited experts.

The experts raised a definitional issue on university and noticed that the term "university" referred to a wide range of institutions.

On the **teaching** side, it was said that the learning function of universities had decreased because learning had become a more important and pervasive activity of everyday life. While this could be understood in line with the social history of western societies progressively breaking down monopolies, the idea of

increased level of learning (i.e. understanding, and not only having information) was questioned. The idea that universities were monopolies was questioned, but there was some agreement that they still had a kind of monopoly on the delivery of degrees.

It was agreed that diversification was probably the only way to tackle **massification**, but it was noted that diversification could follow a specialisation by mission/functions (teaching or research) or by field/topic. Diversification has already occurred within most higher education systems. Some argued that there would probably be a universalisation of participation in tertiary education, as it occurred in secondary education during the 20th Century. Undergraduate education would then be treated like secondary education today while graduate education would correspond to "real" higher education, delivered by institutions with teaching and research. A rationale for this separation could be that undergraduates do not have much to offer to researchers nowadays, which was not the case at the beginning of the 20th Century. It was argued that there was a limit to universalisation though. In Canada and the USA, despite efforts to do so, the participation rate has stagnated for 20 years around 55%.

The discussion on mission questioned the accuracy of the **link between teaching and research** today. Some experts acknowledged the importance of this link, while some others considered that undergraduate was becoming more secondary education alike and that it was thus becoming inaccurate in a context of mass higher education. Should the size of university research increase at the same pace as teaching in a context of massification of higher education? Against this trend, it was noted that research in university was not competitive compared to the private sector except in fields like biotechnology, humanities and social sciences, and that this should be acknowledged.

On the contrary, it was argued that it would be in practice very difficult to separate research and teaching because when sending their children to university, people want them to be part of the elite: politicians are bound to the idea of a "broad elite", taking into account the **social pressure for democratisation**. Noting that the screening function of universities had in some countries tended to merely reproduce the social stratification, the redistribution of higher education functions could well follow the social pressure to more social mobility. In this respect, it was noted that less elitism in the secondary system had led to a more elitist higher education system. The strong differentiation between institutions in terms of reputation and excellence has also been noted, implying that degrees have different values according to the institution of graduation.

Massification also raised the issue of the **funding** of higher education. The issue was first formulated in terms of public and private good, but it was argued that, first, it was debatable whether university was a private or public good because of the variety of its activities and, second, that determining whether it was a public or private good would not allow to identify mechanically who should fund it. The issue of funding led to state a downgrading of university teachers' status and the increasing difficulties to attract the brightest students in academia as it used to be the case 30 years ago. It was also noted that the current demographic trends in OECD countries (i.e. ageing of the populations) would render the issue of funding more acute in the future.

It was agreed that **market forces** were important drivers of societal change and of higher education systems in particular. Market forces could appear as a key driving force controlling most of other drivers of change in the sector, but it was noted that they were not the only forces. Some underlined that there was a global trend towards less welfare state, which became difficult to fund, and more market forces. It was stressed that the new rise of market forces should not necessarily be viewed in an ideological way: believing or not in the market. The rise of market forces in education can be derived from a) state resource constraints (of which the market is one way of allocating), b) the pressure of elderly people on resources (lowering the priority level of tertiary education on the political and financial agenda), and c) the progressive trumping of collective values by individualistic values.

It was put forward that in the context of increasing globalisation and internationalisation of science, **English** would probably become the (even more) dominant world language in elite higher education in all countries, because elites would look for higher education in English (and thus force universities to adapt in non-Anglophone countries). It was counter-argued that while English was a necessary common language, people could learn English without receiving their higher education in English.

The question of the **divergence or convergence** of the systems was also debated. It was said that, like in other fields, higher education systems were converging, especially towards a more Anglo-Saxon model. The great variety of national systems and current issues was then strongly emphasised, but it was also noted that some systems were already quite close or that geographical divergences might not be as profound as they looked like. A broad agreement emerged on the undesirability of a full convergence, which would weaken national characteristics and eventually provide disincentives to go abroad.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) was in particular viewed as an important driver for change. ICT can in particular remove or relax distance and time constraints. Two ways of addressing future issues were put forward: extrapolation and innovation. Up to now, the use of ICT was viewed as extrapolation improving or offering new supports for doing things the old way, albeit possibly faster, better or cheaper. The issue would be to consider the innovation space offered by ICT. In research, cyber-infrastructure represent a real innovation creating virtual communities and allowing researchers to carry out work that they would not have been able to do before in a growing number of scientific fields. It was advanced that ICT could probably not impact teaching in the same way as research because of the remaining higher "productivity" of face to face. While acknowledging the importance of co-location, it was voiced that there was no reason to consider ICT as primarily reserved to vocational learning or less relevant for education, although it remains true that the new ways to use had not been figured out yet. These ways could well be non-linear.

It is however difficult to think of **radical change** in a meaningful way. A major nuclear terrorist attack on a Western country could for instance lead to the end of globalisation or to a crude global empire. The experience of Eastern Europe also shows how difficult it is to imagine something radical beforehand. In the long run, it was argued that a lot of university functions could be disaggregated and then re-aggregated differently.

Although all experts praised universities as they are today for their values of rationalism and knowledge, and some of them argued that they should continue to perform the same missions and functions in the same way in the future, nobody seemed to believe that the "status quo" would be possible.

Second day: Future scenarios

The second day was devoted to the elaboration of a set of 4 preliminary scenarios. The experts split in two groups and reported two sets of scenarios.

The first group generated the scenarios by crossing to axes of variables. The opposite sides of the first axis were a restricted set of providers vs. a free market (with a great diversity of institutions) – which could also be read as monopoly in the delivery of degrees of universities and competition. The second axis was opposing initial higher education vs. lifelong learning.

Scenario 1 (secondarisation): Restricted set of providers and focus on initial education

The State or institutions themselves decide on accreditation and quality assurance and provides the bulk of funding for teaching and research. Because of that, it cannot let all institutions do research and universities

become mostly teaching only. Universities of this type are providing another level of what the school system does at present. Research is carried out in a small part of the system: elite institutions. Students remain mainly national, regional or local.

Scenario 2 (open university): Restricted set of providers and lifelong learning

This scenario goes along the same lines as scenario 1, but with a larger "open university" sector, more shorter courses, more distance learning, more use of ICT. There would be a greater diversity of the student body, especially in terms of ages. Initial degrees would be less important – since people would come back to HE institutions throughout life. Like in the first scenario, research would be carried out in elite institutions, and the system would remain mostly state funded.

Scenario 3 (free market): Great diversity of providers and focus on initial education

The abolition of the university monopoly on the rewarding of degrees gives rise to the entry of many education providers and to the emergence of a more international market for young students. Quality assurance is carried out through private mechanisms. The post-secondary systems ends up with a larger proportion of private suppliers, more specialisation, by function (some research only institutions, a lot of teaching only institutions), by field (business, language, bio science) and also possibly by region (nordic studies). There will be more inter-institutional alliances, and the apparition of a small global super-elite of institutions. Research will however be undertaken in a variety of institutions.

Scenario 4 (flexible learning market): Great diversity of providers and lifelong learning

In this scenario, inter-institutional alliances and partnerships would be important again but there would also be some alliances with industry (media companies, game industry, etc.). It could for example lead to the development of edutainment to overcome the reluctance of some to go to university and push up the participation rate in post-secondary education. But it would also mean a more customised teaching: for example, a bank could ask an institution to design a specific course for its employees, course which would then be delivered at the premises of the bank, possibly before or after the bank business. There would be a great variety of institutions, more ICT and distance courses. There would be more private-funded research. Universities would become a smaller part of the post-secondary education system.

The second set of scenarios was generated differently, by giving a special emphasis to one of the key drivers: massification, technology, market forces, lifelong learning.

Scenario A: extrapolation of existing trends

The increase in enrolment rates would go on and probably reach a participation rate from 60 to 70%. There would therefore be much greater heterogeneity in the system in terms of types of students, forms of institutions. This would lead to the rise of teaching only universities and matched by a greater heterogeneity of the teaching profession with a greater disjunction between those close to secondary level and those at the Nobel elite level. There would not be any uniform profession. Elite universities would become even more elite and operate in English, enrolling and hiring the most ambitious and able from around the world. In this scenario, the resources per student from the state would decline, which would mean that systems that are entirely publicly funded would have a decline in available funds – purely publicly funded systems would be under greater pressure. There would thus be a big pressure on public institutions to find private money, possibly by attracting full fee paying foreign students.

Scenario B: end of institution domination through technological transformation

Technologies would allow mass-customisation of higher education, which would be suited to individual students wherever they are. The idea of time/space constraints diminishing, students could aggregate their course work from across a wide range of sources, which could be certified from a wide variety of authorities. Institutions would have different value in the market. In this scenario, individual academics could become more important than the institution – so that the issue would become who you worked with rather than which institution you studied at… Working with a Nobel-winner would become the highest value. Technology allows for the end of the certification from institutions.

Scenario C: Free market

This market model scenario would correspond to the end of the state quasi-monopoly on finance and operations. First funding would be private. Anyone could enter the higher education market, which would lead to a radical privatisation of the entire system. Maybe this would for instance lead to the creation of a European university system in Europe rather than the current national ones. Turning entirely public systems into a market system with private funders could accommodate the state potentially supporting research and maybe students. This shift from public to market would require deliberate policy decisions.

Scenario D: Lifelong learning

There would be radical changes in demand and a shift to lifelong learning and global demand for OECD universities. This scenario was close to the second scenario of the first set above.

In the discussion following the presentation of the two sets of scenarios, there was a strong agreement that the two sets were very similar. The mains issues raised in the discussion were the following:

- Traditional universities would continue to exist in all scenarios, but they would represent a smaller subset of the system.
- Academic values could either remain similar or evolve differently in the different scenarios. There is no determinism in the evolution.
- Customised universities could also take an ethic or religious character, with for example the rise of universities for indigenous. Will there be pressure for Muslim universities, etc.?
- Technology has an ambiguous potential. On one hand, technology abolishing time and space, co-location will become a privilege likely to be found in elite institutions, just because it will become the expensive way of delivering education. On the other hand, it was noted that technology could give access to great libraries anywhere in the world – which is one of the specific assets of elite institutions – and had thus a strong democratisation potential. It was emphasised that technology could be the vehicle for moving to the free market and that it should be borne in mind that scenarios involving technology would not happen mechanically. They would depend on policy, market or institution decisions and actions.
- The place of academics has been identified as a key issue of the scenarios. Will the social status of academics continue to decline, as happened for secondary teachers? The attractiveness of being an academic should be carefully looked at. The academic status could become even more heterogeneous. The competitive race between academics would deepen. Some scepticism about the reign of academic superstars was voiced, but it was also noted that at the beginning of the university, academics used to be superstars.

5

Next steps

The issue of this session was to discuss how the scenarios could be framed in the most policy-relevant way.

Advice to reach a politician audience were the following: 1) bear in mind that higher education will not be a government priority (compared to health and elderly people's well being) and that there will thus be no extra money to pour in the system; 2) take stock of what the electorate wants, i.e. having their children as well off as possible and thus attend the best kinds of institutions as possible; 3) target a not too long report as an outcome, discussable without any background knowledge; 4) consider that universities will have more foreign students and discuss how it could end up in a win-win situation; 5) remember that politicians are value-based, want to do the good, and do not want to be the mere tools of industry or economics.

It was noted that there was also a huge potential demand for this project, among the academic community, education leaders, education stakeholders, etc., and that this multiple audience should be taken into account.

The experts encouraged the OECD to consider the scenario exercise in terms of values. The seven following values were proposed as consensual but possibly conflicting values: 1) academic freedom, freedom for institutions; 2) choice of students; 3) equality of opportunities and access; 4) national culture and identity; 5) prosperity; 6) quality of higher education; and 7) social cohesion.

OECD project on the Future of universities
Experts meeting
24-25 June 2003
OECD Headquarters, Paris

Annotated agenda

This meeting launches a two year process that will develop a set of long-term scenarios to help policymakers and stakeholders make strategic choices regarding the future of the university in OECD countries. Much important work has been done examining where current societal and institutional trends might take universities over the next few decades. Building on these efforts, the aim here is to analyse the different possible ways society might meet the need for research, teaching, service and screening that are currently performed by universities in the OECD area. Calling into question how OECD countries might, some two-three decades from now, deliver the basic functions performed by today's universities is one way of revealing the potentially strategic implications of different policy choices.

This scenario exercise will help assess the reasons for either sustaining or breaking with the status quo by offering a rigorous assessment of the character and context of (dis)continuity. It will also develop concepts and tools for all the relevant stakeholders to be able to think long-term towards futures that might well be very different from the university world of today. Thus, assuming that the functions, in one form or another, currently performed by post-secondary education institutions will remain essential in the future, the primary analytical question is: can we develop plausible scenarios in which the roles played by today's universities might be taken on by other institutions or forms of social organisation or inversely would universities take a larger role in assuming these functions? And, if these scenarios are possible would they be desirable?

Examining the prospects for discontinuity is helpful for strategic decision making for three reasons: first, it clarifies some of the costs and benefits of preserving the status quo; second, it sharpens the assessment of the goals that currently serve as the target for strategic choices; and third, it provokes innovative ideas regarding what the goals, and means for achieving them, might be in the future.

The aim of this collaborative effort would be to develop over the next two years a set of future scenarios for universities that the experts would agree to find relevant, interesting and challenging for policymakers and stakeholders.

Tuesday 24 June 2003

9h30-10h15:   **Session 1**
                    Tour de table and presentation of the project

                    Barry McGaw
                    Kurt Larsen and Riel Miller

10h15-11h45: Session 2
Missions/functions of the university and their evolution

Universities currently perform four main functions:

1. research (knowledge creation; knowledge improvement/refinement);
2. teaching (knowledge diffusion; training to knowledge acquisition; training to knowledge creation)
3. service to community (local development, consultancy; lifelong learning; participation to public debate; etc.)
4. social screening/legitimation

Do universities have other roles/functions/missions? How have the economic and social functions of universities evolved in the past – have there been significant discontinuities or radical changes? How have universities evolved in the past as organisations and, again, have there been significant breaks from one period to another? What were the primary factors behind (dis)continuity? How do universities currently perform these functions compared to the past? Is there a discrepancy between the explicit or intended missions statements and the reality of the functions universities perform?

We should also address the issues related to the different understandings of the university concept across countries, to the development of universities over time (a moveable target) and to the different realities the word university can refer to (corporate universities, university of the third age, people's university etc). To add to the complexity, universities are part of larger post-secondary education systems.

The aim of this session is to gain insights into the internal and external dynamics of how universities as part of post-secondary education systems evolved in the past and present. This will set the stage for examining, in the next sessions, how the functions and organisation of the sector and the universities within them might evolve in the future.

Discussion launched by Philip Altbach and Margrethe Vestager.

11h45-13h15: Session 3
Prospects for long-run social and economic change – driving forces and societal change

A wide range of important trends have been identified as part of the change processes that appear to already be underway – for instance: massification of education and of demand for learning; demographics such as diminishing numbers of young people, ageing populations, ethnic diversity; knowledge-based economies at different levels; rapidly changing international skills markets; the form of national and international inequalities in wealth and human resources; new forms of competence recognition, qualifications, and market signals; changing patterns of public management, governance and citizenship; extent of private knowledge production and new forms of knowledge management; changing intellectual property rights regimes; changing value systems; social fragmentation and/or solidarity; environmental and social sustainability; technologies for production, consumption and learning etc.

The aim in this session is review these trends. Are there other major forces that need to be taken into consideration? What are the forces underlying changes in these variables? How

powerful an impact might these trends have? Are there feedback loops that might counter-act or divert certain trends? How inter-dependent are different sets of factors?

Furthermore, can we cluster these trends in a meaningful way to imagine the future social and economic contexts in which the learning and research missions should be performed?

Discussion launched by Ben Martin and Dan Atkins.

13h15-14h45: Lunch

14h45-16h15: Session 4
Under what conditions could the status quo of post-secondary education systems continue?

What are the benefits of current arrangements? What might argue to be preserved and changed? What trends should dominate and/or policy choices be made in society to allow the post-secondary educational status quo to continue? What implications might it have for the missions/functions performed by universities? What implications might it have for the university institution? These questions should be dealt with under the different future contexts identified in the previous session.

Discussion launched by Marek Kwieck and Christine Musselin.

16h15-16h30: Coffee Break

16h30-18h00: Session 5
What kind of radically different post-secondary education systems can we imagine?

By imagining radically different post-secondary education systems, we go one step further in the direction of the actual elaboration of scenarios. It is important to brainstorm on discontinuous futures – the most radical ones being a future without universities or a future with far more dominating universities. Might the future bring very radical change to current arrangements, making them unrecognisable to current universities? What might such radical change be? As a starting point for the discussion, we could consider how and under what conditions the different functions/missions of universities (research, teaching, services, screening) could be performed outside universities or that universities would take on new functions in the future.

Discussion launched by Martin Wolf, Jean-Claude Ruano-Borbalan and Jarl Bengtsson.

19h30: Dinner

Wednesday 25 June 2003

Towards preliminary scenarios for universities

The primary aim of the second day is to develop a clear plan for producing policy relevant scenarios for universities in OECD countries. Suggestions on how to proceed will be welcome at the start of day. One option would be to divide the day into two parts. In the first part small teams of four to five people would develop a set of university scenarios. One group might take the approach of projecting current trends into the future – from the

perspective of the university as an institution. Another group might take the approach of imagining what might need to happen for universities as we know them today to disappear. A third group could try to develop scenarios of the ideal university system based on different sets of values or missions. In the second part of the day the aim would be to report back on the scenario development experiments and reflect on how, over the next two years, we might best produce cutting-edge university scenarios as tools for helping to make strategic policy choices for post-secondary education.

9h00-10h30: **Session 6**
Brainstorming scenarios for universities

To get a practical feel for what might be involved in developing university scenarios the first part of the day focuses on brainstorming scenarios around specific themes, organising the main features into coherent clusters and discussing them (strengths, limitations, etc.).

10h30-10h45: **Coffee break**

10h45-11h45: **Session 7**
Reporting back and discussion of different scenarios

Have the different groups arrived at broadly similar preliminary scenarios or very different ones? How should we interpret either broad agreement or divergence of viewpoints?

11h45-13h00: **Session 8**
Discussion of links to policy and to preferences

A number of sketches of scenarios for universities will have been developed in the morning. It is now important to discuss what needs to be done to ensure that the scenarios are policy relevant and take into account the desired outcomes – the accepted goals of policy.

Discussion launched by Margrethe Vestager.

13h00-14h30: **Lunch**

14h30-16h00: **Session 9**
Designing the process

This session aims at summing up and assessing the preliminary outcomes of the two days of discussion. How can the exercise be further developed? What methodological lessons should be drawn from the discussion? What approaches should we take to make this initial brainstorming more systematic in developing the scenarios? Who should be involved? What role might this expert group play? Which networks and stakeholders are crucial for this project? Would it be worthwhile to undertake on-the-ground "process-as-product" experiments where particular universities or policy making groups engage in the development of scenarios and the acquisition of futures-thinking skills?

Discussion launched by Riel Miller.

End of the meeting