Dropout and Completion in Higher Education in Europe

Annex 3: Country Case Studies Europe
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I. Country Case Studies
1 Czech Republic

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1.1 Introduction

In our case study we have used the following documents and data: First of all, the national database - SIMS\(^1\). Second, we went through materials on the national level consisting any dropout policy or measures at any form. Third, we have conducted several interviews and focus groups with various players on the national level. Finally, in the institutional case studies (see below) we analyzed relevant documents at the university level and interviewed relevant stakeholders.

Already at the first phase of the Czech national report, the following hypothesis was formulated: study success and dropout rate depend to a high extent on two main factors: field of study and the system of funding on the national level - e.g. how are individual institutions financed by the state. This hypothesis was confirmed, however, mainly the field work at two case study institutions revealed a few interesting facts and dependencies (see part D, E and F).

In our report we focus on dropout on undergraduate (bachelor’s) and graduate (master’s) level exclusively. We leave out postgraduate (doctoral) training as the factors affecting success and behavior of PhD students are rather specific and might differ from those on lower levels of tertiary education.

At the same time we concentrate mainly on the dropout and study success at public institutions covering almost 90% of all students in the Czech higher education (88% in 2013\(^2\)); both systems work under significantly different conditions. The four main differences to be mentioned are:

1. Private HEIs raise tuition fees;
2. Private HEIs receive no governmental institutional funding, which makes them independent from the per capita funding policy and fully dependent on fees of students they attract;
3. Private institutions attract specific segment of student population, having high proportion of adult learners and probably a specific socio-economic composition of student body.
4. As in many other countries private HEIs focus on study fields which are less demanding on economic terms - such as economics, public policy, sociology, psychology, legal studies, etc. The most “expensive” disciplines such as arts, medicine or engineering are provided almost exclusively by the public sector.

We chose Czech University of Life Sciences in Prague (CULS) and the University of West Bohemia in Pilsen (UWB) as our case studies. Both of these are public, medium-sized HEIs with multiple faculties, diverse offer of study programs and moderate research performance.

\(^1\) Sdružené informace matrik studentů
\(^2\) http://dsia.uiv.cz/vystupy/vu_vs_f1.html
Czech University of Life Sciences in Prague\(^3\) has 22 000 students (2013\(^4\)) at six faculties, most of them covering disciplines related to agriculture and environmental studies (including forestry, agrobiology, tropical agrisciences and engineering). However, the biggest one is the Faculty of Economics and Management, reaching almost 11 000 students (2013\(^5\)). The CULS was established in 1948 by separation of former College of Agricultural and Forestry Sciences from the Czech Technical University in Prague. CULS attracts students from the Prague region as well as from the rest of the Czech Republic. It can be ranked as an average university with respect to its prestige.

University of West Bohemia in Pilsen\(^6\) is a regional university with around 13 500 (2013\(^7\)) students and nine faculties including mechanical and electrical engineering, applied sciences, law, economics, education, health care studies, arts and philosophy and also design and art. The UWB attracts students both from the region of Western Bohemia as well as from South and Central Bohemia and regions nearby. In last years, it was strongly affected by demographic decline, governmental funding policy as well as by strong competition of mainly Prague HEIs, falling significantly from 18 000 students in 2009 to 13 500 nowadays.\(^8\) The UWB can be seen as a typical regional university focusing mainly on bordering region. It does not score high with respect to internationalization - neither students nor staff. However, it is a university with the most heterogeneous portfolio of study programs in the Czech Republic.

The following table displays dropout rates at UWB and CULS by individual faculties. It indicates the share of students who discontinued their studies during the first three years for cohorts enrolled in 2003 and 2010. The current names of the faculties are used.

Table 1: Dropout in the first three years of studies, by faculties, 2003 and 2010, in %

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University of West Bohemia</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ladislav Sutnar Faculty of Design and Art</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty of Health Care Studies</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty of Law</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty of Philosophy and Arts</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty of Education</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty of Economics</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty of Applied Sciences</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty of Electrical Engineering</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty of Mechanical Engineering</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Czech University of Life Sciences</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faculty of Tropical AgroSciences</td>
<td>N/A.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty of Economics and Management</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty of Environmental Science</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty of Agrobiology, Food and Natural Resources</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty of Engineering</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty of Forestry and Wood Sciences</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| CZECH REPUBLIC                                             | 38   | 48   |

Source of data: Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, student register data.

\(^3\) see [http://czu.cz/en/?r=881](http://czu.cz/en/?r=881)  
\(^4\) [http://dsia.uiv.cz/vystupy/vu_vs_f2.html](http://dsia.uiv.cz/vystupy/vu_vs_f2.html)  
\(^5\) [http://dsia.uiv.cz/vystupy/vu_vs_f2.html](http://dsia.uiv.cz/vystupy/vu_vs_f2.html)  
\(^7\) [http://dsia.uiv.cz/vystupy/vu_vs_f2.html](http://dsia.uiv.cz/vystupy/vu_vs_f2.html)  
\(^8\) [http://dsia.uiv.cz/vystupy/vu_vs_f2.html](http://dsia.uiv.cz/vystupy/vu_vs_f2.html)
1.2 Definitions of study success

In the Czech Higher Education Act (111/1998 Sb.), the term dropout is implicitly referred to in §58 in the context of student fees in public institutions (where “studies terminated in a way different than regular according to §45 art. 3 or §46 art. 3” are taken into account), i.e. the dropout is measured on the level of individual study in a study program - in this respect, switching from one program to another is considered a dropout. This definition is widely accepted by governing bodies as well as the university management and academic staff in general. “Successful study” is usually defined in terms of completion.

Terms referring to retention are used sometimes too (průchodnost / průstupnost studia). Retention between first and second year is taken into account namely when calculating limits of students funded from the public budget (caps / numerus clausus).

Regular students, on the other hand, when asked about “study success” tend to identify this term rather with “successful study”. According to many of them, successful study is a study that leads to competences and / or employment. This view is shared by some members of academic staff as well. In this case, question might be asked whether a study that has led to employment but has not been completed in accordance with the Higher Education Act could be considered as successful. Some students tend to think so.

Study success / dropout issues have not been and still are not perceived as highly important and pressing by the majority of HE stakeholders. The fact that some students do not finish the study programs they enter is almost unanimously considered to be an integral and almost indispensable part of the Czech higher education system. Therefore, attention of most stakeholders is attracted by the issues of quality (in terms of competence of graduates and their employability), funding and governance rather than dropout and retention.

1.3 Short description of the higher education system

In the following description, we focus on main developments over the last 25 years in terms of access, numbers of students and retention as well as general perception of HE system as such.

The Czech higher education system consists of
- 26 public HEIs, dominantly funded by the Ministry of Education;
- State HEIs (University of Defense, an organizational part of and dominantly funded by the Ministry of Defense; Police Academy, organizational part of and funded by the Ministry of Interior; not all data are available for these two institutions);
- 44 private HEIs (their number changes every year, the private sector educates 12 percent of HE students in 2013).

Higher education Institutions in the Czech Republic differ in size and profile: ranging from small and highly selective academies of arts and small private and regional institutions established in the last decade, through medium-sized agricultural and technical HEIs focused on limited number of fields, to big, broad-profile universities with even as much as 17 faculties and almost 50 000 students such as the Charles University in Prague.
The overall number of students in the Czech HE grew steadily over the last twenty years, changing completely the policies and environment of many institutions. However, starting from 2010, demographic decline and governmental funding policy start to reverse the trend.
Access (selectivity)

Figure 2:

Simultaneously with growing numbers of students, the share of applicants accepted for at least one of the chosen study programs was growing till 2009. Over the period of 2002-2011, the number of applicants was actually growing too which caused the share to stay still at 70% from 2009 on. In recent years, the decreasing numbers of study places seem to copy the declining trend in number of applications so the share stays the same even for 2013.
Demographic decline

Figure 3:

The number of 19 years olds (and high school graduates) stayed relatively stable over the 2000’s but starting from 2011, the demographic decline becomes one of the biggest challenges for Czech HEIs.
**Dropout, retention**

**Figure 4:**

![Retention after the first year undergraduate + long cycle programmes](image)

Starting at least from 2006, the dropout rates are on the rise, namely in the first and second year of undergraduate studies. While in 2003-2005 more than 75%\(^9\) of students enrolled in HE re-enrolled within the same study program in the second year, for 2012 this rate dropped to 66%. According to 2013 data, it seems clear that only less than 50% of bachelor’s studies started in 2009 will be awarded a degree.

It must be stressed that faculties and study programs differ significantly in their respective dropout rates. However, the general trend, described above, is the same for most of them.

**Tuition fees, student support**

In the Czech Republic, only very limited financial support for socio-economically disadvantaged students is available on the national level. On the institutional level additional instruments are available but these are usually focused more on well-performing students than the socio-economically disadvantaged ones.

On the other hand, tuition at public HEIs is generally free so the costs of studying are not so high. Only students who exceed standard study duration by more than one year are charged a fee while previously discontinued studies are added to this duration. This measure is supposed to reduce study program switching.

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\(^9\) In this paragraph, only data on on-campus, full-time programs at public institutions are taken into account.
Strong autonomy of faculties

Faculties and sometimes even departments have traditionally enjoyed a high level of autonomy in respect with setting up the study programs, teaching and personal agenda issues. The accreditation of study programs is mainly carried out at the faculty level. Students are accepted to study programs mostly at faculties, sometimes even at study departments. Especially at large public universities people teach and students study at a particular faculty, not at the university. This trend was even stronger in the period between 1990 and 1998 during which faculties of public higher education institutions possessed an independent legal personality. Still today student success policy is decentralized at the universities, in some cases even on the level of departments or individual study programs.

Implementation of the Bologna program structure

Between the years 2000 - 2006, most of the study programs have been transformed from four to six year’s long master’s “long cycles” to the new “Bologna” two-degree structure, most usually with three years of bachelor’s and two years of master’s studies. Yet, the HE Act allows for exceptions, and typically some of the engineering programs go for 4+2 instead. As many of the stakeholders point out, the transformation was not always a full success. In many cases, the existing study programs were just mechanically split in half and in some of them all the theoretical classes were squeezed in the bachelor’s program making it very challenging and unattractive for the students. Even in 2014, a significant share of academic staff is not satisfied with the state of art and considers returning to long cycle programs to be the best option for the Czech HE - namely in the fields of engineering but also in teacher education and other regulated professions.

“Degree” is valued more than “education”

As some of the experts claim, in the Czech society the HE degree is still highly valued, often regardless actual competence of its owner. In this respect, there is a strong pressure put on students to reach the diploma but far less emphasis is put on quality and relevance of education one receives.

1.4 Description of national and institutional policies

1.4.1 National policies

On the national level, there is hardly any explicit dropout policy despite the fact that the issue was mentioned already in the HE Strategic Plan for 2000 - 2005. There, re-orientation was proposed as a solution to “accommodate all students in case their first choice was not optimal and allow them to reach qualification adequate to their competence by changing their educational pathway.” Inefficiency of dropout is mentioned as well, both for the government (in economic terms) and the student. No other measures and aspects of dropout were identified. The entire paragraph has only three sentences (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 2000).

Together with other requirements, HEIs are asked to publish elementary dropout data and measures taken to reduce the rates in their annual reports. However, the recommended structure of an annual report, set by the MEYS, is not obligatory to follow, and no shared definitions of dropout are set for this purpose.
When drafting the current Strategic Plan for 2016-2020 (it is supposed to be adopted in February 2015), the Ministry of Education intended to include more specific measures to deal with increasing dropout rates but these have been rejected by the HEIs representatives. They were afraid of pressure for decreasing demands put on students and therefore the quality of teaching and learning. As a result, only modest claims have been included in the latest version:

"Identify the causes of increasing dropout rates: The ministry in cooperation with higher education institutions will elaborate an empirical analysis on causes and effects of study dropout and will open the discussion on where and in what conditions the dropout is a problematic issue to be solved. Based on examples of good practice and with respect to specific character of individual HEIs and disciplines, measures will be proposed to reduce dropout rates without reducing the quality of teaching and learning." 

In the latest version of the Strategic plan available (in December 2014), the aim of the Ministry is to reach 65% of bachelor’s studies started in 2015 to be completed successfully by 2020.

The “HE Development Framework”, a ministerial strategic document serving as a background both for the Strategic Plan as well as for preparation of the European Structural and Investment Fund (ESIF) interventions in education for 2014-2020 European Union (EU) programming period, covers the dropout topic in more detail. It contains a brief analysis of the dropout data and identifies somewhat broader range of measures to improve study success. Being first adopted in July 2014, the document is currently under revision, reflecting negotiations with the European Commission, and the new version is supposed to be adopted in February 2015. Before that date, the document will not be published.

The Ministry anticipates that in the future institutional projects to improve study success are supposed to be funded and stimulated from both the ESIF operational program as well as from the ministerial Institutional Program (resources dedicated to strategic institutional projects related to goals of the Strategic Plan).

Dropout rates are now explicitly incorporated in the funding mechanism. The share of students who retain in their studies after the first year (in all programs, including master’s and doctoral) affects the funding caps - number of study places funded by the government. In this way, the institutions with high dropout rates are at risk that not all of their students will be funded.

The plan of the Ministry is also that in the upcoming period: ... better access to reliable and relevant information for applicants is one the main aims of the currently prepared HE information portal, with reducing dropout being one of the main aims ...

At this point, we want to describe two other HE policies - funding mechanism and external quality assurance represented by the accreditation process - which appeared to be very repeatedly stressed by the stakeholders as important (or even determining) with respect to dropout policy. Also in increasing role of research in the university mission is being mentioned. The mutual interaction of these policies with other mentioned trend is discussed in the Part E.
From 1990’s, the **funding** of HEIs has been based dominantly on the number of students and their respective study fields (bonus for specific fields such as engineering, science, medicine or fine and performing arts). Starting from 2010, elements of “quality-based” funding are being introduced, reflecting now research performance, student international mobility and unemployment rates of graduates. The rate between per capita : quality-based element is 76 : 24 for 2015 with the second pillar growing steadily since its introduction.

The caps are another aspect of the funding mechanism that might affect institutional behavior. Every year the ministry sets limits of state-funded study places for each institution, separately in four categories: B1 (first year bachelor’s), M1 (first year long-cycle master’s), N1 (first year master’s), P1 (first year doctoral) and SP2+ (all other students). Institutions are allowed to accept students over the limit but these are not funded. Besides the fact that first year dropout is reflected in the calculation of the SP2+ cap, as discussed above, other developments are also considered important. First, the MEYS is reflecting the demographic decline in the B1 and M1 limits and reduces them every year. Second, the MEYS attempts to reduce the share of bachelor’s level graduates who continue in master’s studies by reducing N1 limits every year as well.

The current **accreditation process**, which serves also as the main external quality assurance tool in the Czech HE, reflects the quality of teaching only to a limited extend. As confirmed in the interviews, the main criteria for accreditation and reaccreditation of a study program are the qualification structure of teaching staff and their research performance. Student services and counselling, content and form of study courses as well as the quality of teaching and learning as such are evaluated less thoroughly and no site visits take place during the process.

Apart from accreditation criteria, there are also other pressures on institutions to dedicate more resources to **research** rather than to teaching. Many of these are of economic nature as publishing is reflected not only in the research & development (R&D) funding but also in the HE funding. It must be stressed that research grants constitute often a very significant part of institutional budgets. Also, a significant research performance is required as a part of the sustainability criteria of R&D centers build with contribution of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) in the last European Union (EU) programing period 2007-2013. Out of 48 research centers co-financed by the EU Structural Funds, 28 are located at public universities.

On the opposite, teaching can be source of only limited extra funding since there are no tuition fees in the Czech Republic (with the exception of students who exceed the standard duration of studies by more than one year) in programs taught in the Czech language. However, facing the demographic decline, institutions are attempting to attract more international students for paid programs with instruction in English or other foreign languages.

### 1.4.2 Institutional policies

One of the important findings is the fact that HEIs and their parts are rarely homogenous in their response. In case of the dropout issue, individual faculties adopt their own strategies and even in case when there has been a university-level initiative developed, the implementation has stayed on the level of faculties (or even departments) and its form can vary significantly across individual major disciplines, as the vice-rector at UWB described. The main factor which is affecting institutional responses is the **study field**.
Before we discuss the measures taken by the institutions to reduce the dropout rate, we shortly mention few consequences of policies, demands or developments in the last years on individual institutions. As already stated, they are mainly: funding system, accreditation process, demographic decline and increased share of applicants accepted.

It must be repeatedly stressed that due to the per-capita funding mechanism, keeping student numbers high has been crucial for any institution. As a consequence, the following trends could be observed in the Czech higher education.

First, the admission criteria has been eased in almost all the study fields despite the fact that many members of academic staff and management interviewed consider thorough admission process a good way to improve student success. In fact, numerous institutions and faculties offer study place to almost everyone who applies for, and apply an “extended admission process policy” where admission criteria are basically replaced by first year courses and exams. However, the Vice-Dean of Faculty of Mechanical Engineering at UWB claims the completion rate stays more or less the same regardless the form of admission and the share of applicants accepted.

Many interviewees believe the broadened access to be the main driving force behind rising dropout rates as ever greater share of cohort enrolls to study programs, bringing in greater diversity in background, attitudes, skills, expectation and previous educational experience of students.

Second, in many cases the internal study-related regulation at many faculties has been reviewed, easing the criteria for re-enrollment, aiming to allow the students to stay longer. In some cases, recognition of prior learning become a routine part of educational pathways, stimulating students to disenroll and re-enrol repeatedly, transferring credits between individual studies.

Third, in the recent years, one strategic approach is clearly common for most of the faculties observed: investing much more resources and energy to marketing and student attraction than ever before. Even before the demographic decline, faculties started to implement a broad range of measures in order to attract, motivate and integrate students in higher quantity as well as “quality” (in terms of competence and attitudes). Site visits at high schools, cooperation with career counselors, special web pages for applicants, social media presence, advertising and other tools fall within the scope. Besides to increasing the amounts of applicants, these measures are also supposed to prevent the dropout, as confirmed by numerous representatives of academic management interviewed.

Besides these general approaches, interviewees named a number of institutional measures and policies they consider to be relevant for dropout reduction. Some of these are shared by many institutions and faculties, some might be unique. It is also true that in many cases the measures are rather vague or related to completion rather indirectly. Also, many of these policies have been introduced just recently and so far, there is no reliable evidence of their effect on student behavior.

To name a few examples of policies and measures adopted by universities or faculties in recent years in order to improve student success:

- Re-introducing obligatory presence at seminars and some courses, namely for freshmen;
- Distributing study obligations more evenly across the semester and academic year (midterm tests, seminar papers and presentations...) as well as entire study program (demanding theoretical courses should not be concentrated in the first year any more);
- Developing student services and counselling;
- Increasing the number of consultation hours of academic staff;
- Establishing off-campus counselling centers in other cities for students in distant learning programs;
- Introducing compensatory courses - both extra-curricular (fee charged) or as a part of the program (non-obligatory courses);
- Offering educational resources (books, presentations, sometimes also lecture records) online for all students to reduce the barriers in learning;
- Dedicating more attention to student evaluations and opinion surveys to identify trouble points in the student pathway (courses with enormous study demands, poor quality of lectures or disengaging approach of teachers);
- Developing targeted support for special needs (disabled) students;
- Stimulating motivation of students by merit-based scholarships for best-performing ones;
- Ensuring the curriculum is up-to-date, in line with industry needs and clearly career-oriented.

The last measure were pointed out namely by dean of the Faculty of Electrical Engineering at the UWB. He put emphasis on the labour market relevance: they invite employer representatives regularly to the classes and do site-visits in local industries in order to show students the latest technology and what it will be like when they graduate. As the dean believes, this is important for student’s motivation to continue and complete studies. He also mentioned the ambition to reduce the amount of lectures and increase the volume of team projects, even interdisciplinary, to provide students with a first-hand experience and stimulate their further learning. On the other hand, one of the students interviewed reported right the opposite and considered "learning what is out for decades already " to be one of the most disengaging aspects at the faculty. The discrepancy might be caused by the fact the dean’s initiative is focused on senior and graduate students primarily while the student integration takes place dominantly in the first year of studies.

The dean of Faculty of Economics and Management at the CULS also put a great emphasis on the “success culture” policy. He claims that university management focuses on soft measures, aiming on positive and open-minded attitude of the staff and creating a safe student-accommodating environment at the institution.

At the same time, there were also other measures discussed in the interviews, which should be mentioned. They serve mainly as a tool to attract students, however, might also contribute to increasing the study completion.

There are for example:
- Intensive cooperation with the city and the region which are responsible for elementary and secondary education;
- Various pilot projects at secondary schools in the region - academics participate as part-time teachers already at the secondary school;
- Cooperation with counselors of secondary schools at neighboring regions;
- Special workshops for applicants enabling them to master the transition from secondary to higher education;
- Direct involvement or close cooperation with local Science Learning Centers;
- Summer Schools or camps for talented students from primary as well as secondary schools.

Effects of institutional (as well as national) policies are rarely rigorously evaluated and many of the policies discussed above have been introduced only in last few years, so it is hard to make conclusions about their efficiency.

1.5 Reflection of policy mix

In our view, the Czech case study represents a specific example when complex and often conflicting policies have been implemented on the national level in higher education. Yet, we can see institutions behaving in the most rational way in economic terms rather than responding to the implemented policies and measures.

On the one hand, there are certain requirements from the Ministry to focus on reducing dropout rates. Furthermore, the issue has been several time addressed by the European Commission (EC) in the past (EC, 2003a; EC, 2003b; EC, 2005). Lately, the dropout issue was put on the menu by the EC when discussing the structure and content of interventions within the next ESIF programing period (2014-2020). However, the requirements or measures have been so far of a soft nature, rather formal or in the form of recommendations. So far, there has not been a specific dropout policy on the national level as such.

On the other hand, other policies being implemented on the national level (funding, accreditation system, implementation of the Bachelor-Master structure and ECTS system) have principally driven the system itself into higher dropout rates. The dropout rate itself probably would not be paid an increased attention from any stakeholders. As we already stated, it has been traditionally perceived as an embedded part of the system playing the role of a quality watchdog. Yet, only in combination with other significant factors (mainly demographic decline, increased share of applicants, funding system, and accreditation criteria) required an appropriate response. All as such it made institutions, mainly in engineering and partly in natural sciences fields, act with utmost urgency.

They gradually started implementing various measures in order to reduce the dropout rate notwithstanding of any dropout policy on the national level. For them it was a matter of institutional survival under existing conditions. We also argue that the main rationale behind above-mentioned measures targeted at increasing the study success was mostly economic – to secure resources for basic activities in the way which is allowed by the regulatory setting. The student-centered approach – e.g. the university should use any available method in order to help students handle their study load – is only peripheral for most of the Czech higher education institutions, except those which still keep very rigorous and multileveled entrance exams.

As a result of above mentioned facts, we cannot directly link the dropout rate in Czech higher education to quality of teaching, inefficiency of individual institutions or any other institutional qualities. The dropout rate should be rather looked at as a consequence of other environmental pressures and also the structure and setting up of the whole system. We suggest that it should not be taken out and studied as an isolated phenomenon without taking other factors, mainly of systemic feature, into account.
While one policy explicitly claims to address the dropout issue (however, only in the form of soft proclamations and rather insignificant measures), another policy (financing formula and quality assurance system) is in fact forcing the institutions to continue their behavior in line with the existing pattern.

One can agree that a certain minimum dropout rate\(^{11}\) in any educational process – or even at any human activity – is inevitable. The European Commission was concerned with the average dropout of 40% at the EU level (EC, 2003b) while talking about inefficiencies (EC, 2003a). Nevertheless, in the case of Czech higher education we talk about even more alarming numbers. In specific disciplines (or more accurately, in study programs) such as mechanical engineering the dropout at the bachelor level is more than 80%! It means that, for example, out of 1 000 students accepted to the study program in 2008 only 150 were awarded a bachelor degree within five years.

We would like to add another fact in order describe the Czech higher education fully. Despite the fact that the current Czech system can be described as being transformed from a mass system into a universal one\(^{12}\), it seems that higher education is still considered to be elite by the majority of actors as well as public. The shared view on dropout might also support such a claim.

Also the existing structure of the system is still similar to the one designed for elite higher education as was mentioned, for example, by the OECD Country Note (2006). The authors of the report state that “public university sector is formally undifferentiated, driven by a traditional Humboldtian vision, highly autonomous, self-governing and characterized by strenuous academic career requirements” (File et al., 2006, p. 16). Since the report was published, however, no fundamental changes have been undertaken in line with the OECD recommendations, despite rather rich publicity and resources given into the “tertiary education reform”.

Our final remarks concern implementation of higher education policy in general. No matter how essential and relevant a certain issue might seem, it must be very carefully scrutinized with respect to any policy being implemented. Unless other policies and conditions do not change, any dropout policy (either on the national or institutional level) would only have limited success.

We believe that changing or modifying other policies and measures might lead to increasing the completion rates. The biggest challenge is a true diversification of the Czech higher education system. We are afraid that the existing system under current conditions is not able to absorb any dropout policy and make it work without a fundamental change accompanied by changes in the funding system and the accreditation process.

After conducting our case study, we tend to claim that recent high dropout rate in Czech higher education is rather a consequence of inefficient higher education policy in

\(^{11}\) As we know, many authors calculate the dropout rate differently. There is no universal calculation methodology employed across higher education literature.

\(^{12}\) Mass higher education is usually considered when it contains at least 15 percent of the relevant age cohort and universal when at least 50 percent of the age cohort participates (Trow, 1972). Higher education in Western Europe reached mass status in 1970s and certain countries (among them France, Germany and Italy) moved towards universal access 20 years later (Neave, 1994).
general in the past 25 years, rather than a sign of insufficient quality of students, poor teaching or inefficiencies on the institutional level.

1.6 Annex

1.6.1 List of Interviewees

National level:
Bob Kartous, Education expert, EDUin, www.eduin.cz
Jakub Fischer, Chairperson, Higher Education Council
Petr Baierl, Aneta Hašková, Marek Hodulík, Filip Přihoda, Daniel Thibaud, Members of the Students Chamber, Higher Education Council
Eva Münsterová, Member of the Board, Higher Education Council
Jan Roda, Vice-chairperson, Accreditation Commission
Jiří Smrčka, Secretary, Accreditation Commission
Karolína Gondková, Director, Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports
Jiří Zlatuška, Chairperson, Committee on Science, Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, Chamber of Deputies, Parliament of the Czech Republic
Milena Králíčková, Vice-Rector for Education, Charles University in Prague

Czech University of Life Sciences, Prague
Petr Zasadil, Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs
Martin Pelikán, Dean, Faculty of Economics and Management
Ivana Berníková, Head, Information and Consultancy Centre
Ivana Tichá, Head, Department of Management
Lucie Vokáčová, Lecturer, Department of Management
Jan Huml, Lecturer, Department of Management
Josef Pavlíček, Lecturer, Department of Information Engineering
Michala Zemanová, Martin Fabián, Daniel Zháněl, Václav Fiala, Veronika Jandová, Jan Černý, Pavel Pešek, Klára Schejbalová, Šárka Čechová, Jana Petrášková, Luboš Koblása, Michal Fogl, Ladislav Kubelka, Eva Zusková, Michal Kačor, Martin Tichý, Zuzana Šurovčíková, Vít Blažek, Katka Hanychová, Jana Turnerová, Ivana Hřebcová, Jaroslav Brož, Student Representatives
University of West Bohemia, Pilsen

Ilona Mauritzová, Rector
Jaroslav Dokoupl, Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs
Pavla Hrabačková, Head, Information and Counseling Center
Jiří Hammerbauer, Dean, Faculty of Electrical Engineering
Eva Kučerová, Vice-Dean for Education, Faculty of Electrical Engineering
Jiří Staněk, Vice-Dean for Education, Faculty of Mechanical Engineering
Hana Kunešová, Vice-Dean for Education, Faculty of Economics
Josef Mištera, Dean, Ladislav Sutnar Faculty of Design and Art
Lukáš Harvánek, Hana Fejfarová, David Ženíšek, Jan Brázda, Pavel Petrle, Simona Egriová, Student Representatives

1.6.2 References


Sociologický ústav AV ČR. Available online: http://www.stratif.cz/?operation=display&id=92


2 England
Liz Thomas (Edgehill University)

2.1 Introduction
This case study focuses on England, rather than the UK as a whole, as each of the four nations has a distinctive approach to higher education policy, and have adopted different policy tools to improve student retention and success. In England alone there are more than 100 universities, and approximately 350 higher education providers in receipt of public sector funding. This is in addition to more than 600 private providers, most of which are comparatively small.

It was therefore necessary to select two institutions to participate in this case study report. This was done by posting a request out on a number of national lists associated with the widening participation and study success. These will have reached approximately 2500 individuals in the HE community. Nine institutions volunteered to participate in the study. The volunteers consisted of four more selective institutions (SI), who tend to have higher entry requirements and a more traditional student cohort, and five more inclusive, recruiting institutions (II), with generally lower entry requirements and a more diverse student population. (These differences largely reflect the binary division that was abolished in 1992). It was decided to choose one selective and one inclusive institution for this study (mirroring previous work on access and student success in England such as Bowes et al 2012). To select institutions to participate their non-continuation rates were compared (drawing on data about the full-time first degree entrants 2009/10, which was the most up to date national data set available at the time (see Table 1 below). The best performing institutions of each institutional type were selected, as this was felt to provide the most useful insights into policies and practices to improve study success outcomes.

Table 1: Non-continuation expectations and performance of higher education institutions volunteering to participate in the English case study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HEI</th>
<th>Young Actual</th>
<th>BM</th>
<th>Mature Actual</th>
<th>BM</th>
<th>All Actual</th>
<th>BM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>II1</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II2</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II3</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II4</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II5</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SI1</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SI2</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SI3</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SI4</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England total</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK total</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13 Bowes et al 2012 identify two other institutional types: specialist or professional institutes and small institutions (predominantly further education colleges delivering higher education programmes. These two groups however account for comparatively small numbers of students, for example the latter educates approximately 8% of higher education students.
BM = Benchmark, which is the expected figure calculated by the Higher Education Statistics Agency, taking into account a range of factors.

It can be seen that that the two selected institutions, Inclusive Institution two (II2 – Coventry University) and Selective Institution three (SI3 – University of Leeds), both performed above their expected benchmarks in relation to all three non-continuation indicators for full-time first degree entrants, and above the English and UK rates.

Throughout this case study use is made of this non-continuation data, produced by the Higher Education Statistics Agency, based on annual returns made by HEIs.¹⁴

### 2.1.1 Coventry University¹⁵

Coventry University was established in 1843 as the School of Design, and in 1970 was established at the Lanchester Polytechnic, changing its name to Coventry Polytechnic in 1980. In June 1992 the Further and Higher Education Act enabled the institution to adopt the title of Coventry University. Coventry is located in the Midlands, close to Birmingham and has a long industrial heritage, particularly associated with vehicle manufacturing.

Coventry University has 24,000 students (approximately 20,000 undergraduates); 52% male, 48% female; 13% international students. The student to staff ratio is 16:1.

Coventry University has a strong vocational emphasis of courses and links with industry; the university is firmly focussed on preparing students for successful futures. Coventry University accepts a range of qualifications that enable students to progress onto undergraduate programmes. Degree programmes require 160–260 UCAS tariff points, depending on the subject.

Coventry University is ranked 51st in the 2015 Complete University Guide, with particularly high student satisfaction rates (4.20 out of 5.0), degree completion (87.6%) and graduate prospects (70.5%). It outperforms the majority of inclusive institutions in England, and some selective institutions.

"Ten years ago, we were in the bottom ten, I think, in terms of student retention. I don't know where we are now, but we’re nowhere near the bottom."

In 2013-14 86% of Coventry University students completed the degree they started on, which put the university in the top 25% of HEIs in the country, which is “a huge turnaround, in less than ten years”. The institution has a target of 5% non-completion. It has been allocated approximately £4.5 million Student Opportunity funding for improving retention in 2015/6.

### 2.1.2 University of Leeds

The University of Leeds traces its roots as far back as 1831, and was awarded a university charter in 1904, Leeds is now one of the largest universities in the UK. Leeds is located in the West Yorkshire in the north east of England. Its industrial roots are in the

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¹⁴ All data is available from: https://www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2072.

¹⁵ Information from the Complete University Guide, http://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/coventry/
woollen and textiles industry, but more recently has become a medical, educational and financial hub in the north.

The University of Leeds offers a very wide range of degree programmes, encompassing both traditional and vocational, with opportunities for studying abroad and in industry. Entry is competitive, the applications to places ratio is 6:1, and in 2012 the average entry UCAS tariff score was 424. The University of Leeds has approximately 34,000 students, 41% male: 59% female. The student to staff ratio is 14.7:1.

The University of Leeds has good rates of continuation and continuation, consistently performing better than its benchmarks, with less than 6% not completing or transferring to another programme in 2012/13. University of Leeds is ranked 23rd in the 2015 Complete University Guide, student satisfaction is 4.05 (out of a maximum of 5.0), degree completion is 94.4% and graduate prospects are 69.1%. The University has been allocated almost £900,000 Student Opportunity funding for improving retention in 2015-16.

### 2.1.3 National stakeholders

A long list of national stakeholders was drawn up and these were all contacted by email, and their responses were used to inform the country questionnaire. Drawing on these responses and guidance in the Case Study Researchers Manual a range of national stakeholders were approached and interviewed (see appendix).

### 2.2 Definitions of study success

In England (and in the UK) two measures of student retention are commonly used in respect of full-time undergraduates:

*The first is the ‘completion rate’ – the proportion of starters in a year who continue their studies until they obtain their qualification, with no more than one consecutive year out of higher education. As higher education courses take years to complete, an expected completion rate is calculated by the Higher Education Statistics Agency... A more immediate measure of retention is the proportion of an institution’s intake which is enrolled in higher education in the year following their first entry to higher education. This is the ‘continuation rate’. (National Audit Office Report on Retention, 2007, p. 5).*

These are widely understood and endorsed by stakeholders across the HE sector and beyond. A second relevant indicator is Destination of Leavers of Higher Education, which measures employment rate using a centrally co-ordinated survey administered by HEIs. This is beyond the scope of this case study, although it is referred to by interviewees. Institutional case study respondents also refer to the National Student Survey (NSS) which is an annual survey designed to measure the satisfaction of final year undergraduate students about various aspects of their course and wider higher education experience (see [http://www.thestudentsurvey.com/about.php](http://www.thestudentsurvey.com/about.php) for a description). This does not measure study success, and was not implemented specifically to improve study success, but can be seen in this study to be a driver of changes to improve the student experience, with positive benefits for student retention and success.

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE 2013) recently identified four types of outcomes of HE: achieving a degree (retention and completion); achieving a first
or upper second class degree (attainment); achieving a degree and continuing to employment or further study; and achieving a degree and continuing to graduate employment (as opposed to any employment) or postgraduate study. This reflects the concern about differential outcomes, ensuring that all student groups are benefiting equally from HE.

HEFCE views these – retention, completion, attainment and progression - as the headline outcomes, but underneath this high level simplicity there are other aspects of success which are largely recognised to be connected to the learning experience. Key issues include student engagement with the learning experience, and the skills they have gained through participation in higher education, both in terms of personal and professional development. This focus on the wider benefits to higher education is perhaps inevitable when students are shouldering the burden of high tuition fees.

The definition of study success was discussed in the interviews – both with national stakeholders and institutions. The formal definitions cited above are widely used, but most respondents wanted to extend the notion of success, recognizing personal goals and aspirations, and distance travelled.

Similarly both Coventry University and the University of Leeds take a wider view of success, including maximising academic achievement and progressing to professional (graduate) employment.

“The student that we admit achieves to their maximum, and then leaves us with a good degree, whatever their maximum potential leads them to, and has access to the professions. Our definition of success I think includes, whilst they’re with us having an excellent taught experience in an environment that allows them to learn, that includes international perspective and leads onto graduate level employment, and access to all aspects of the profession... we then think we’re failing them if we don’t help them to aspire to access the very top professions that perhaps sometimes are limited to that group of people. So the Deloittes and the KPMGs and the foreign office, getting them in to recruit out students is where we put our effort...” (Coventry).

2.3 Short description of the higher education system

2.3.1 Statistical overview of access, retention and completion

In 2012-13 there were 2,340,275 HE students at HE institutions (HEIs), plus 186,455 HE students at FE colleges. There are also a large number of private providers (more than 600), most of which are comparatively small. The majority of students in the UK are registered for full-time study (79%); and 67% are under 21 when they commenced HE study. The young participation rate in England is 38%; (in Scotland it is 45%). Participation rates however vary between groups, for example 51% of young people in the most advantaged quintile participate in higher education, while only 20% participate from the most disadvantaged quintile. 43% of students are male, but there are significant differences between subjects, for example 80% of students are female in subjects allied to medicine. 71% of students identify themselves as 'white' (compare to other ethnic categories) and 82% have no known disability. The student population has been increasing since the system expanded in the early 1990s, and this while this has
slowed it has not stopped, despite the introduction of student tuition fees (2006) and significantly increased fees (2012/13). The population to part-time students declined significantly in 2012/13 and has not yet recovered, but student numbers remain in tact at the system level. In 2015/16 recruitment caps will no longer apply, enabling institutions to recruit as many students as they choose.

The majority of students continue in the HE system. As is shown in Table 1 above, only 7.1% of first degree entrants do not continue in HE after their first year. 81.9% of students in England are projected to complete their degree; 3.4% to achieve an alternative award; 4.1% to transfer to another institution; 10.4% to neither gain an award or transfer; and 0.1% are not known. Continuation and completion rates have been improving gradually and fairly consistently over the past 10 years.

2.3.2 Overview of the HE sector

England has a unified, but highly differentiated HE sector, consisting of selective and inclusive universities, specialist institutions, and further education institutions delivering HE provision (usually validated by an HEI or other national body). In 2012-13 there were 2,340,275 HE students at HE institutions (HEIs), plus 186,455 HE students at FE colleges.

The majority of provision is full-time bachelor degrees (usually three years full-time). There is a lack of higher vocational routes offering a genuine alternative to higher education. This helps to account for the high rates of participation in HE. All higher education institutions can offer shorter degree programmes, such as Foundation Degrees (2 years full-time), although they are more predominant in inclusive institutions and the college sector. Most institutions offer some part-time provision, and there are two public sector institutions that only provide part-time courses. Most institutions offer predominantly face-to-face or blended learning programmes (combining face-to-face and on-line learning). It is widely assumed that students will complete their degree programme within the specified time-period.

2.3.3 Additional information about the HE sector

2.3.3.1 Scope and diversity of the system

The UK HE system in general, and the English system in particular is fairly standardised in terms of the structure of degrees offered, the majority being three years, full-time, face to face study. Part-time provision is available and some institutions offer alternatives, such as work-based learning, blended learning, or accelerated degrees. There is however a very wide diet of degree programmes available: according to the Universities and Colleges Central Admissions Service (UCAS) there are over 37,000 undergraduate courses at over 370 providers in the UK\footnote{https://www.ucas.com/ucas/undergraduate/find-course}. Most students choose up to five course that they apply to for admission.

2.3.3.2 Funding for students

Fees and student support are a key area of variation on the UK context, and the following information applies to England only. Students must pay deferred tuition fees (direct
costs) and support themselves financially through higher education (indirect costs). Three types of funding for students are available at the national level, while additional support may be available through a student’s HEI. The student financial support package comprises tuition fee loan, maintenance loan and grant.

Higher Education Institutions in England can charge up to £9000 tuition fees annually. UK and EU full-time and part-time students can apply for a Tuition Fee Loan to cover these fees. The loan is paid directly to the higher education provider, and students pay it back after graduation, once they reach the repayment threshold of £16,910. The interest rate is inflation, plus 3%.

A maintenance loan for living costs is available to full-time UK students under the age of 60. The size of loan is determined by income, status (living at home or away from home) and location (London or outside London, or abroad). For the academic year 2014/15 a student living at home may receive up to £4418; living away from home outside London up to £5,555; living away from home in London up to £7,751; and year of a UK course studying abroad up to £6,600. Again this is repayable on graduation, once the repayment threshold has been met.

Some full-time UK students are eligible for a maintenance grant for living costs, which does not have to be repaid, but is taken into account when the Maintenance Loan is calculated. Eligibility is shown in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Full-time student – household income</th>
<th>Grant for courses from September 2014</th>
<th>Grant for courses from September 2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>£25,000 or less</td>
<td>£3,387</td>
<td>£3,387</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£30,000</td>
<td>£2,441</td>
<td>£2,441</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£35,000</td>
<td>£1,494</td>
<td>£1,494</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£40,000</td>
<td>£547</td>
<td>£547</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£42,620</td>
<td>£50</td>
<td>£50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over £42,620</td>
<td>No grant</td>
<td>No grant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 2.3.3.3 Funding for higher education institutions

Funding for higher education institutions in England comes from two sources: public funding which is distributed by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE); and students fees which are usually paid directly to the HEP by the student loan (see above). The government allocates the money for higher education to HEFCE in the winter, and in March the grant is announced for each institution for the following academic year. The grant comprises the teaching grant and the research grant. The teaching grant is the funding that is relevant to student retention and success. The Teaching Grant is based on institutions’ student numbers. It is paid in three tranches (before, during and after the academic year in question) so that it can be adjusted in line with actual students’ numbers. Following the introduction of higher tuition fees (academic year 2012-13) the funding model has changed, under the new regime payment is only made to subsidise high-cost subjects. In addition the Teaching Grant includes Student Opportunity Funding.

Student Opportunity (SO) funding is composed of three strands: widening access for students from disadvantaged backgrounds; improving retention; and supporting disabled students. The retention allocation is calculated based on ‘risk; of withdrawing, it takes
into account age, entry qualifications and course (degree or other undergraduate programme). Risk is categorised as low, medium or high; additional funding is paid for medium and high risk students. This information is used to calculate a risk weighting for each institution, which is the weighted proportion of UK-domiciled students at risk, divided by the total number of UK-domiciled full-time undergraduate students at the institution. A London weighting is then applied. A similar model is used for part-time students.

In 2014-15 the total student opportunity funding was £366 million, of which £273 million was allocated to the retention of full and part-time students. Coventry University will receive approximately £5.5 million of Student Opportunity funding in 2014-15, of which about £4.4 million is for improving retention. The University of Leeds will receive £1.7 million on the same year, of which about £700,000 is for improving retention. This reflects the different student populations of the two universities, the associated risk of early departure and the additional costs associated with retaining and graduating these students (the background and implementation of the Student Opportunity Funding is discussed below).

### 2.3.3.4 Performance of the system

The English HE system performs well in relation to study success, as demonstrated by the following evidence:

- The non-continuation rate for the sector is 6.6% for UK-domiciled full-time first degree entrants in 2011/12 (i.e. 93.4% continued to their second year of study). This has improved over time, as indicated in the table below (all data from HESA).
- The projected completion rate here combines all those projected to complete their degree and those who complete an alternative qualification (all data from HESA).

#### Table 3: Outcomes of part-time first degree entrants in 1996-97 after 11 academic years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Non-continuation rate</th>
<th>Projected completion rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001-2</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>79.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-3</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>79.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-4</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>79.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-5</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
<td>80.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-6</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>80.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-7</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>80.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-8</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
<td>81.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-9</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>81.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-10</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
<td>81.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-11</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>84.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-12</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>85.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-13</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>85.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The outcomes of part-time students are however less good, which may be because students have different objectives, or because there are factors that make it more difficult to complete part-time degree programme.
Table 4: Outcomes of part-time first degree entrants in 1996-97 after 11 academic years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort</th>
<th>1st degree awarded</th>
<th>Still active</th>
<th>No longer active</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. of entrants</td>
<td>% of entrants</td>
<td>No. of entrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK HEIs (no-OU)</td>
<td>6,490</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open University</td>
<td>10,025</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>1,745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16,515</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>1,005</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: HEFCE 2009/18, from BIS 2014

2.3.3.5 Context

The UK HE system is very efficient: students are only able to take up to one year out of higher education without having been deemed to have withdrawn, and there is little opportunity to transfer between HEIs (for example in 2012-13 4.5% of students are expected to transfer). Institutional funding is linked to the actual number of students studying, i.e. those continuing and completing their programmes.

There is also a strong national commitment to equity in each of the four countries of the UK. The Higher Education Council for England (HEFCE) has policies and approaches relating to widening participation and employability and aims to influence institutions. The Quality Assurance Agency has oversight of quality, but it is maintained by individual institutions. Data about retention, completion and employment rates are collected and published. This data has a powerful effect as it spotlights institutional performance in the public arena, and is used to inform assessments of effectiveness and league tables.

Public funding for HEIs has declined and been replaced by student fees, set by institutions, up to a maximum of £9000 per year. Students defer the payment of fees, and are only eligible to repay once their earnings have reached a threshold level. Students are also eligible for subsidised loans to cover their living costs, which they do not begin repaying until they have left HE and are earning above a threshold level. Institutions have introduced higher fees - for home students most HEI courses charge £9000 per annum. Institutions have also introduced financial support for students. This includes fee waivers, bursaries, scholarships, HE accommodation or other campus services etc. Institutions are required to provide some financial support to low income students and report on this to the Office for Fair Access, but there are no national standards about how much etc, so the same student may get very different financial support from different institutions.

There is an expectation that all institutions will provide support services, but there have been no specific developments in this area, with the exception of financial support noted above. All/most institutions provide academic and pastoral support, often organised and delivered centrally through a one-stop-shop. There is increasing recognition of the value of delivering this services at the academic school or programme level (especially academic support and first contact for pastoral support).
2.4 Description of national and institutional policies

2.4.1 National policies

2.4.1.1 Policy overview

In England higher education policies are developed and implemented by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) on behalf of the relevant government ministry, currently the Department of Business, Innovation and Skill (BIS). BIS stresses the diversity of the HE sector and the autonomy of higher education institutions to decide how best to improve student outcomes. Annually BIS provides guidance to HEFCE on its priorities, and HEFCE converts this into policy and guidance for the sector. HEFCE has two directorates that shape policy that impact on student retention and success: learning and teaching and student access and success. These two areas work together in relation to retention and success: for example in the early 2000s, HEFCE requested HEIs to prepare and submit both learning and teaching strategies and widening participation strategies (which spanned the student lifecycle and recognised that access to HE is insufficient, people need to be retained in higher education and have a successful experience).

“We explicitly, in those two sets of guidance, the learning and teaching strategy guidance, the WP strategy guidance, cross-referred to each other. You should be linking in your WP strategy to your learning and teaching strategy.” (HEFCE interview)

From 2003 funding was provided to institutions to improve retention, which became the biggest part of the widening participation premium (now called student opportunity funding, described below). In addition other initiatives and funding were introduced to improve the quality of learning and teaching within institutions and across the sector, e.g. the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund, the Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning, the Learning and Teaching Support Network and the Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education – the latter two were subsequently merged to form the Higher Education Academy (HEA) in 2004, which leads on improving the quality of learning and teaching and implements national work on behalf of HEFCE, such as the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme. This work was intended to raise the esteem and parity of learning and teaching (compared to research) and to develop the capacity in the sector for pedagogical development. The focus was not explicitly on student retention and success, but the link between learning, teaching, retention and success has long been recognised by HEFCE (at least to some extent).

The work to improve student retention and success has been underpinned by the use of data, in particular performance indicators on continuation and completion, which provide institutional level data, including a benchmark of where each institution is expected to be in terms of retention (discussed below), and more recently the National Student Survey (NSS) which surveys final year students about their satisfaction with their higher education experience. Both of which have become drivers for institutional change. In addition there were two reports by the National Audit Office which pushed the sector (institutions and HEFCE) to do more to improve retention (NAO 2002 and 2007). The second NAO report resulted in a national research project to examine how to improve student retention and success (Thomas 2012). Subsequently further work has been initiated by HEFCE and undertaken by HEA and the Equality Challenge Unit to further
understand and address the attainment differential, especially in relation to black and minority ethnic groups.

In addition, the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) was set up under the Higher Education Act 2004 to ensure that the introduction of higher tuition fees in 2006-07 did not deter people from entering higher education for financial reasons; and universities and colleges were explicitly committed to increasing participation in higher education among under-represented groups. Since then ministers have given OFFA additional guidance regarding how they should work within the higher education sector, including extending the remit beyond access to HE to retention and success in undergraduate higher education and progression into the labour market, graduate employment and postgraduate study.

Between 2012 and 2013 BIS requested HEFCE and OFFA to draft a strategy for widening access and student success; the National Strategy for Access and Student Success was published in 2014 (BIS 2014). HEFCE and OFFA took a sector-wide approach, synthesising existing evidence and research, and commissioning new research and evaluation to develop a national strategy. With regards to retention and success the strategy, the emphasis is in on the importance of belonging particularly to academic programmes through learning and teaching, combining universal and targeted support, and appropriate financial support.

### 2.4.1.2 Institutional funding – public funding and student tuition fees

Institutional funding is linked to actual student numbers – which are reported annually to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). The explicit connection between funding and student numbers impacts positively on the development of institutional measures to improve student retention and completion. The National Audit Office reports have put pressure on HEFCE and institutions to further improve continuation and completion rates (NA) 2002 and 2007). In response to these reports the Government tightened up on audit process and reclawing overpayments to institutions that have reported incorrectly the numbers of students still in higher education, providing a further ‘stick’ to institutions to improve retention (Longden 2012). Although the majority of funding is now paid by students rather than the state, it is still directly linked to enrolled and continuing student numbers. This has had the effect of focusing institutional attention even more on retention, completion and progression outcomes (see performance indicators and league tables below), and institutions have taken greater responsibility for student retention and success. The only challenge here is, perhaps, knowing how to improve student continuation and completion. This gap has been filled by national research, and analysis of institutional data, and institutional research with students to provide further understanding.

### 2.4.1.3 Student Opportunity Funding

A small pilot study (PA Consulting 2002) and a subsequent study involving 18 case studies (JM Consulting 2004) demonstrated that retaining some students is more expensive that retaining other students. The retention strand of the Widening Participation Premium was introduced to address this in 2003/4 (recently renamed Student Opportunity Funding) to enable institutions to better support students at risk of early withdrawal. The money is paid to HEIs and is formula-driven based on risk, thus payments are dependent on the age of students and their entry qualifications.
Institutions with a large number of ‘at risk’ students receive considerable funding from this element of the teaching grant, for example, in 2015-16 quite a few institutions receive more than £4 million (https://www.hefce.ac.uk/funding/annallocns/1516/lt/).

In 2013-14 Student Opportunity Funding amounted to £228 million. Analysis (Bowes et al 2012) found that the vast majority of institutions use this money for additional learning, teaching and assessment support and enhanced pastoral support, while over half also offer support with academic development, have undertaken curriculum organisation and design work and offer career development. Bowes et al 2012 found that institutions reported that this funding made an important contribution to their efforts to improve retention and success. As shown above, at sector level there has been year on year improvements in continuation and completion rates. A more detailed analysis of the relationships between the investment and student outcomes are not currently available. (HEFCE has recently commissioned work to enable better measurement of outcomes in relation to investment and activities; this is in response to increasing demands to demonstrate efficiency and value for money).

2.4.1.4 Access Agreements

All institutions charging tuition fees over £6000 are required to submit an Access Agreement to the Office for Fair Access (OFFA). This documents specifies how a proportion of additional fee income it to be spent to ensure the access and success of disadvantaged student groups (particularly low SES). This must include outreach work, financial aid and spending to improve retention and success (including progression beyond HE). Each year guidance is provided by OFFA which helps to steer the sector’s approach to widening access, and improving retention and success. Furthermore, Access Agreements must be approved by the Director of the Office for Fair Access, however in reality approval is not withheld, but changes to the Access Agreement are made through informal discussions. To improve the access, retention, completion, attainment and progression of students from lower SES groups (and other institutional target groups). OFFA undertakes annual monitoring, and additional analysis - see http://www.offa.org.uk/publications/. The uses and impact of Access Agreements were researched in 2013 (Bowes et al 2013).

Bowes et al (2013) found that Access agreements and associated spend have had a positive impact on institutional policies, planning and behaviour in relation to WP and have contributed towards progress made in relation to institutional and wider WP targets and goals, with most HEIs achieving or exceeding their targets. The process of producing and implementing an Access Agreement has impact on both institutions approach to this work, and to the outcomes for students. Since the 2012-13 access agreements, predicted expenditure on retention and student success has increased by 43.9 per cent from £82.4 million to £118.6 million. Meanwhile, investment in financial support– is predicted to rise by 5.6 per cent by 2017-18 from £439.7 million to £464.5 million (excluding the Government’s NSP allocation). (BIS 2014, p63). Bowes et al 2013, who found that they need to produce an annual access agreement had a positive impact on the institutional approach to both widening access and improving student retention and success. OFFA’s statistical analysis has called into question the value of financial support on improving student retention and success (OFFA 2014), although institutional research and analysis paints a more complex picture (Nursaw Associates 2015), and thus OFFA is working with the sector to further evaluate the impact of different models of financial support. Current
guidance (OFFA publication 2015/01) encourages institutions to reduce spending on financial support in favour of other activities (to support both widening access and improving student retention and success).

2.4.1.5 Student financial support and the National Scholarship Programme (NSP)

In England all fees are deferred, and students pay nothing up front; this is intended to enable all students to study in HE and complete studies. In addition, public maintenance grants are provided for low income students; additional living costs are covered by loans. Maintenance loans comprise a non-financially assessed portion, which all students who are eligible for the loan can receive (i.e. dependent on study status); and financially assessed portion. All students are eligible for an annual loan of £3750, without means testing. Additional support is available for students from families with an income below £60,000 per year. Graduate students only begin paying fee and maintenance loans when they are earning above £21,000 per year, at a rate of 9% of any income above this level. If earnings drop, then payments drop. If graduates stop work for whatever reason, then payments stop as well. The payment threshold is reviewed regularly to bring it into line with growth in earnings. The interest rate on the loans is the low rate that the Government itself pays on borrowing money. There is a rebate for low earners: any balance remaining after 30 years is written off.

Following the increase of tuition fees the government provided institutions with funding for the National Scholarship programme, which needed to be match funded, to provide additional financial support to students with a family income below £25,000. The schemes were developed and implemented at the institutional level, and money was allocated using additional criteria as many institutions were not allocated sufficient money to support all low income students. Initially only £1000 could be in a cash bursary, thus fee waivers were common and other approaches included vouchers etc for institutional services such as accommodation and catering. As a consequence of the formative evaluation of the NSP, which found that on the whole students valued more highly cash, the restriction on cash bursaries was lifted and thus students could receive up to £3000 in cash.

The aim of the NSP was to improve the access and retention of eligible low income students through the provision of additional financial support. The evaluation of the NSP found little evidence of impact on student retention and outcomes, but this work is still on-going (Bowes et al 2013b http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/year/2013/nspevaly2/). Institutional evidence however suggests that some models of financial support – e.g. in conjunction with other types of support, can have a positive influence on student outcomes (see OFFA 2015). This is an area of on-going ambiguity and research, and OFFA is currently looking to work with the HE sector to evaluate different models of financial support.

2.4.1.6 Retention performance indicators, benchmarks and league tables

The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) collects data about non-continuation and completion from HEIs which is published and publically available annually. HESA calculates a ‘benchmark’ for every institution (which takes into account subject portfolio, entry qualifications and student diversity); this is the ‘expected’ rate of non-continuation.
The benchmark is published alongside the actual performance with regards to the total institutional student population and sub-sections of the student population (particularly related to the widening participation agenda). This enables institutions to compare themselves year on year, with other HEIs and with where they should ‘expect’ to be. The aim is to provide better quality information to inform institutions and the public (e.g. potential students) about retention performance.

Furthermore, national newspapers and other organisations use this data to produce league tables about retention, and the information is fed into wider league tables about the ‘quality’ of individual HE providers in England and the UK, for example the Complete University Guide.

The performance indicators were introduced to improve retention, and Longden (2012) cites the value of the performance indicators in ‘bearing down’ on retention. As discussed below, the institutional visits found that the performance indicators and the associated league tables have a positive effect on driving institutions to address the underlying causes of higher rates of withdrawal.

2.4.1.7 Improving the quality of learning and teaching through the Higher Education Academy (HEA)

The English policy context sought to connect improving retention and success with learning teaching since the 2000s, and this is reinforced in the National Strategy (BIS 2014). The significant contribution of learning and teaching to improving retention and success is evidenced in more recent English research (Hockings et al and Thomas 2012), and this resonates with European research cited in the literature review, Australian and Irish research (Bowes et al 2013b).

Following the reports of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education on the future of higher education (NCIHE, 1997) a range of national initiatives were introduced to enhance the status and improve the quality of learning and teaching within institutions and across the sector – as noted above. In particular, the Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN) was set up as a network of 24 ‘subject centres’, providing pedagogical subject experts across the UK, who had the capacity and funding to engage teaching staff in the same discipline areas to innovate, disseminate and develop more effective approaches to learning, teaching and assessment. This was work supported by the Generic Centre, which took a more thematic approach (assessment, e-learning, employability and widening participation being key issues). Simultaneously the Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education was established, with a similar aim but a different approach: to set standards of for professional practice in learning and teaching, and to work with HEIs to accredited institutional postgraduate programmes for staff to develop skills and qualifications in learning and teaching in higher education.

Subsequently in 2004 these two organisations were merged to form the Higher Education Academy (HEA), owned by Universities UK (which represents all universities) and supported by the four funding bodies in the UK. The HEA leads nationally on raising the status and improving the quality of learning and teaching in the UK, which includes implementing national priorities and projects on behalf of HEFCE, such as the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme which recognises excellent teaching. The HEA has also continued the work of the ILTHE around professional recognition. There has been a revision to the professional standards, the introduction of four categories of HEA
fellowship (associate, fellow, senior and principal levels), on-going accreditation and recognition institutional postgraduate programmes for new teaching staff, and an extended focus on continuing professional development. Similarly, the HEA continued much of the work of the LTSN, developing one of its thematic strands of work from a focus on widening participation, to student retention and success. This included undertaking research, sharing effective practice, influencing national policy and developing and implementing institutional change programmes to improve learning and teaching and improve student retention and success.

All of the work of the HEA is intended to raise the esteem and parity of learning and teaching (compared to research) and to develop the capacity in the sector for pedagogical innovation and development, and improve the quality of learning and teaching. The focus was not explicitly on student retention and success, but subsequently this became a core plank of their work, and the link between learning, teaching, retention and success has long been recognised by HEFCE (at least to some extent). The National Strategy for Access and Student Success (BIS 2014) identifies learning and teaching as a primary approach to improving retention and success, and references various HEA publications. The value of the HEA’s retention work on influencing national policy and institutional practice is identified in the evaluation of the HE (Brooks et al 2014).

2.4.2 Institutional policies
Besides the points stated for the national policies the following issues are important here:
- Translation and implementation of national policies at the institutional level.
- Description of institutional policies that are not informed/inspired by national policies (local policies)
- Good practices of institutional policies around study success

2.4.2.1 Overview of the approaches taken by English HEIs
Within English HEIs in general, and the case study institutions in particular (Coventry University and University of Leeds) improving student retention and success is a priority. This is because of both the structure of the English higher education system and the specific policies pursued at the national level, both of which motivate HEIs to improve their rate retention and completion rates. The incentives are financial; the number of students enrolled, continuing in study and completing determine institutional funding; and institutional retention, completion and employability rates are publically available and may inform potential students’ decisions about which HEIs to apply to and attend.

2.4.2.2 Institutional commitment (funding)
Both institutions demonstrated commitment at the senior level to improve student retention, satisfaction and outcomes; this was particularly clear at Coventry University. Given the structure of higher education in England (with funding following students) and the explicit ‘competition’ for students between HEIs the primary motivation to improve student retention and success is student numbers and funding.

For example, the former Vice Chancellor of Coventry University instigated a number of measures to improve student outcomes. The first step was to put in place appropriate data collection mechanisms to ensure fine-grained understanding of the issues with
academic areas and programmes to enable accountability. The next step was to revise the learning and teaching strategy to bring about the necessary changes; and these themes are re-enforced through other institutional processes, such as course review. Twice a year academic teams receive detailed information about the performance of their programmes/and students (which includes completion), and then course teams go away together to spend a day reviewing their course and agreeing how to address poor achievement. Subsequently a report and action plan are prepared and reviewed; this includes identifying best practice and barriers to progress. Academic teams are encouraged to identify barriers at three levels: what could they do about stuff? What does the faculty need to do to help? What does the university need to do to help them? The approach at Coventry is premised on the belief the classroom experience accounts for at least 50% of the factors that contribute to improve study success. This requires academic leadership, and involving colleagues in the process of development and change.

2.4.2.3 Performance indicators, league tables and devolved internal accountability (Coventry University) (information)

As noted above, England has made use of performance indicators which provide public information about the expected and actual performance of each higher education institution. The performance indicators and associated league tables are driving change in institutions. Coventry University has made a concerted effort to improve its performance against a number of measures and improve its position in the league tables, and improving retention has been central to this: ten years ago Coventry University was in the bottom decile for student retention, and now is in the top quarter.

*Interviewer: So, the other league tables are important as well?*

*Respondent: They are really important, but I think the key thing is, this isn’t just about getting the figures right for the league table. This is actually about positive impacts on the student experience.*

In order to improve student retention Coventry University has extended the performance indicator and league table model for internal purposes to hold academic course teams accountable for their performance. This identifies academic programmes with poor performance in relation to specific indicators (e.g. retention and completion) and then the course team develops an action plan.

"Metrics are really important, we put numbers and targets and lead tables and we name and praise and name and shame at both ends of the league tables...Teaching quality league tables, graduate destination league tables, course by course, module by module."

2.4.2.4 Additional evidence: NSS and student voice, module evaluations (information)

Both institutions identified the importance of the National Student Survey (NSS) in both driving and informing change. Insights from the NSS have driven changes in both institutions, and these in turn are likely to have impacted on student retention and success. For example at Coventry University they have moved from a six-week turn around for feedback to student on their work, to three weeks for first and second years and ten days for final year students. And in addition feed-forward has been added.
Not only is the NSS driving change, but so too is the Student Voice – listening to the views of students on their experience in HE. Both institutions have a network of student representatives, who raise issues with staff teams.

“There are 1,300 reps, some of whom are halls reps and service reps, but mainly course reps.... The idea is that there’s a real structure that maps onto the academic structure, so that all those people can talk to each other regularly.” (Coventry)

Coventry University has made much greater use of its module evaluations: rather than them taking place at the end of the module they take place during the module, to allow the changes to be made to benefit the current rather than the next group of students.

“The tutor is required, within five working days, to post on the online learning environment a response to the student, saying, ‘You said this, and this is what I’m doing about it,’ or, ‘Thank you so much for telling me my teaching’s great, and thank you for the constructive comments. I’ll be taking those on.’” (Coventry)

Coventry monitors withdrawals and non-completions on a two-weekly basis. The data is submitted to the Deputy Vice Chancellor for Student Experience and the Associate Deans, and is discussed to identify problems and solutions. This is underpinned by a target of 5% non-completion.

2.4.2.5 Improving teaching quality (Coventry University) (organisation of learning and teaching)

Funding, performance indicators and student evidence are driving change, but at Coventry University much of the improvement is being achieved through efforts to enhance the student experience through the quality of learning and teaching and the associated regulations.

Learning and teaching changes mentioned by Coventry University:

- Reducing the number of programmes and modules offered, and working in course teams, rather than module teams. The university has many joint programmes, combining two or more disciplines. These students were the least satisfied: “these poor students were often let down by the system.
- “When you’ve got that modular, sort of, scheme, you bang things together-, that’s a technical term for course design, in such a way that because we’ve got the modules, ‘Well, we can pop them together, these a little market out there, we’ll pick up those twenty students.’ Actually, because we’ve banged it together... It’s a recipe for disaster. We said we’re willing to sacrifice a few students coming onto our courses by forcing them to make choices”.
- Working as course teams, and training course director to be able to lead effective teams. The teams consist of academics, librarians, technicians and students, and they take joint responsibility for delivery and outcomes: “If there’s a drop out and completion and satisfaction issue, the course team can effect that”.
- Planning and delivering courses, rather than modules: For first years there’s no choice, second years have a little bit of choice which is being reduced and final years have a small amount of choice. That makes timetabling reliable – which is good for students, and provides clear pathways through HE.
“Looking from the outside, we don’t have many students—, you say, ‘Why are you going to university,’ and they don’t say, ‘Well, I’m going to study a bunch of modules.’ You know, it’s the course. On the other side for the course team, the coherence around the course ethos, the pedagogic approaches that are going to be applied, the integration of assessment and opportunities to provide a holistic, deep experience around a course are so much different... We say, ‘Actually in the end we’re the subject experts. That’s what you’re coming for, you’re coming to study a degree with us, and this is how we think we’re best able to serve you. We’ll induct you into the subject area over the first two years, and then give you some flexibility about the directions in your subject area, but actually it’s at master’s level you’re really going to specialise.’” This also helps to build a sense of belonging to a specific programme of study.

- Rather than a peer observation system of teaching, Coventry has a management system; heads of department and associate heads go into the classroom, observe and provide feedback. The focus is on pedagogy: how to get the curriculum contents across (this is significant at Coventry as approximately 60% of courses are accredited by a professional body, so there is limited freedom about the curriculum contents.
- Learning and teaching awards, which include cash prizes for individuals to spend as they choose.
- Changes to regulations: students have to submit their work on time – otherwise they receive a zero, and students who don’t submit a piece of work are longer allowed to re-sit it. These changes have had an “enormously positive impact on the students”.
- Creating social learning spaces to allow students to learn together collaboratively on campus.
- International experience: We make a promise to all of our students that they’ll have an international experience as part of their study... We don’t count international students coming in as being part of the international experience.... The idea is 40% of our student population will actually go abroad as part of their study, but we use online learning extensively to link students in different parts of the world together on projects. That has nearly 2,000 students now working together each year. So, we’re using all sorts of techniques.

2.4.2.6 Staff development, monitoring reward and recognition (organisation of learning and teaching)

Nationally there have been a number of initiatives (discussed above) designed to develop academic staff’s capacity as effect educators. Both Coventry University and the University of Leeds actively engage with the issue of staff development, reward and recognition.

Absolutely massive training. The CPD offer for our academic staff is as good as there is. It doesn’t only talk about presence in the classroom. We address issues like intercultural competence in academic practice and those really important issues that engage people. (Coventry)

Both institutions offer a postgraduate certificate, which new staff and encouraged to undertake. Successful completion of the 60-credit programme automatically qualifies staff as fellows of the HEA. At Coventry staff with a more minor teaching role (e.g. PhD students who teach, paid lecturers, teaching assistants), do a 20-credit Master’s double module, which qualifies them as an associate fellow of the HEA.
Coventry is categorical that their approach is about the "ability to teach, not about the ability to write reflectively about your teaching". They have integrated four teaching observations into the 60-credit programme

"They can't pass, and they can't get the recognition, without passing a management-led teaching observation. That's built into the scheme. The assessments are real assessments, in that they innovate in their practice, evaluate it. We do collaborative online group work as well. It’s about enhancing practice rather than about enhancing the ability of those teachers to write reflectively." (Coventry)

In addition there is a route for existing members of staff to be recognised. The aim at Coventry is for 75% of staff to be accredited by the end of this year, and 90% by the end of next year.

Student satisfaction with learning and teaching and other factors is fed into the academic staff performance review process, thus holding academic staff individually accountable for the performance of staff on their courses: “if you fail one objective, effectively, then you can’t get the top-end, sort of, ratings”.

Furthermore, Coventry is linking high quality learning and teaching to promotion:

"We’re introducing a Professor of Teaching and Learning, which is not a scholarship route. It’s about high quality teaching and learning. So, you will soon be able to become a professor through a teaching route... It will be sustained, outstanding teaching practice, and it’s the ‘sustained’ word that’s really important. You’ve got to demonstrate that you are a top-class teacher. The deal for becoming a professor of teaching practice will be that you feed into the CPD of other staff, become a learning mentor.”

2.4.2.7 Monitoring student attendance (information and student support)

One strategy employed by some institutions to improve student retention and success is attendance monitoring. This involves recording who attends – or crucially misses – teaching sessions; this can be done manually (e.g. by taking a register) or electronically (e.g. through ‘swiping in’). This data can then be used to give institutions an early indication of students who may be at risk of withdrawal, and allow them to put in place a suitable follow up intervention.

“There is one module in each course, a core module, which is attendance-monitored by the tutor. That’s a paper-based thing that causes massive amounts of administration. The registrar’s currently looking at solutions.”

"Once they’ve done that, it goes into a central system, which generates an email, which gives a listing of students who’ve missed two consecutive weeks, and it’s escalated... Every Monday there’s a report saying, ‘These are the students who are flagged up.’”

If students exhibit persistent non-attendance within the first eight weeks they are withdrawn (after consultation with the course director). “It’s about saying to them, ‘You’ve got to be serious, otherwise we’re serious.’ We just have to move things on.”
2.4.2.8 Personal tutoring

Both institutions have in place a personal tutoring system which provides each student with an individual member of staff to deliver academic and/or personal support and guidance in relation to the academic experience in HE. Many UK institutions have reviewed and revised their approach to academic advising/personal tutoring, and Coventry is looking to move towards a model of academic coaching. Leeds is keen to ensure consistency in the student experience (as it is very large university) and so has standards which are implemented by academic areas.

"The model specifies that every student has a personal tutor who is an academic member of staff. They meet a fixed number of times a year and there’s a standard agenda. They’re engaged, have a consistent tutoring model to make sure they talk to their personal tutor.”

2.4.2.9 Student services

Both Coventry and Leeds have a well-developed suite of student services, designed to facilitate students’ engagement and success. Services include careers, sport, welfare and counselling, health and wellbeing, disability, accommodation and financial support. At Leeds the emphasis is on extra-curricular engagement in activities that contribute to personal and professional development, for example work placements and volunteering. They provide support services to enable all students to fully take advantages of these opportunities irrespective of their personal circumstances. Coventry staff feel that the academic and the embedded co-curricular experience is the most important features of the higher education experience, but their services are designed to enable students to overcome personal or academic challenges in relation to their engagement.

2.4.2.10 Student finance

Both universities use student finance interventions to enable students to participate fully in the academic and wider higher education experience, with a particular emphasis on the development of employability skills. For example, Leeds for Life is a programme targeted at students from low income backgrounds. It provides students with financial support, and services, including student ambassadors, to enable student to engage and develop both academically and professionally, and get the most out of their higher education experience. The Coventry University Promises project says that all course-related costs are covered by the tuition-fee, so there are no additional costs to a fully HE experience.

2.5 Reflection of policy mix

Although there are some tensions in the higher education policy arena, and in particular a struggle between research and learning and teaching, in general research does not undermine institutional commitment to enhancing the student experience and student outcomes. As both the institutional case studies demonstrated, HEIs of all types of a strong commitment to the student experience.

This commitment is driven by the way in which institutional funding is organised: funding – whether public or private – is directly connected to whether student is studying in higher education. Thus, every student who leaves higher education before completing
their target qualification is walking away with annual tuition fees of up to £9000, plus additional institutional income from campus services and accommodation. Additional student funding is provided to institutions in recognition of the additional costs of retaining some types of students, and this serves to reinforce institutional responsibility – and accountability with respect to the study success of students traditionally disadvantaged groups. Furthermore, on a competitive market for student recruitment, institutions also have a keen eye on their performance against their benchmarks and their position in various league tables. Thus improving student continuation and completion, satisfaction and employment outcomes are important priorities.

Thus, institutional funding and public information about the performance of individual institutions stimulate universities and colleges to improve study success, but the primary approaches are through learning and teaching, with some focus on additional support services (including but not limited to, financial support).

Funding – both directly and indirectly – is driving changes to learning and teaching and the student experience and this is mediated via evidence and information and complemented by student support. National policy is using funding levers to stimulate institutions to make internal changes to learning and teaching and student support. The funding levers are effective partly due to completion for student numbers in the HE sector, and this is fuelled by information – league tables.

2.6 Annex

2.6.1 List of interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Approached</th>
<th>Interviewed</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Department of Business, Innovations and Skills</td>
<td>BIS</td>
<td>Government department with responsibility for HE.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Education Academy</td>
<td>HEA</td>
<td>UK-wide organisation that aims to improve the quality of learning and teaching in HE. Funded through a mix of public funding, institutional membership and other income.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Higher Education Funding Council for England</td>
<td>HEFCE</td>
<td>BIS provides HE funding to HEFCE, who then distribute funding to HEIs, and implement BIS policy objectives. They have responsibility for learning and teaching and Student Opportunity work</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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(which incorporates work on retention and success).

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Million Plus Group</th>
<th>HEI interest group</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Yes</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Office for Fair Access</td>
<td>OFFA</td>
<td>OFFA oversees the mandatory institutional spending of additional fee income on widening access and improving student success.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quality Assurance Agency</td>
<td>QAA</td>
<td>Statutory organisation responsible for the quality of higher education programmes in the UK.</td>
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<td>Russell Group</td>
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<td>University Alliance</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<td>Universities UK</td>
<td>UUK</td>
<td>Organisation representing all UK universities</td>
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<th>Interviewed</th>
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<td>Student Experience</td>
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<td>HR Teaching and Learning</td>
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<td>Student Services</td>
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<td>Teaching and Learning</td>
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<td>CUReS</td>
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<td>Registry and Quality Assurance</td>
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<td>PhD student and RA in CUReS</td>
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<td>Centre for Academic Writing Director</td>
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<td>Library</td>
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</tr>
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</tr>
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<tr>
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<td>UK UG Scholarships Administrator</td>
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<td>Manager Student Experience</td>
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<td>Quality Assurance</td>
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<td>Senior Academic Development Officer</td>
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<td>Lifelong Learning Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 students</td>
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2.6.2 References


http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/Year/2014/heareview/Title,92165,en.html


Nursaw Associates (2015) What do we know about the impact of financial support on access and student success? Review of the research and evaluation of the impact of institutional financial support on access and student success. Bristol: OFFA

OFFA (2015) How to produce an access agreement for 2016-17. Bristol: OFFA

OFFA (2014) Do bursaries have an effect on retention rates? Bristol: OFFA


3 France
Emanuel Boudard (La Rochelle Consult); Andrea Kottmann (CHEPS)

3.1 Introduction
This country case study on France has the following objectives:

- To describe the national and institutional policies addressing study success, as well as to analyse how study success as an outcome has developed in the recent years;
- To analyse the effectiveness of the policies: what lesson can be learned from the experiences made with study success policies in France so far to inspire policy makers in other countries or higher education institutions.

This country case study uses data from different sources: desk research, expert interviews and institutional case studies.

Preparatory desk research was done in Summer 2014. Between October 2014 and January 2015, 10 expert interviews and two visits to universities were conducted. In total, more than 50 people have been interviewed for this report.

Interviews were conducted with representatives from the ministry responsible for higher education policy and funding, the national quality assurance agency (HCERES\textsuperscript{17}), the universities association (CPU\textsuperscript{18}), and the national advisory committee on education (StraNES\textsuperscript{19}). Also experts from other organizations/stakeholders who might play a role in the national context such as the CGPME, FAGE, RESOSUP, & OCDE\textsuperscript{20} have been interviewed.

The University of La Rochelle and the University of Nantes are the report’s institutional cases. At both institutions university management representatives, leading officers of quality assurance and other departments related to student support/ counselling, study deans or similar representatives from faculty level representing the different disciplines at the institution, and students were interviewed.\textsuperscript{21}

The University of La Rochelle\textsuperscript{22} is a young and dynamic higher education institution. Founded in January 1993, the university is well integrated in the local economic and cultural environment and contributes to its development. As a good practice, the University of La Rochelle designed Bachelor curricula allowing students to follow their own study paths in undergraduate study or continuing education (see Annex). Two

\textsuperscript{17} Previously called AERES, see http://www.hceres.fr and http://www.ares-evaluation.fr
\textsuperscript{18} http://www.cpu.fr/presentation/presentation-of-the-cpu/
\textsuperscript{19} http://www.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/cid76975/la-strategie-nationale-de-l-enseignement-superieur-stranes.html
\textsuperscript{21} The two contact persons at the institutions (Ms Anne Aubert & Ms Anne Reboud) were very helpful in securing the participation of key persons and all interviewees were very constructive. The university visits have also triggered exchanges of good practices that will continue after this case study.
\textsuperscript{22} http://www.univ-larochelle.fr/?lang=en
reports (IGAENR 2010, and Cour des Comptes 2012) mention the institutions because of this approach.

Moreover, this institution was chosen because of its following distinctive characteristics:

- Study success: 90% of the graduates (both professional Bachelors and Masters) from 2010 are employed 30 months after their graduation; 23
- Training: oriented towards the needs of the local economic environment with some specialised curricula;
- Size: 7,400 students and 500 teachers and researchers;
- Location: outside of Paris or other big cities.

The University of Nantes 24 is a multidisciplinary institution and a major teaching and research hub in the west of France. As a good practice to maximize study success, the University of Nantes has established a special first semester for first-year students. During this first semester, the university provides support for building career plans, including for example a personal road map.

Moreover, the University of Nantes was chosen because of the following distinctive characteristics:

- Study success: Graduates from professional study programmes are widely accepted on the labour market. The employment rate among graduates is around 90%. 25
- Training: more traditional with a strong focus on encompassing all areas.
- Size: more than 34,000 students and 2,000 teachers
- Location: Nantes is one of the main French cities (and the most attractive city for people leaving Paris, every year 6,000 people are moving to Nantes).

The full list of interviewees, documents used and descriptions of both institutional cases are provided in the Annex. References and web links to information and data obtained from the Internet have been inserted as footnotes.

### 3.2 Definitions of study success

In France, study success is defined in various ways. The major definitions put forward by national authorities and stakeholders in higher education are

- completing a study programmes with an academic degree;
- completing a study programme within the nominal study period;
- finding employment upon completion.

National authorities and most higher education stakeholders define study success as finding an employment. This definition is also used in a national survey among recent graduates from professional study programmes that lead to bachelor or master degrees. 26 The benchmark considers 30 months after graduation as the benchmark.

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23 http://www.univ-larochelle.fr/Les-chiffres-cles-2013
25 http://www.univ-nantes.fr/85023157/0/fiche___pagelibre/&RH=ORIE&RF=1327083212477
26 http://www.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/cid75937/publication-des-resultats-de-la-4e-enquete-sur-l-insertion-professionnelle-des-diplomes-de-l-universite.html
Hence, finding employment more than 30 months after graduation is not deemed study success. None the less, most stakeholders (e.g. university staff, students, and ministry representatives) are less rigorous in their interpretation of study success.\textsuperscript{27} They do not judge taking a year off or exceeding the nominal study period as a problem. Rather, they emphasize that most important aspect is matching study programmes with students’ interest. This is regarded as the most important source of motivation for both students and professors and hence leading to successful completion. This is especially true for professional and technical programmes leading to a bachelor degree.

However, study success has several other meanings in France. For example, the national law on higher education states that and important goal reaching the target of 50% of a generation with a higher education degree in the future\textsuperscript{28}. Finding employment or completion of a study programme in time are less important.

Completion has also become important in the funding of higher education institutions. Although most universities funding is allocated based on the number of students, some resources reward completion and retention. Performance indicators have been tried for universities in 2009 with a funding model called SYMPA.\textsuperscript{29,30} About 20% of the university funding was allocated based on performance. The funding formula includes three indicators of study success in bachelor programmes, namely (i) re-enrolments of students in the 2\textsuperscript{nd} year, (ii) number of bachelor graduates, and (iii) the added value of the bachelor\textsuperscript{31} (this indicator compares the achieved completion rate with a theoretical completion rate based on social origin, delays in obtaining the degree, etc.). The model has enabled the identification of institutions needing more resources. A new funding allocation model was prepared for 2015. Currently it is being used by schools of engineering only. Finally, evaluations conducted by the national quality assurance agency HCESR also include the different definitions of study success mentioned above.

The survey definition also avoids certain issues. For example, the surveys are designed to look at those following academic paths (IUT, licence pro or master) but do not look at the failing population such as those who drop out after the first year, or those who succeed without a formal qualification for example by creating/ finding employment before obtaining the diploma\textsuperscript{32}. Moreover, the survey does not account for those completing degrees outside the university. CEREQ, a research centre looking at the relationship between education and employment, is also publishing an indicator on professional insertion based on their generation survey “enquête génération”\textsuperscript{33}. The

\textsuperscript{27} See page 25, République Française, (2014).
\textsuperscript{28} GILLOT D. and ADNOT, P. (2013).
\textsuperscript{29} SYMPA has not been used since, for 2015 a new funding model called MODAL is discussed.
\textsuperscript{31} For example, some students only want to get basic competencies for managing a company, and then they start their company
\textsuperscript{32} CEREQ is look into professional insertion of graduates every three years. These provide much more details. See CEREQ
\textsuperscript{33} http://www.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/pid24624/taux-insertion-professionnelle-des-diplomes-universite.html
survey is looking at the whole population three years after its graduation for all levels of graduation.

In addition, the professional insertion can be misleading. According to the representative from CGPME, many job positions are currently filled with overqualified workers. For example, often Master graduates are hired for positions where bachelor skills and competencies would suffice. This is due to the decreasing value of the baccalaureate (80% of today’s student population has a baccalaureate), which leads to a greater share of the population into higher education.

While study success has been the focus of the government, mainly at the bachelor level, study success is linked to other key policies too, for example:

- The objective of attaining 80% of a generation at the baccalaureate level;
- The orientation of students with professional and technical baccalaureates;
- University funding;
- Equity in access;
- Relevance of the diploma for the labour market;
- Evaluation and quality of teaching;
- Development of lifelong learning;
- Lack of stability due to a series of policy reforms;
- Monitoring (there is a lack of studies investigating thoroughly the issue)\(^{34}\).

### 3.3 Short description of the Higher education system

#### 3.3.1 Institutions

According to Eurydice, “Higher education is characterised by the coexistence of two systems: universities – public institutions that have an open admissions policy, except for *instituts universitaires de technologie* (IUT - technological university institutes) or some *classes préparatoires intégrées* (integrated preparatory classes) – and a non-university sector, including, in particular, *Grandes Ecoles* (Elite Schools), with a highly selective admissions policy open to *baccalauréat* holders having attended two years of *classes préparatoires*, themselves highly selective on entry and during the course.”\(^{35}\)

The French higher education system is characterised by the *coexistence of a plurality of institutions* which share the dispensing of higher education. They belong to different legal categories, defined in the *French Code of Education* (book VII). Distinctions can be made between:

- Universities

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\(^{34}\) A good source to identify good practices was Ms Aubert, responsible for the Academic Network of Leaders of professional insertion and career guidance of student “Conférence Universitaire en Réseau des Responsables de l’insertion et de l’orientation professionnelle des étudiants”, see http://www.lacourroie.fr

- Schools and institutes outside of universities
- Higher education institutions, French schools abroad and "grands établissements" (major institutions)
- "Communautés d’universités et établissements" (COMUE - Communities of Universities and Schools)\(^{36}\)

### 3.3.2 Students

According to the data of the Ministry for Education and Research, in 2013 about 2,387,000 students were enrolled in higher education. The majority (54%) were studying at public universities, about 15% in the STS and IUT. 31% were enrolled in other institutions. About 18% of students were enrolled in private institutions. Since 2005, participation in the private sector has been growing rapidly (at about 31%) while public institutions have experienced relatively stable enrolments. During this period, the number of students overall has not changed significantly.

Chart 1 below shows the development of enrolments in French higher education between 2003 and 2012. As can be seen numbers are relatively constant, with female students accounting for about 55%.

**Figure 1: Students 2003-2012, males, females, total**

![Chart 1: Students 2003-2012, males, females, total](image)

Source: Eurostat

According to OECD data\(^{37}\) in 2012 about 40.85% of the French population overall (and 38.085% of the under-25 year olds) were expected to enter higher education at least once in their life-time. The student population is thus relatively homogeneous in age,

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\(^{37}\) Education at a Glance 2014: Indicator C3.1
and reflects a strongly institutionalized educational pathway (the traditionally and culturally prescribed period in the life-cycle for studying and achieving a higher education degree is between the completion of the upper secondary school and 25 years of age).

Currently, there are more female than male students. In 2013, 55.3% of all enrolled students were female. The gender gap is stronger when considering the participation of 20 year olds only. In this age group, 49.3% of the females were participating in higher education versus 40.2% of males. Furthermore, the student population is still highly stratified with regards to their socio-economic background. According to OECD data, the probability that persons from families of low educational background will attain higher education is slight (38%). For 2013/2014 official statistics indicate that 30.4% of the students in France come from a middle-class family background (Cadres et professions intellectuelles supérieures).

### 3.3.3 Access to Higher Education

The baccalaureate, the French upper secondary education school leaving certificate, provides access to non-selective higher education study programmes/institutions.

To access selective study programmes/institutions, students must pass an examination ("concours") or prepare an application based on professors’ recommendations and grades of the last two high school years. In the “concours”, students can only chose a limited number of institutions for which they would like to apply.

#### 3.3.3.1 Widening Access

Access to selective programmes, especially “grandes écoles”, has gradually been widened by allowing students to access in the second or third year. This is not the result of a national policy or a regulation but of gradual changes in individual institutions’ recruitment practices.

#### 3.3.3.2 Selection procedures/restricting access

In France there is no national selection exam for higher education. Access to programmes on the Bachelor level at universities is not restricted. Students send in their applications via the ABP (see below) – an admission organisation that coordinates the applications to higher education institutions. For other institutions/programmes access is restricted (see above).

#### 3.3.3.3 Flexible pathways

The 2013 law on higher education and research intended to increase the permeability of the university sector. For example, students are not obliged to choose a specialisation for their bachelor degree during their first year but they may specialise during their second and the third years. In addition, in 2015 higher education institutions and secondary schools will establish so-called bridging agreements. Access to selective study

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38 Béjean and Monthubert, 2014, p. 9
40 Education at a Glance 2014, p. 64
programmes has been widening gradually by allowing students to access the programmes in the second or third year, as mentioned above.

3.4 Description of national and institutional policies

3.4.1 National policies

In recent decades there has been a significant growth in participation in French higher education because of the overall increase in the percentage of cohorts receiving a baccalaureate. This development had been induced by law in 1985 when Jean-Pierre Chevènement, then Minister of education, announced that 80% of a generation should attain at least a baccalaureate.42 One of the main measures to achieve this objective was the establishment of the professional baccalaureate (in addition to already existing technical baccalaureates). The objective of the professional baccalaureates was to provide students with more educational options, preparing them for both higher education and the labour market.

To date, the objective that 80% of a generation attain the baccalaureate level has almost been achieved. In 2013, 74% of the students have the baccalaureate (77% in 2012) while it was only 29% in 1985.43 The goal has been achieved primarily through professional baccalaureates (20%). Between 1985 and 2013 the general baccalaureate has increased from 20% to 38% and the technical baccalaureates from 10% to 16%.

However, there are a number of problems related to this development. The most important is that the majority of students would prefer to enrol at one of the selective higher education institutions rather than at a university. Further, access to the different types of institutions is segmented with regard to the students’ socio-economic background and the type of baccalaureate. Students of higher socio-economic background and a traditional type of the baccalaureate are more likely to enrol in one of the selective higher education institutions. The strong preference of students to enrol at one of the selective higher education institutions leads to a mis-orientation of students as some students consider enrolling at university a second-best choice. They are very likely to discontinue their university studies as soon as they will be selected for a study programme at one of the selective higher education institutions. Moreover, students with a professional and technical baccalaureate are also said not to be adequately prepared for university studies (Hetzel, 2006). According to the OECD (2014, p. 67), 75% of students with a professional baccalaureate who enrol in university a bachelor programme will not complete their bachelor’s

The strong preference for students and the - to some extent biased - selection of students for selective higher education institutions causes inefficiency for the French higher education system. This affects especially university bachelor study programmes . In 2012 every second student enrolled as a first year student in a bachelor programme at university dropped out of that programme (MESR 2013b, p. 4).

To tackle the inefficiency of the higher education system, to better adjust students demands with the offer provided by higher education institutions and to improve the

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42 http://legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000693428
43 http://www.insee.fr/fr/themes/tableau.asp?reg_id=0&ref_id=NATTEF07252
outcome of the selection processes of selective higher education institutions, several policies have been implemented at the national level, as described below.

3.4.1.1 The “plan pour la réussite en licence” (plan to increase completion in bachelor study programmes)

This “plan” comprises different measures: a multi-annual funding scheme for universities that was in place between 2008 and 2012, the establishment of instruments to stimulate more conscious study choices among students and the implementation of new regulations for the selection procedures at selective higher education institutions.

- **Multi-annual funding scheme (2008-2012)**

  With the “plan” universities are funded to develop instruments addressing study success in bachelor study programmes. The government launched calls for proposals to develop actions in different areas related to study success; universities could apply for funds by sending their ideas for projects. Participation in the calls was voluntary.

- **Stimulation of better study choices/career choices**

  As a measure implemented at the national level, the action “bac -3/bac +3” must be mentioned. It intended to identify students with no concrete ideas about their study choices and subsequent careers. The action is based on the idea that student information and orientation should start early in secondary school. Three years before completion of the baccalaureate students are consulted about study/career choices. This consultation is done collaboratively by universities, higher education institutions and upper secondary schools.

  Additionally, a national website - the admission post-bac (ABP)44 - has been set up. This website has different functions:
  - coordination of applications to higher education institutions
  - provision of information and consultation to students
  - achieve better distribution of students across higher education institutions.

  ABP has recently been evaluated (Opinion Way, 2013) and will be revised in 2014 and 2015 and new services such as a free phone number (using call centres from S.A.I.O. “Service académique d'information et d'orientation” the academic information service and guidance) will be included. APB will also extend the number of institutions covered (so far only the main institutions are included).

  At the level of the higher education institutions a number of measures to stimulate better study and career choices of students had been implemented. Many universities have reorganized departments that were providing services for students and merged them into single offices providing a comprehensive personalized support for students, including career advice, accommodation and other administrative tasks. Another important measure at the institutional level was to increase personalized educational support up to five hours per week during all three years of a bachelor programme. Moreover, institutions have also initiated mentoring by a teacher and tutoring. Finally, regulations to smooth transition between study programmes after the first semester have been established frequently.

44 http://www.admission-postbac.fr
• **New regulations for selections at selective higher education institutions/study programmes**

These measures address the “biased” selection in selective higher education or study programmes. To increase the chances of students with a professional or technical baccalaureate to be accepted at selective institutions or study programmes a regulation has been implemented that determines a quota for these types of students (MESR, 2013a). Evidence suggests that this measure has positive effects. In 2013, the percentage of students with a professional baccalaureate in STS rose by 8%, and by 3% in IUT (MESR, 2014a).

The different measures that relate to the “plan” are monitored by the comité de suivi de la licence et de la licence professionnelle, a committee that follows up on the reform of bachelor programmes It provides annual reports (2009a, 2009b, 2011, 2012 and 2013). Evaluation results show that a number of results have been achieved during the plan’s funding period (2008 - 2011). However, they were not sustainable due to the limited availability of funds, leading to the law for higher education and research.

### 3.4.1.2 2013 Law on higher education and research

In July 2013, the parliament adopted the law for higher education and research “loi sur l'enseignement supérieur et la recherche” (MESR, 2013a; Legifrance, 2013). This new higher education law refocuses on efficiency in higher education. One major purpose of the reform is improving the students’ chances to successfully participate in higher education. A key goal of the law is the improvement of completion rates among Bachelor degree students (Eurydice, 2014). Further, the law sets the target that 50% of each cohort should at least achieve a bachelor degree. The following propositions of the law are addressing study success:

- **No. 2** suggests that the curriculum of bachelor degrees should be reorganized. The reorganisation should simplify the current complex landscape of bachelor degrees to make it easier for students and employers to recognize and choose subjects/study programmes (Legifrance, 2013). Since 2014, the number of bachelor study programmes/degree-titles has been reduced. As a broad introductory year has been implemented (see also proposition no. 5) students can enrol in a so-called large area (arts, humanities, languages; law, economics, management; humanities and social sciences, science, technology, health). In the further course of their study students can choose among 45 specializations. This simplified structure replaces the former 1,800 bachelor diplomas. From 2015 also the landscape of professional bachelor degrees will be simplified – 173 specializations will replace the former 1,844 degrees (MESR, 2014a);
- **No. 3** addresses the need to better stimulate the study choices of students with professional baccalaureates;
- **No. 4** emphasizes the need to better stimulate students to make considered study choices and to strengthen links between STS/IUT and universities;
- **No. 5** calls for the reorganization of the first university year. It should be organized as a broad introductory year that allows students to find the study programme/specialising track best suited to them. In the second and third year students should finalize their choices and select a specialisation track in the study programme;
- No. 6 states that the number of students doing internships shall be doubled to facilitate a better transition of graduates to employment and to allow different models of studying (for examples part-time studies for employed).
- No. 7 states that internships should be monitored and these results should feed into the curriculum of study programmes. The law also states entrepreneurship training as a goal for higher education and allows that courses include a work-linked training element (Eurydice, 2014; art. 31 and art. 22 of the HE law).

The new law on higher education and research thus picked up some experiences made with the ‘plan’ and made them more sustainable.

3.4.1.3 Further national policies

3.4.1.3.1 Funding

Study success plays a role in the performance-based funding for universities. The funding formula includes the retention rate for students re-enrolling in the second study year and the number of bachelor graduates. This regulation stimulates universities to implement measures/instruments to address retention and completion among bachelor students.

Besides performance-based funding additional funds are provided to universities to address study success including inter alia:

- In 2008 the Plan Campus with a budget of €5 billion was implemented. These additional funds support 12 selected universities to become “universities of excellence”. To receive funds from the Plan Campus universities had to submit proposals addressing the following points:  
  - Educational and scientific objectives of the university. These needed to be reflected against the background of international standards (in terms of scientific excellence, ability to develop centres of excellence for education and research, employability of graduates, international openness and research transfer);
  - Plans for renovating buildings and optimization of properties;
  - The development of a modern campus (quality of life on the new campus for French or foreign staff and students, facilitating meetings and exchange, allowing extra-curricular activities such as sports, community, cultural);
  - The expected impact of a new campus for the local environment. The plans should be part of a coherent development policy.

Twelve universities were selected for funding. These campuses of excellence serve as showcases for France to strengthen the attractiveness and influence of its universities. Renovations, constructions and reorganisations funded by Plan Campus started recently (MESR, 2012).

- Additional funds have also been provided to improve and increase human resources at universities. For the period 2013-2017 funds are available to hire a total of 6,000 additional support staff and professors. In 2013, universities hired 1,000 additional support staff and professors.

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45 See http://www.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/pid24591/operation-campus.html
46 http://www.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/cid20924/operation-campus-renovation-de-10-projets-de-campus.html#criteres
support staff (45%) and professors (55%) to improve study success of the first cycle (MESR 2013c, p. 8).

Finally, there are additional funds for students. In 2012, the government increased the budget for scholarships and student rental deposit (which supports students in accessing private rental housing) by € 458 million. To date, about 135,000 additional scholarships have been funded (in autumn 2014 about 77,500 additional scholarships were granted). The expected effect of the additional scholarships for students is to decrease inequalities towards access to higher education.

3.4.1.3.2 Organisation of higher education

The 2013 law on higher education and research has a number of propositions to address study success (see above). Besides curricular changes and the simplification of bachelor degree titles, also quality assurance and accreditation regulations address study success.

In 2007, the autonomous quality assurance agency AERES (Evaluation Agency for Research and Education) was established. Since then, accreditation of selected study programmes, research units and higher education institutions takes place every five years. Evaluations in the accreditation procedures are based self-reported institutional data such as employment rates of students by study programme. The agency also evaluates the quality assurance processes in place such as the self-evaluation processes, the possibly to receive advice from external experts, and indicators for piloting and improving the existing study programmes. As a result, the culture of quality insurance is gradually spreading.

However, one of the actions proposed by the 2013 higher education and research law is to review the procedures of AERES and change it into the High Council for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (Haut conseil de l’évaluation de la recherche et de l’enseignement supérieur [HCERES]).

Teaching profession

The professionalization of academic staff in universities with regard to teaching, i.e. to enhance their teaching skills, is regarded as a key factors to improve the quality of teaching and have a positive impact on study success. Similarly to other European countries, in France academic staff has teaching as well as research duties. While their training was focusing on research primarily it mostly did not include a training of didactic competencies. The government is currently considering whether teaching skills should be a criterion in academic staff’s remuneration and commissioned a report to Mr Claude Bertrand (2014).

In addition, the government has upgraded the so-called Superior Schools for Teaching and Education - ESPE (”école Supérieure du Professeurat et de l’Education”) to universities in 2013. These were independent institutions before. While they had been

47 http://www.gouvernement.fr/gouvernement/la-rentree-universitaire
49 The agency is also accredited by EQAR (2011) & ENQA (2010).
50 http://www.hceres.fr
51 See also Comité de suivi de la licence et de la licence professionnelle. 2014.
52 IGEN and IGAENR (2013).
originally established to support (school) teachers they now also address university professors.

Another government initiative to improve the quality of teaching and learning in higher education was the funding scheme “Initiatives of Excellence in Innovative Training - IDEFI ("Initiatives d’excellence en formations innovantes”),

http://www.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/cid59599/37-projets-de-formation-labellises-idefi.html

In 2012 a call for proposals for proposals was launched. About 29 individual projects have been selected and funded for a total of €149 million over a period of up to eight years. Further, eight projects proposed by networks of institutions have been selected. These are funded by a different scheme, i.e. the so-called “Initiatives of Excellence - IDEX” (“Initiatives d’excellence”).

http://www.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/cid51351/initiatives-d-excellence.html

Higher education institutions or networks of higher education institutions receiving IDEX funding are also developing innovative training initiatives. However, this is part of more global project at these institutions. Both IDEFI and IDEX are part of the scheme “investments for the future” of higher education that is funded by a total of €35 billion and has been implemented in 2010. The “Plan Campus” is another part of this funding scheme (see above). It is planned that in a second phase, based on the experiences made by the funded institutions, good practices should be disseminated to inform all institutions.

3.4.2 Institutional policies

A major challenge for French universities is the heterogeneity of their student population because of the open access policy. Student populations are heterogeneous with regard to several characteristics, including socio-economic family and ethnic background, type of baccalaureate and preferences to enrol in a study programme at universities. As shown in the previous sections, drop-out rates in bachelor degree programmes at universities are high – over 50% of these students interrupt their studies during year-1. The section on national policies emphasized that a number of national initiatives have been implemented to increase completion rates at universities. These policies are mostly “indirect” as universities can decide on how to implement them.

The next sections will present institutional approaches to address study success for the two cases that have been visited for this country case study. Further, also other frequently used policies and instruments used by higher education institutions in France will be described.

3.4.2.1 University of Nantes

In 2007, the University of Nantes prepared the “plan d’action pour la promotion de la réussite des étudiants” (plan to improve completion), an action plan for promoting student success. The plan proposed the establishment of the following new roles/organizational units to improve study success:

- information and orientation office (1 position),
- pedagogical and didactic support unit (3 positions),
- career services (1 position),
- mentoring and coaching centre (2 positions),
- student service centre (1 position),
- and a centre for diagnostics and assessment (1 position).

In total, the plan proposed to establish 9 additional positions at the university; these were funded by different stakeholders (see below). These new positions were installed in the Centre for Information and Orientation (SUIO) that provides the following services:

- A number of activities to inform and consult students when choosing their study programme: “the office provides services strongly oriented towards the needs of the local environment. For example to improve counselling of students in secondary education, every year about 150 teachers from secondary schools in the local environment are invited for a two-day workshop. During this workshop teachers are informed about the study programmes and put in contact with around 25-30 academic staff at the University of Nantes who are in charge of advising students seeking for information.

- As a further activity the office for information and orientation has implemented the so-called “student ambassadors”, who are enrolled at the university. As ambassadors, they act as consultants at information fairs for students from secondary schools. The office trains selected students to become ambassadors and to give presentations on their experiences as a student.

- A further instrument developed by the information and orientation office is an open day for secondary school students. During the open day they can participate in seminars, lectures etc. to get acquainted with “real” university life. In 2013, around 680 students participated in the open day.

- The office has developed a specific website for students seeking information on bachelor programmes offered by the university prior to their application. The website provides information on four steps in the process of selecting a study programme:
  - Discover: including four videos that explain differences between university studies vis-à-vis their previous education institutions,
  - Deepen: providing detailed information and data on all study programmes provided by the university
  - Visit: providing information on open days and other opportunities to visit the university
  - Enrol: relevant information on the application procedure as well as information on study-related issues and for special groups among students are provided.

The SUIO surveys all first year students upon enrolment with regard to their needs for mentoring/coaching. This is done in the “Tranversup activity”, which originally was implemented as a project between 2009 and 2014. As of 2015 it is a regular process at the university. Based on results, students are assigned to one of three groups addressing different coaching needs. Students with clear expectations/plans about their study programme and their later career are assigned to the group with a low need for coaching. Students who have been identified as having a strong need for coaching participate in a long-term coaching plan where the centre organizes a series of weekly meetings for around 25 students between October and January/February.

56 http://www.lyceens.univ-nantes.fr/
The university also conducts surveys among their alumni/graduates. Survey results are used to inform prospective students about post-graduation employment and careers opportunities. Transition to the labour market and career counselling is further done through an employment fair to bring students and employers together. The fair, called “forum les têtes de l’emploi”, helps students find internships. Around 1,500 employers participate in the fair (at a fee). Students are trained for the fair over a period of six weeks, especially in how to present themselves convincingly and professionally.

Finally, the positions for didactical and pedagogical support provide training for professors who would like to enhance their teaching skills. Training is provided in different settings including tailor-made individual training as well as group lessons. In 2014, the office received about 50 training requests.

Besides the services provided by the Centre, the university has set up specific curricula for students in their first semester in higher education (see differences by faculty). The curricula aim to help students integrate in the university. Besides a welcome week to improve students’ social integration, courses to improve their academic preparedness are offered (e.g. trainings on note taking, time management, documentary research, group work, critical analysis of information, writing a paper and oral presentation). Further instruments are tutoring of first year students by more experienced students and the introduction of an orientation semester that allows students to change their study programme/subjects more easily after the first semester.

At the level of faculties the following practices to improve study success in the first study year have been established:

- At the faculty for science and technology of physical activities and sports (“sciences et techniques des activités physiques et sportives”), a professor is in charge of identifying students who are at risk of dropping out already early in the first semester. Experiences have shown that a high number of students withdraw after they have received their grades for the first semester. To identify students at risk early, the faculty surveys all students one month after the start of the semester. Students at risk are sent to the Centre for information and orientation for consultancy. During the meetings a study programme more suited to the student’s interests and abilities might be proposed. The faculty is also active in stimulating students to make considered study choices. Their website provides a questionnaire for students seeking information on programmes. Through the questionnaire students can test whether they would succeed in the first study year. Results are provided immediately after filling the questionnaire and indicate the student’s chances of success in the STAPS study programme. The questionnaire intends to stimulate self-selection among students. Those lacking the required abilities and motivation will be prevented from applying to the programme and might orient themselves towards other study programmes that better match their capabilities.

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At the faculty of medicine tutoring is very frequently used during the first study year. This tutoring is conducted by third year students and its goal is to facilitate the social and academic integration of freshmen. The tutoring is done by third year students also not to put additional demands on academic staff. It must be noted that the student-staff-ratio at this faculty is rather low. This measure was awarded the gold medal of the national student association in medicine for the high quality of the tutoring. It includes the following activities:

Welcome of first year students one week before the official start of the semester, provision of information on study organisation, facilities of the university and socialising events;

- After the start of the year: evening courses done by tutors, to rehearse exercises from different subjects; test exams are assessed by the professors
- Students can participate in test exams to prepare for the final exam every week
- Tutors also visit secondary schools to inform pupils about the requirements of the programmes
- Finally tutors hold close contact with students and follow up those students who are at risk for transferring to a different programme.

At the faculty of science a very flexible curriculum for the Bachelor programmes has been developed. In addition, the faculty organizes an orientation day informing students on potential educational and professional pathways upon graduation. Further, the programme REUSCIT is a one-year programme supporting students lacking the sufficient knowledge/academic preparedness to follow regular courses at the university. Only 30 students per year are accepted to this programme, based on motivation and on teacher recommendations. REUSCIT was developed in 2007 through the plan "réussite en licence". Thus far, some of the programme’s participants used the course to prepare for an application at a selective higher education institution, other students decided for trainings outside higher education.

3.4.2.2 University of La Rochelle

The University of La Rochelle designed Bachelor curricula allowing students to follow their own study paths during undergraduate study and test courses. This measure is unique in France, and has proven very successful. Dropout rates in Bachelor programmes have fallen by 20% on average. After a transition period of five weeks after the start of their studies, students can choose among four different pathways according to their abilities and motivations:

- A classical pathway;
- An excellent pathway (attending additional courses);
- An adapted pathway where the courses of the first study year are spread over two years;
- A reorientation of their study choice.

So far, the measure has already been fully implemented at the faculty of Science and Technology. The transition period mentioned above includes:
An aptitude test and interview to assess the academic preparedness of the student;
- Five weeks of preparatory courses;
- Consultation by the Maison de al Réussite et de l’Insertion Professionelle about later career possibilities;
- A final interview based on results of test and experiences in the preparatory courses.

The faculty of economics introduced the PPP-Project. Also in this case, students take part in a transition period. In addition, to formulate their study plans and goals, students are required to organize an interview with a graduate already employed.

Also at the University of La Rochelle “plan réussite” funds the have been used to develop and implement study success policies such as a commission for “réussite & insertion professionelle” and the project “fabLab“. The latter comprises informal lunch discussions for academic staff on innovations in teaching and learning (for example on the introduction of multiple choice questionnaires). Apparently, setting up informal measures is more successful than formalizing structures. Also innovations such as multiple choice questionnaire become more widely accepted among academic staff if these are communicated in an informal setting.

In addition, in the recent years the University of La Rochelle has introduced a number of prize-winning projects intended to improve study success. For instance, the Maison de la Réussite et de l’Insertion Professionelle, introduced in 2007, is a one-stop shop where all persons interested can ask for information and consultation on pathways within higher education and professional pathways beyond.

In 2008 the University initiated the project “plan licence” . This plan includes different measures to orient and inform students throughout the student life cycle.

### 3.5 Reflection of policy mix

One could argue that study success is very high on the policy agenda in France. Currently, attention seems to be both directed at reducing dropout, especially at universities, and encourage the link between higher education and the labour market. Various policy initiatives have been taken to cater for both priorities.

In France, there seems to be a good understanding of the causes of high dropout. In essence the problem is believed to be students’ inadequate qualifications upon accessing the system, and poor information about study programmes’ relevance for individual students. National authorities have taken steps to address both issues. Most of the policies being implemented are pre-entry interventions. The additional endowments made available to universities have enabled them to revise first year curricula, launch new initiatives to improve student (programme) choice, and reform selection procedures.

The recent initiatives to strengthen the links between higher education and the labour market, might impact study success both positively and negatively. A range of studies suggest that students who take part in the labour market while studying find it easier to gain employment upon graduation. At the same time, it is also likely that allowing students to work during their studies may prolong their time to degree, and potentially increase dropouts since students are not all able to combine these efforts.

An interesting development in France is that the measures taken might drive changes at the institutional level concerning the responsibilities of the individual university for retention and dropout. One could argue that historically French universities have taken
little responsibility for study progress and success of individual students. However, the recent policy changes might imply a new role for institutions, and increased attention to what the contribution of the organization of higher education to study success might be. In this respect, the “adapted routes” example at the University of La Rochelle is interesting since as more clearer pathways are created for students to enhance both institutional capacity to cater for particular groups of students, and student motivation and study choices. As examples of increased institutional responsibility, it can also be mentioned that universities are putting more resources and efforts into providing pedagogical and didactical training for academic staff.

3.6 Annex

3.6.1 Central characteristics of institutions selected

Institution 1: University of La Rochelle

The University of La Rochelle offers multi-disciplinary curricula structured around four main fields: Science, Technology and Medicine; Arts, French, Languages; Social Sciences and Humanities; and Law, Economics and Management. In April 2014, the university had:

- Three Faculties, one IUT, and one institutes proposing 67 national degrees;
- 7,405 students enrolled in graduate studies (including 180 on continuing education) (40 percent receive a scholarship, higher than the national average);
- 497 teachers and researchers, 386 library staff, engineers, administrative staff, technicians, operative level workers, and 800 part-time staff;
- A budget of 79 million euros;
- More than 200 doctoral students, 6 doctoral schools, and 9 research units;
- 11% international students (85 nationalities are represented on the campus);
- 200 French students are annually studying in a foreign country;
- 74 partner universities in 21 European countries in the context of the Socrates-Erasmus program and 73 partners outside Europe.

Autonomous since 1st of January 2009, the University of La Rochelle is a member of the “Limousin Poitou-Charentes PRES” (Pole of Research and Higher Education).

Institution 2: University of Nantes

The university of Nantes has 21 faculties, institutes and schools, and prepares students to close to 300 national diplomas into five main fields of study: Law, Economics, Management; Arts, Literature and Languages; Science, Technologies, Health; and Human and Social Sciences. In September 2013, the University of Nantes had:

- 11 faculties, seven institutes, and one engineering school proposing 296 national diplomas;

64 http://www.univ-nantes.fr/70112634/0/fiche___pagelibre/&RH=1232718498414
- 34,714 students enrolled (34 percent receive a scholarship), and 9,000 in lifelong learners;
- 2,139 teachers and researchers, and 2,121 administrative and technical staff (4,260 in total);
- A budget for 2014 of 316 million euros;
- 1,206 doctoral students, 8 doctoral schools supervised by a joint college, and 63 research labs;
- 10.9% international students (140 nationalities are represented on the campus);
- 1,214 French student are annually studying in a foreign country;
- 497 partner universities;

The University of Nantes is a member of the Pôle de recherche et d'enseignement supérieur “Université Nantes Angers Le Mans” (PRES UNAM\(^{65}\)). UNAM is an association of 11 founding members and 19 associate members from the Region Pays de la Loire (Universities, Engineering and Business Schools, as well as University Hospitals). As a multidisciplinary regional Campus, UNAM mainly focuses on 4 missions: provides the UNAM label for doctoral diploma and UNAM signature for research articles; develops synergies and joint policy for doctoral training, research, acquisition of research equipment, and valorization of research output; internationalization of doctoral training, research, and master degrees; and coordination of student life, continuing education, scientific education and culture. UNAM is currently considering merging with another PRES, the “Université Européenne de Bretagne” (UEB) to form a ComUE called “Université Bretagne Loire”\(^6^{66}\).

### 3.6.2 Interviewees stakeholders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National stakeholders</th>
<th>Interviewees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ministry responsible for higher education</td>
<td>MESR - Ministry of Research Ms Rachel-Marie Pradeilles-Duval, department head of strategy training and student life at the DGESIP (chef de service de la stratégie des formations et de la vie étudiante à la DGESIP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Monsieur Amaury VILLE, Head of Department training cycle license (chef du département des formations du cycle licence)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National funding agencies</td>
<td>MESR - Ministry of Research Frédéric Forest, Deputy Director of Financing Higher Education (sous-directeur du financement de l'enseignement supérieur)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National quality assurance agency</td>
<td>AERES - Mr Jean-Marc Geib, Head of the education section</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universities association(s)</td>
<td>CPU - Gilles ROUSSEL president working group on professional insertion (and president of Marne-la-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{65}\) [http://www.lunam.fr](http://www.lunam.fr)  
\(^{66}\) [https://lunam.ueb.eu](https://lunam.ueb.eu) see data at [https://lunam.ueb.eu/projet.html](https://lunam.ueb.eu/projet.html)
### National advisory body on education

Vallée university

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>StraNÉS - President Ms Sophie Béjean Committee for the National Strategy for Higher Education (Comité pour la stratégie nationale de l'enseignement)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Other organizations/stakeholders that might play a role in the national context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Confederation of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (Confédération générale des petites et moyennes entreprises - CGPME) Mr Petel, representative from the working-group education and training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Network of Observatories of Higher Education (Réseau des observatoires de l'Enseignement supérieur - RESOSUP) Mr Pierre-Yves Steunou, president</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Federation of Student Associations (Fédération des associations générales étudiantes - FAGE) Charles Bozonnet, Vice President for Academic Affairs (vice-président chargé des affaires académiques)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD - Eric Charbonnier, education expert</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.6.3 Interviewees at universities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University of La Rochelle</th>
<th>University of Nantes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>University management</strong> Mr Gérard Blanchard, deputy president CPU, president of La Rochelle University Ms Anne Aubert, Vice-President responsible for the Orientation, Success and Professional Integration Ms Isabelle Sueur, Vice-President of the Senate</td>
<td>Mr Dominique Averty, Vice-President commission for training and student life (CFVU) Mr Thierry Biais, Director General of Services Mr Samuel Branchu, Advisor to the President for Insertion and Orientation Mr Mohammed BERNOUSSI, first vice-president, vice-president of the board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leading officers of quality assurance and other departments related to student counselling</strong> Ms Fabienne Marotte, lecturer science and technology Mr François Geoffriaux, Ms Fabienne Marotte, lecturer science and technology Ms Anne Aubert Ms Maelle Crosse, IT and pedagogical research Ms Violaine Larriè, House of Success and Professional Insertion</td>
<td>Mr Dominique Averty, vice-president CFVU Mr Samuel Branchu, Advisor to the President for Insertion and Orientation Ms Marie Blain, Advisor to the President for relations university / secondary schools Ms Anne-Céline Grolleau, university department of pedagogy Mr Bruno Bellet, university</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Study deans or similar representatives from faculty level, representing the different disciplines at the institution | Mr Charles Brion, lecturer in Literature  
Ms Brigitte Noc, Deputy Director Education and External Relations of the IUT  
Mr Patrice Guder, professor in economics and management  
Mr Laurent Bordereaux, lecturer in law | Mr Dominique Averty, vice-president CFVU  
Mr Samuel Branchu, Advisor to the President for Insertion and Orientation  
Ms Marie Blain, Advisor to the President for relations university / secondary schools  
Mr Bruno Bellet, SUIO  
Ms Marie-Claude Fernandez, vice-dean of the Science faculty  
Ms Françoise Nazih, in charge of the PACES (1st year selection) for the medicine faculty  
Mr Yann Lignereux, dean of history faculty  
Mr Stéphane Bellard, sport faculty (STAPS), in charge of professional insertion and relation to partners  
Mr Nozar Rafii, IUT of Nantes  
Ms Gwendolina Wendling, director for studies and student life (DEVU) |
| Students | Mr Maxime Mouclier  
Mr Theo Agar  
Ms Elise Morin  
Mr Matthieu Besson  
Ms Gaelle Coenye  
Mr Guillaume Cottreau  
Mr Simon Tonglet  
Ms Laura Portejoir  
Ms Emeline Briache  
Mr Paul Colly  
Mr Rémy Gabare (cordé) | Mr Victor Fredet, Advisor to the President for student issues, student in 3rd year of medicine  
Mr Clément Mézerette, student in sport (has changed curricula from environment to sport or STAPS)  
Ms Victoria Jolly, student in law, tutor "ambassador" for the university  
Ms Licia Bourgeais-Boon, student in law, follow a reorientation scheme |

### 3.6.4 References


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A sponsorship between a less favoured student before it enters into higher education and a student in higher education in order to sensitize on higher education environment http://www.cordeesdelareussite.fr


4 Germany
Andrea Kottmann (CHEPS)

4.1 Introduction

Since the start of the HEDOCE Project in April 2014 the importance of study success on the German higher education policy agenda has changed to a greater extent. While it had moderate relevance on the federal level as well as for most of the governments at the level of the federal states the picture only very recently changed. On April 16, 2015 Chancellor Angela Merkel highlighted the need to provide students who dropout from higher education with alternative educational pathways to receive a professional training. The project “Jobstarter 18plus” campaigns these alternative educational pathways. In different projects the attention of students who dropped out of higher education is called to shortened trainings in the VET sector. Additionally, the projects also involve and support small and medium enterprises in employing those students for their training. Thus, on the federal level study success has become more important at least with regard to the further pathways of students who dropped out. Study success has, however, gained in importance on the agenda of the federal states and further stakeholder like the German’s Rectors Conference, the Council for Science and Humanities as well as the Council for Accreditation. These actors have either formulated policies addressing study success or published recommendations and statements concerning study success.

Nonetheless, as education policies are under the solely responsibility of the federal states in Germany, for this report a number of choices were done. First of all, not all federal states have been included in the analyses; Berlin and North Rhine-Westphalia have been selected as both represent the discourse evolving around study success in a good manner. This discourse mentions:

- the increasing diversity of the student population
- and the high dropout rates in the so-called STEM disciplines

as the greatest challenges with regard to study success.

In the federal states selected, authorities, stakeholders and higher education institutions mention the two as most important challenges that need to be addressed when it comes to study success.

In North Rhine-Westphalia, the most populous federal state in Germany, the increasing diversity of the student population has been put upfront in higher education policy making. The diversity of the population has recently become more and more represented in the student population of higher education institutions. It has not only been increasing in terms of numbers but also diversifying: more and more students from so-called non-traditional backgrounds (for example from lower socio-economic background, second or third generation migrants). In particular higher education institutions that are located in the Ruhr-Area witness this development: In the recent years an increasing number of students from non-traditional backgrounds has been enrolling. Further, dropout rates in the STEM disciplines are also high in North Rhine-Westphalia. Against this background

68 http://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/Artikel/2015/04/2015-04-16-bundeskanzlerin-comconsult-aachen-und-ihk-fosa-n%C3%BCrnberg.html
the Fachhochschule Dortmund has been chosen as an institutional case. Both criteria apply to it: With a student body hosting more than 80 nationalities, students with very diverse pathways to higher education and a focus on study programmes in the STEM disciplines dropout and completion are crucial at the Fachhochschule. Currently more than 11,000 students are enrolled at the Fachhochschule Dortmund, it is thus one of the bigger universities of applied sciences in North Rhine-Westphalia.

Berlin though smaller than North Rhine-Westphalia with regard to the absolute number of inhabitants is also one of the most densely populated area in Germany. Similar to the Ruhr-Area Berlin has a very diverse population with regard to their background characteristics. Since 1989 the city developed more and more into a melting pot of very different cultures and also attracts a number of (international) students. The Technical University of Berlin - the second biggest university in Berlin with currently more than 30,000 students enrolled - also reports that its student population has become increasingly diverse. Similar to the Fachhochschule Dortmund this diversity represents not only students with different socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds but also with different educational backgrounds, from diverse age groups as well as from different family and work status (for example with children and/or working part-time to earn a living). Dropout rates in technical study programmes at the Technical University of Berlin were also high in the recent years. These dropouts mostly occur in the first year of the Bachelor.

Both higher education institutions have also been selected for the country case study as they are funded by the Quality Pact for Teaching from the German Federal Ministry for Education and Research. The goal to improve study success with the measures implemented is very important in their projects funded.

At both higher education institutions research was done as two-day site visits. During the site visits focus groups and expert interviews were conducted with representatives from the university leadership, officers from quality assurance departments, officers from other departments working on study success, study deans and heads of study programmes. Also, current students and students who dropped higher education or transferred to a new study programme/other institution have been interviewed.

The country case study further includes results from interviews with experts from the federal ministry (Federal Ministry for Education and Research - BMBF), the responsible authorities at the level of the federal states (Berlin and North Rhine-Westphalia) as well as from important higher education stakeholders like the Stifterverband, the Council for Science and Humanities (Wissenschaftsrat), the German Rector’s Conference (Hochschulrektorenkonferenz), and the Foundation for Accreditation of Study Programmes in Germany (Akkreditierungsrat) and the Verband deutscher Maschinen- und Anlagenbau (VDMA).

Finally, data from statistical offices and scientific publications have been used. In addition, the Fachhochschule Dortmund and the Technical University Berlin provided data and policy papers on dropout and completion at their institutions.

This country case study will in the following provide information on:

- The definition of study success and its importance on the agenda of national authorities (federal and state level), important higher education stakeholders and finally the two higher education institutions included in this study.
- The monitoring of study success
4.2 Definition of study success

4.2.1 Definitions used by ministries and stakeholders

In view of the definition of study success it is evident that both ministries as well as the important stakeholders in higher education share similar positions. All stated the definition of study success as “completion of a study programme with an academic degree.” This definition does not necessarily assume that students should successfully complete the program in which they started when moving to higher education. Rather, it states that all students who once enrolled in higher education should complete a degree irrespective of changing the higher education institution or the study programme.

This definition has replaced an older definition respectively political goal with regard to study success that stated timely completion as study success. This definition was prevalent in and an important driver for the implementation of the Bologna Reforms and the new study structure at the beginning of the 2000s. It was expected that study duration would be shortened by the introduction of new, shorter study programmes. This expectation was not fulfilled: study duration was not shortened significantly due to a number of reasons related to the implementation of new degrees (like for example an overloaded curriculum in some Bachelor programmes). Although most of these initial problems have been solved by now, timely completion does not play a role anymore. Currently, most stakeholders take the position that demanding a timely completion of studies would not pay sufficient attention to the living reality of students. Due to widening of higher education to non-traditional groups the student body has become increasingly diverse. There is no such thing as the typical student anymore, i.e. a student who starts immediately after leaving secondary education, mainly studying with no further tasks like working part-time or family obligations. From the perspective of a number of stakeholders policy making has to account for this change. Consequently regulations and study programmes should ideally allow students to better combine the requirements of their study programme with their further obligations and needs.

A further speciality of the definition of study success is that ‘completion of an academic degree’ does not mean that the student necessarily has to complete the study programme of the first enrolment. Most stakeholders indicate that changing a study programme and/or the institutions should be perceived as normal and acceptable. From their perspective the higher education systems should enable students to opt for new or to reorient themselves. This, however, does not mean that students can change ad libitum. In this respect the German Rector’s Conference and the council for science and humanities distinguish avoidable dropouts caused by a malfunctioning of the higher education system and/or the higher education institution and dropouts due to other, mostly personal reasons. Malfunctioning includes problems like: no adequate funding of the student, a lack of appropriate information on the study programme leading to wrong expectations about the study programme on behalf of the student, inappropriate study organization (ignoring the needs of students who earn a living, care for children etc.). From the perspective of stakeholders, higher education policy should primarily address avoidable dropouts. Dropouts that are related to personal problems of the student should be regarded as ‘normal attrition’ and not be targeted by higher education policy.
A further important idea that is influential in policy making addressing study success is that study success strongly depends on the quality of teaching and learning at higher education institutions. This assumption is shared by all representatives of ministries and stakeholders interviewed. The funding scheme Quality Pact for Teaching (see detailed description in section 4.5.1) for example builds on this idea.

Though the picture is currently changing, at the time of the interviews most interview partners from ministries and important stakeholders argue that study success has moderate to high importance on their agendas. The following reasons account for this:

- Dropout rates in Germany (to the extent known, see section 4.3) are considered not to be startlingly high;
- Currently students drop/switch their study programme early (mostly in the first study year);
- The German educational system offers a number of alternative educational pathways, here the Vocational Education (VET) plays a very important role. There are thus different routes to the labour market;
- Unemployment in general and in particular among higher education graduates is very low (Bundesagentur für Arbeit 2013).

In North Rhine-Westphalia study success has recently become very important on the higher education policy agenda. Since the change in government in early 2014 the reduction of dropout and completion is a political goal. The coalition agreement between social democrats and greens states that dropout rates in higher education should be reduced by 20 percent in the coming years. The new higher education law - so called “Hochschulzukunftsgesetz” - that came into force in October. The law contains provisions that will make it possible to achieve this goal. Also, the government funds a number of campaigns aiming to improve study success (see section 4.5.2).

### 4.2.2 Definitions used by higher education institutions

#### 4.2.2.1 Fachhochschule Dortmund

Study success is an important goal at the Fachhochschule Dortmund. Here it was stated that study success is defined as completion of studies with an academic degree. The Fachhochschule Dortmund represents thus a similar position as already reported for stakeholders and national authorities. Also to the Fachhochschule it does not matter whether the student has been changing programmes while studying. The university leadership uses study success to point to the performance of degree programmes in terms of dropout, retention, completion and time to degree. It uses these indicators in annual talks with the leader of degree programmes. Using these indicators helped the university leadership to start a discourse on the quality of teaching and learning.

Though study success is important in the goal setting of the Fachhochschule actors at different levels of the institution were critical about the limitations in gathering data on study success indicators. In this respect a number of problems were mentioned:

- The lack of an official definition of completion, dropout and retention. Although study success is commonly defined as leaving the higher education system with an academic degree there is no official definition of the three indicators. For institutions, it is particularly difficult to define dropout because they have no data on the further pathway of students who do not re-enroll.
Due to the lack of an official definition of dropout representatives of the Fachhochschule Dortmund were also critical about the objective of the government of North Rhine-Westphalia to reduce drop out in higher education by 20 percent in the coming years. From their perspective, it would be necessary here to have definitions of and valid data on dropout and completion available.

4.2.2.2 Technical University Berlin

Improving study success respectively decreasing dropout is an important goal at the Technical University Berlin already for a number of years. This is mainly due to the traditionally high dropout rates in the technical and scientific disciplines. At the Technical University Berlin a number of different understandings of study success are in place. These have different functions: In its future concept the Technical University states that study success is mostly dependent on the quality of teaching and learning. The university leadership for example states that improving study choices and the match between students and programmes is important. Therefore it has initiated a number of projects aiming to realize these goals (see section 4.5.5.2). Study success is also included in the quality assurance system of the Technical University. Here the feasibility of the programme is an important evaluation criterion. This includes for example if students are able to complete modules on time and what percentage of students successfully complete a module once started. In some cases, however, interviewees mentioned that a greater importance is assigned to completion in general rather than to completion in time. This is mostly dependent on the discipline and the high number of students that have been enrolling in some degree programmes. Also, it was mentioned that to some professors the transfer of competences and knowledge is more important than the quick completion of the programme.

4.3 Monitoring of study success

4.3.1 Monitoring of study success at federal level

In Germany, various indicators for study success are in use. These include the dropout rate and the completion rate. These are provided by two different actors. The German Centre for Research on Higher Education and Science Studies (DZHW – the former HIS) provides a dropout rate. Since data on the educational careers of students in Germany are not collected centrally and thus no exact numbers on dropouts are available, the DZHW has developed a method that allows estimating dropout rates. To calculate the dropout rate the number of graduates of a given year are compared to a virtual cohort of first-year students of any one year. This virtual cohort is not determined by the average length of studies but it is “a of a newly-formed group in which all groups of first-year students are included with a weight that is equal to their respective share in the examined group of graduates.” (Heublein, 2014, p. 499). Data on first-year students are collected by the DZHW, to build the virtual cohort data from students enrolling in more than one degree programme and from students who change their study programme are considered.

The federal statistical office provides a completion rate. Here the number of graduates who started higher education in the study year X is compared to all students who enrolled in the study year X. The formula does not consider international students and
non-degree seeking students. The graduation rate is calculated for different time points. The first time is eight years after the initial enrolment (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2014).

The Higher Education Statistics Act (Hochschulstatistikgesetz) is a federal law that regulates what information on students may be collected. This includes information about selected student characteristics (for example age, sex, educational background). Due to data security regulations it is not allowed to use the data for tracking students’ educational pathways, therefore currently available indicators do not reveal the real situation but are estimates. The majority of stakeholders are very unsatisfied with this situation; they claimed that the data does not deliver up-to-date information about the actual scope of dropout and completion. In particular representatives of higher education institutions were very unsatisfied. Due to missing data, they cannot measure the success or failure of their degree programmes. Also, due to the strong data security regulations implementing measures that they could help identifying students at risk for dropout is very difficult for them.

Currently a reform of the Higher Education Statistics Act is discussed. With the reform the tracking of students could become possible. Here, the introduction of a so-called educational ID (Bildungs-ID) is discussed. This ID should allow tracking students educational pathways without referencing to the individual.

### 4.3.2 Performance of the higher education system

According to the data currently available on dropout and completion it becomes clear that the numbers are not startlingly high. The data of the German federal statistical office indicate an average completion rate of 75.9 percent for the student cohort enrolling in 2004 for the first time. The data also reveal that completion is higher in discipline with selective access like medicine, veterinary medicine and fine arts. Here the completion rate is around 90 percent (see table 2 below).

**Table 1: Completion rates, cohorts enrolling 2000 – 2004, in %, by sex**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>First year of enrolment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>73.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>76.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>75.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Statistisches Bundesamt 2014, p. 9
The dropout rates calculated by the DZHW point into a similar direction. For the cohort graduating in 2012 it states a dropout rate of 28 percent for Bachelor programmes. For master programmes at universities it estimates a dropout of 12 percent, at universities of applied sciences these are 7 percent.

### Table 2: Completion rates, cohorts enrolling 2000 – 2004, in percent, by sex and discipline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>First year of enrolment</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts and humanities</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>65.5</td>
<td>63.7</td>
<td>65.0</td>
<td>65.9</td>
<td>63.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>female</td>
<td>72.7</td>
<td>72.8</td>
<td>74.3</td>
<td>73.2</td>
<td>72.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>total</td>
<td>71.0</td>
<td>70.6</td>
<td>72.5</td>
<td>70.7</td>
<td>74.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>85.3</td>
<td>84.6</td>
<td>85.0</td>
<td>90.0</td>
<td>90.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>female</td>
<td>88.6</td>
<td>97.4</td>
<td>103.7</td>
<td>98.0</td>
<td>98.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>total</td>
<td>87.6</td>
<td>90.3</td>
<td>93.7</td>
<td>94.1</td>
<td>93.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law, economics, social sciences</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>77.7</td>
<td>77.7</td>
<td>77.9</td>
<td>79.7</td>
<td>76.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>female</td>
<td>80.9</td>
<td>79.2</td>
<td>80.2</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>81.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>total</td>
<td>79.3</td>
<td>78.5</td>
<td>79.1</td>
<td>78.5</td>
<td>78.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics, natural science</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>67.9</td>
<td>68.1</td>
<td>66.6</td>
<td>66.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>female</td>
<td>65.2</td>
<td>64.2</td>
<td>65.0</td>
<td>65.9</td>
<td>69.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>total</td>
<td>66.1</td>
<td>66.5</td>
<td>67.0</td>
<td>66.6</td>
<td>67.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine, health sciences</td>
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<td>96.7</td>
<td>&gt;100</td>
<td>97.8</td>
<td>93.7</td>
<td>97.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>female</td>
<td>94.9</td>
<td>99.8</td>
<td>97.1</td>
<td>93.0</td>
<td>90.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>total</td>
<td>95.6</td>
<td>&gt;100</td>
<td>97.8</td>
<td>94.8</td>
<td>91.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterinary medicine</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>85.9</td>
<td>&gt;100</td>
<td>97.3</td>
<td>94.1</td>
<td>96.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>female</td>
<td>88.8</td>
<td>94.9</td>
<td>91.4</td>
<td>94.1</td>
<td>91.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>total</td>
<td>88.4</td>
<td>95.7</td>
<td>92.3</td>
<td>94.0</td>
<td>91.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
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<td>80.4</td>
<td>81.1</td>
<td>80.4</td>
<td>80.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>female</td>
<td>82.0</td>
<td>86.0</td>
<td>90.4</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>total</td>
<td>80.3</td>
<td>83.4</td>
<td>86.3</td>
<td>80.2</td>
<td>80.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>72.4</td>
<td>72.0</td>
<td>72.4</td>
<td>73.1</td>
<td>71.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>female</td>
<td>75.9</td>
<td>75.8</td>
<td>76.7</td>
<td>75.9</td>
<td>76.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>total</td>
<td>73.1</td>
<td>72.8</td>
<td>73.3</td>
<td>73.7</td>
<td>72.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine arts</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>94.4</td>
<td>91.6</td>
<td>89.0</td>
<td>93.5</td>
<td>83.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>female</td>
<td>88.2</td>
<td>90.7</td>
<td>91.0</td>
<td>90.7</td>
<td>90.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>total</td>
<td>90.2</td>
<td>91.0</td>
<td>90.4</td>
<td>91.8</td>
<td>87.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>male</td>
<td>73.9</td>
<td>74.0</td>
<td>74.5</td>
<td>73.6</td>
<td>72.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>female</td>
<td>77.4</td>
<td>77.1</td>
<td>78.1</td>
<td>77.4</td>
<td>79.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>total</td>
<td>75.6</td>
<td>75.6</td>
<td>76.4</td>
<td>75.5</td>
<td>75.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Statistisches Bundesamt 2014, p. 12


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor - total</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor (U)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor (UAS)</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State exam</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Heublein et al 2014, p. 3, table compiled by author
Table 4: Dropout rates by DZHW 2012, cohort graduating 2012, in %, Masters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Arts and humanities</th>
<th>Law, economics, social sciences</th>
<th>Mathematics, natural sciences</th>
<th>Engineering</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Master (U)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master (UAS)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Heublein et al 2014, p. 9-10, table compiled by author

4.3.3 Monitoring of study success at the institutional level

As mentioned above, due to data security regulations German higher education institutions are limited in tracking and monitoring the pathways of their students. They thus lack detailed information on the achievements of students, changes of degree programmes and the actual dropout in higher education. Both higher education institutions included in this research were critical about this situation. Nonetheless, both institutions implemented measures to better identify students at risk.

4.3.3.1 Fachhochschule Dortmund

Tracking students at the Fachhochschule Dortmund includes monitoring the achievements of first year students on the one hand and trying to monitor the pathways of students on the other hand. When it comes to monitoring the achievements of first year students the Fachhochschule had to find a way to act according to the data security regulations. Its solution to the problem was to integrate mentoring talks as a mandatory activity in the curriculum of the degree programmes. In addition a so-called digital study journal for students (Digitales Studienlogbuch) is implemented (see also section 4.5.5.1).

The study journal provides the students with information on different issues like the outcomes of test, credits already achieved, upcoming exams etc. These different issues are also visualized by means of a traffic-light-system that informs students about for example urgently required actions. Students can allow mentors to access their data and use it in the mandatory mentoring talks.

With regard to students discontinuing their programmes in an active or passive manner, the Fachhochschule has developed different forms of monitoring. Those students who actively deregister from the Fachhochschule are surveyed. Participation in the survey is voluntary. In the survey students are asked why they discontinue their study at the Fachhochschule and what future educational steps they will take.

With regard to students who passively discontinue their studies the Fachhochschule tries to monitor their numbers per degree programme. Therefore the indicator system AREX has been introduced. It includes indicators on the number of re-enrolments, the number of students who complete in the nominal duration of the programme + 2 semesters, the number of students who actively deregister. AREX also uses traffic-light-symbols to highlight the performance of study programmes with regard to retention and completion.

These performance indicators are discussed in the yearly performance talks between the

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For students there are two ways to discontinue a degree programme: either passively by simply not re-enrolling or by actively deregistering from the institutions/study programme.
university leadership and the deans. Nonetheless, though AREX informs about the outputs of a study programme it does not inform about the reasons for discontinuation of those students who passively deregister, also information on their further pathways is not available.

The Fachhochschule Dortmund reports about dropout as absolute numbers. These numbers include students who actively deregister from the institution. Students who transfer to another programme and/or another institution cannot be monitored. Therefore a completion cannot be represented for the Fachhochschule Dortmund.

4.3.3.2 Technical University Berlin

The Technical University Berlin monitors study success in similar but also different ways. Similar like the Fachhochschule Dortmund it has to face that it cannot monitor the pathways of students. Thus, information on students passively discontinuing is rare and only a few students actively discontinuing their studies provide data. Nonetheless, at the Technical University Berlin an extensive controlling of degree programmes is conducted as part of a pilot project related to the institutional accreditation that started in 2014. This controlling feeds into reports (Datenbasierte Studiengangsberichte) that summarize all available indicators for selected degree programmes. The indicators provide information on the study population in the degree programme, the number of passed/completed exams/modules/degrees, participation of female/male students, internationalization, student-staff ratio. In addition results from three surveys are included. The first survey asks for the taught and learned skills and competencies, from the second survey results on the general student satisfaction, students’ satisfaction with teachers and the quality of teaching and other evaluation indicators are presented. From the third survey finally - a survey among graduates of the Technical University Berlin - for example results on their satisfaction with their former study programme are presented.

The comprehensive controlling at the Technical University Berlin includes a completion rate. For the calculation of the rate the number of graduates of a certain year is put in perspective to a selected enrolment cohort. The numbers below include data from graduates completing their programmes till 2013 and first year students in the winter term 2006/2007.

Table 5: Completion rates at Technical University Berlin, 2013, in %, by discipline and sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All disciplines</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>International students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts and humanities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law and economics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics and natural sciences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4.4 Short description of the higher education system

#### 4.4.1 Steering and funding of the German higher education system in short

A central characteristic of the German higher education system is its federal organization. In this respect the federal states are solely responsible for higher education (as they are for education in general). The responsibility includes the funding as well as regulation of higher education institutions. Thus, in Germany there about 16 higher education laws, 16 different models of funding higher education, and 16 ways of steering higher education. In this context the “Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany” (short KMK - Kultusministerkonferenz) has the role to align education policies in the countries to achieve similar conditions in all German federal states.

Until recently (December 2014) the federal level was also not allowed to fund higher education because of the so-called “Kooperationsverbot” (cooperation ban). The recent loosening of the cooperation ban allows the federal level to provide funds for higher education to the federal states.  

Nonetheless, although the cooperation ban is in place since 2006, the federal states and the federal level agreed in 2007 to cooperate by establishing so-called higher education pacts. This was made possible because of a special article in the German constitution (Grundgesetz Article 91 b, 1, 1 No. 2) that allows cooperation between the federal level and the federal states under certain conditions, i.e. the cooperation helps to ensure the international competitiveness of the German higher education system. Based on administrative agreements the federal level and the federal states then cooperate, this means both provide funds for higher education, these funds have to serve the improvement of higher education.

Besides these national authorities at the federal level, the intermediary level and the level of the federal states some further stakeholders that have an impact on higher education policies have to be mentioned. The most important among them are the Council for Science and Humanities (Wissenschaftsrat), the German Rector’s conference (Hochschulrektorenkonferenz) and the Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Programmes in Germany (Akkreditierungsrat). The Council for Science and Humanities is a central advisory body for the federal government and the governments of the federal states. It issues recommendations for the future development of higher education institutions and the development of higher education in general. The German Rectors’ Conference is an organization representing public and state-acknowledged private higher education institutions in Germany.  

It voices the interests of its members with regard to teaching, research and further missions of higher education. It is integrated in a number of political processes related to higher education (for example, in the setting of accreditation guidelines). With its publications it voices the interests of higher education institutions to the political level. The Rectors’ Conference also acts as a support/service agent to higher education institutions. It contributes to the identification of good

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70 https://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2014/kw46_de_grundgesetz/339876
71 Currently about 268 higher education institutions are a members of the HRK, these represent about 94 percent of all students enrolled in German higher education (Website HRK-accessed on March 16th, 2015).
practices in teaching and learning. Further, it acts as an information agent for prospective students as it provides detailed information on the German higher education landscape and the offer of degree programmes. The Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Programmes in Germany organizes the quality assurance system for Germany. Here it collaborates with the Standing Conference of Ministers (KMK) and the German Rectors’ Conference: The council of the Foundation formulates and decides the guidelines for accreditation in Germany. These guidelines are based on the decisions made by the Standing Conference and recommendations issued by the German Rectors’ Conference.

4.4.2 Higher education landscape

Though there are differences in funding models and regulations in all federal states the higher education system is a binary system, i.e. higher education is provided by universities and universities of applied sciences. In some federal states like Baden-Württemberg new hybrid institutions - the so-called Berufsakademien have been established. These offer training and courses that lead to combined vocational/higher education degree.

In Germany there are 432 higher education institutions, from these were 106 universities, 6 pedagogical universities, 17 theological universities, 53 art and music universities, 212 universities of applied sciences and 29 colleges for public administration (Statistisches Bundesamt). More than one quarter, 28 percent, of the higher education institutions are private; 7 percent of all students are enrolled here. Private institutions are mostly universities of applied sciences, 86 percent of students enrolled at private institutions study there.

Besides higher education, the vocational training system is an important educational pathway after leaving secondary school. In 2012 from school leavers who received an entry qualification for higher education about 24 percent decided to start training in the vocational sector (Bildungsbericht 2014, p. 107)

4.4.3 Students

In 2011 about 57 percent of all school leavers received an upper secondary school leaving certificate (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2013, p. 8). From these students 46 percent were attending higher education immediately. Experiences have shown that a number of students do not immediately start higher education after leaving school. These students decide either for training in the vocational sector or spend a year abroad or volunteering in the social sector (Freiwilliges Soziales Jahr). From the 2009 cohort of students leaving high school with an entry qualification for higher education nearly two thirds (65 percent) had enrolled in higher education two years after leaving school. For younger cohorts i.e. students leaving high school in or after 2010 currently only estimates on the percentage moving to higher education are available. For the 2012 cohort we find an estimate of 73 to 79 percent that are expected to enrol in higher education (Bildungsbericht, 2014).

In the study year 2013/2014 about 2,616,881 students were enrolled at German higher education institutions. Since 2008 the number of students has been increasing due to the reduction of the total schooling time in (upper) secondary education and the abolishment of the compulsory military service. In the study year 2014/2015 in total 500,666 first-year students have been enrolling at German higher education institutions. Also the number of non-Germans has been increasing in the recent ten years. In the study year
2013/2014 about 11.5 percent of all students were foreigners. 52 percent of all students were male, 48 percent female (Statistisches Bundesamt).

Figure 1: Number of students, 2004/2005 – 2013/2014, by sex

Source: Statistisches Bundesamt

The students classified as Germans in the statistical data include students with a migration background. According to the Education Report (Bildungsbericht 2006) from 2006 an increasing number of students with migration background have been enrolling in higher education. In 2006 the percentage of persons with a migration background receiving a higher education entry qualification was at 15 percent (among all people receiving credentials to access higher education), from these persons a percentage of 75 percent enrolled in tertiary education programmes. Exact data on the current participation of persons with a migration background in higher education are not available. The Federal Statistical Office estimates that about 15 percent of the population with a German citizenship have a migration background and are second or third generation migrants. In the recent years different initiatives to widen access among students with non-traditional backgrounds might have contributed to an increase in the number of students with a migration background. As the proportion of the population with a migrant background is difficult to determine, there are currently only estimates for younger cohort. The estimations for the 2012 cohort is that 19 percent of students receiving a higher education entry qualification have a migrant background; from these 76 to 83 percent are expected to enrol in higher education (Bildungsbericht 2014, Table F2-2.A). The percentage of students with non-traditional backgrounds in higher education is thus increasing. Nonetheless, though these data point to an increasing diversity of the student body it is unfortunately not possible to provide its full picture due to a lack of data.
4.4.4 Access to higher education

4.4.4.1 Entrance requirements

In Germany there are three different school certificates entitle their owners to enrol in higher education: The Abitur, the Zeugnis der fachgebundenen Hochschulreife and the Fachhochschulreife. The three school certificates differ as regards the ‘enrolment rights’ their owners have acquired.

- The “Abitur” is most encompassing school certificate. Owners are entitled to enrol in any kind of first cycle programme at any kind of higher education institutions in the first study cycle.
- The “Zeugnis der fachgebundenen Hochschulreife” entitles enrol in specific study programmes at any kind of higher education institutions in the first study cycle; the range of subjects to be chosen is limited to the subject of the certificate.
- The “Fachabitur” entitles to enrol in study programmes at universities of applied science in the first study cycle.

Also persons who completed a vocational training but not completed one of the three school certificate can access higher education. In 2009 the federal states agreed that some vocational degrees are equivalent to the Abitur. Among these degrees are master craftsmen and graduates from professional continuing education (e.g. nautical professions or health professions). Persons who do not have one of the vocational degrees can seek access to higher education if they have at least three years of professional experience after their vocational training and if they have successfully passed an entrance examination.

4.4.4.2 Restrictions on access

With regard to access to programmes of the first study cycle three different types of access restrictions can be distinguished:

- Programmes with nationwide quotas:
  Access to programmes in medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine, pharmacy and psychology is organized by the national Foundation for Higher Education Admission (Stiftung für Hochschulzulassung) in cooperation with the universities providing these programmes. About 40 percent of the study places are allocated due to the mark of the entry qualification for higher education and waiting period after receiving the entry qualification. 60 percent of the study places will be awarded by the universities themselves, while local selection criteria will be used.

- Programmes with local restrictions on admission:
  Here access can be organized in two ways: either the higher education institution organizes the selection process or commissions it to the Foundation for Higher Education Admission. Selection criteria are determined by the higher education institutions, mostly a numerus clausus is used.

- Programmes with no access restrictions:
  Here students can apply freely to the institutions and programmes.

It has to be mentioned that artistic programmes all use selection procedures when admitting students.
4.4.4.3 Widening access

In the recent years different measures to widen access to higher education were done. These were targeting students who do not have a university entrance qualification but gained adequate qualifications through vocational training. These measures were initiated due to an 2009 agreement of the KMK to open up the universities to vocationally qualified.\textsuperscript{72}

Widening access to students from lower socio-economic backgrounds is an ongoing issue for higher education policy in Germany, data show that students from families where no parent has a higher education degree less frequently enrol in higher education than students from families with parents having a higher education degree (Bildungsbericht 2014). The high selectivity of primary and secondary schools has already been identified as a major reason for the lower participation of students from non-traditional backgrounds. Therefore instruments to achieve more equity throughout the educational system have been introduced. These mostly target primary and secondary education. With regard to the transition from secondary school to higher education the funding of students plays an important role (see section national policies below). Also some foundations (like for example the Böll-Stiftung, the Mercator-Stiftung, etc.) and organisations like “arbeiterkind” campaign for a stronger participation of non-traditional students in higher education.

4.5 Description of national and institutional policies

4.5.1 Federal policies

As higher education policy (as education in general) is the responsibility of the federal states, the federal level cannot implement any regulation that addresses study success when it comes to higher education institutions. A cooperation ban even restricted that the federal level could fund higher education. This ban was loosened after the change of the German constitution. Now the federal level can participate in the funding based on a special agreement between the federal level and the federal states. By means of the agreement and a corresponding change in the German constitution (Article 91 b,1,1, No.2) the cooperation ban was cancelled for selected situations. Now the federal level and the federal states can cooperate when it comes to issues like assuring the international competitiveness of the German higher education system. Cooperation takes place as collaborative funding of higher education aiming to improve the quality of the higher education provision.

Against this background, two administrative arrangements have been implemented in recent years. Both provide funds for improving the quality of teaching at higher education institutions: the Higher Education Pact 2020 and the Quality Pact for Teaching.

**The Higher Education Pact 2020\textsuperscript{73}:** This pact supports higher education institutions in tackling the increasing number of students that are expected to enroll in higher education till 2020. Based on a statistical estimation by the Standing Conference (KMK) it was expected that the number of enrolments in higher education will continuously increase. Under the pact additional funds were made available for higher education institutions for

\textsuperscript{72} Aufstieg durch Bildung....
\textsuperscript{73} http://www.bmbf.de/de/6142.php
each additional first-year student by the federal and the state governments. Since 2007 already two funding periods took place. A third funding period that will start in January 2016 has already been agreed upon by the federal states and the federal government. In the current second period funds for 275,000 additional first year students were provided (26,000 Euros per student for a four year period are received by the higher education institutions, 50 percent paid by the federal ministry, 50 percent paid by the federal states). Higher education institutions are required to use funds for increasing capacities and improving the quality of teaching and learning.

In the upcoming third funding period (2016 - 2020) funds to establish more than 760,033 additional study places will be provided. In the third period the funds will be allocated on the condition that higher education institutions use of which 10 percent for the introduction of measures addressing the improvement of study success.

The federal states report on the implementation of the Higher education pact annually. In these reports data on aspects like the development of first-year student numbers, student staff ratio etc. are evaluated. The 2012 report states that so far the Higher Education Pact has realized its quantitative goals (GWK, 2012, p. 22) that is an increase in staff numbers, female professors, and first-years students at universities of applied sciences and in the STEM disciplines. The report makes no statement on the aim to improve study conditions and to allow a high-quality study. Interviewees in higher education institutions appreciated the additional funds of the higher education pact. At the same time they also mentioned that funds do not fully meet the needs of higher education institutions. They indicated that the number of first-year students exceeded the original estimation. At the same time they pointed to the chronic underfunding of higher education. The funds made available would not be sufficient to achieve a significant improvement in the quality of teaching as they would not be sufficient to cover the actual costs of a study place. The interviewees also criticized the temporal limitation of the higher education pact.

**The Quality Pact for Teaching**

The Quality Pact for Teaching (running from 2011 – 2020) is a further administrative agreement between the German Federal Ministry and the federal states. It aims to stimulate higher education institutions to implement instruments and measures addressing the improvement of the quality of teaching and learning. Funds were distributed in a competitive process. In order to participate in the process higher education institutions had to send in a proposal stating their plans to improve teaching and learning. These proposals were reviewed in a peer review process and from which the most promising were selected for funding. The universities had maximum freedom in developing their proposals. The tender did not contain any restrictions on the type of actions that will be funded as the Ministry has deliberately opted for an open design. Higher education institutions should be given the opportunity to develop as appropriate measures as possible. The increase in study success was one reason for the establishment of the Quality Pact for Teaching and Learning. Although this is not mentioned as a primary goal, the Quality Pact is based on the idea that the improvement of the quality of teaching and learning increases study success.

Currently, 182 higher education institutions receive funds from the Quality Pact for Teaching. Higher education institutions receive funds for a wide range of instruments. These include like for example hiring of additional teaching staff, creating new

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74 www.qualitaetspakt-lehre.de
organisational units offering study-related counselling and mentoring for students and teachers alike. Currently a midterm evaluation of the funded projects is ongoing. Projects that are evaluated positively will be funded for five more years. In addition, an overall evaluation of the funding scheme is taking place. Since October 2014 also a number of projects researching the wider impact of the Quality Pact became funded by the Federal Ministry for research and education (Begleitforschung zum Qualitätspakt Lehre). Results from these evaluations and research are not available yet. Nonetheless, most stakeholders perceive the Quality Pact as an important measure leading to a number of innovations in teaching and learning. Stakeholders also mention that by means of the Quality Pact teaching and learning received more attention at higher education institutions. Again, the project-character of the funding and that funds are only granted additionally had been criticized. Stakeholders mention that due to the underfunding of higher education institutions a sustainable improvement of the teaching and learning quality and study conditions would only be achieved by a constant and massive increase of basic funds.

Furthermore, the federal government is responsible for the financial support of students.

**BAFöG – Bundesausbildungsförderungsgesetz**\(^{75}\): With this law (already implemented in 1971) funds are provided to students meeting certain eligibility criteria. Eligibility as well as the amount of funding depend on parental income. The funding aims to give students from low-income families the opportunity to study. Funds are awarded as a combination of grants/loans, normally students have to pack back about 50 percent of the funds received. When eligible for funding students receive monthly payments for the nominal period of their degree programmes. The payment can be extended by two semesters so that students can complete their degrees. After each study year, however, students have to prove that they are still eligible for funding, after the fifth semester eligibility is also dependent on study achievements. The regulations allow for one change of the degree programme by the student. Besides stimulating completion the regulations also aim at the stimulation of faster completion. Students who earn their degree before the end of the nominal period of their study must repay only half of the loan. The expenditure on Bafög is monitored annually with regard to the height of the funding per student, the socio-demographic background of recipients, and the repayment of the loans.\(^{76}\) The impact of BAFöG on study success has not yet been evaluated. Research on the motives and reasons for dropout has shown that students more often drop higher education for other reasons than financial problems, and that students receiving BAFöG are more likely to leave higher education (Heublein et al 2009).\(^{77}\)

**Deutschland-Stipendium (Germany Scholarship)**\(^{78}\): The Germany Scholarship was implemented in 2011. It is a fellowship for talented and high-achieving students, but is also awarded to students who show a special social commitment or who had to overcome serious obstacles in their educational careers. Selected students receive about 300 Euros per month, from these about 150 Euros are funded by the Federal Government and 150 Euros are supplied by private sponsors. Students should receive the fellowship for the

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\(^{75}\) [https://www.bafög.de/](https://www.bafög.de/)


\(^{77}\) This is due to the fact that students receiving BAFöG are more often from a lower socio-economic parental background and are thus more likely to drop higher education.

\(^{78}\) [http://www.deutschlandstipendium.de/](http://www.deutschlandstipendium.de/)
nominal period of the degree program. It is planned that in the long run about eight percent of all students at German universities should receive this scholarship. Scholarships are awarded by the participating universities, students also have to apply here. The aim of the Germany scholarship is to stimulate cooperation between higher education and industry in funding higher education. A further aim of the Germany Scholarship is to improve completion rates. A mid-term evaluation of the Germany Scholarship started in 2014 and will complete in 2016. Results are not available yet.

4.5.2 Policies North Rhine-Westphalia

As mentioned above study success is high on the political agenda in North Rhine-Westphalia. The coalition agreement of the Social democrats and the Greens from 2014 states that dropout rates in higher education should be reduced by 20 percent in the coming years. The new higher education law from October 2014 has a number of regulations that intend to support reaching this goal. Currently a new funding model for higher education institutions is developed, information on this model is not available yet. Representatives of higher education institutions and higher education stakeholders in NRW are critical about this goal - in particular as data on ‘real’ dropout rates is not available (see section 1.3.1). Additionally a number of information policies to better inform students about later programmes have been initiated and funded by North Rhine-Westphalia.

4.5.2.1 Funding

Currently, in North Rhine-Westphalia, performance based funding is used for higher education. The funding formula includes the number of graduates (de Boer and Jongbloed 2015). There are plans to replace the performance based funding model in the near future by a budgeting model. So far, detailed information on the new funding model is not available. Also, the impact of performance funding on study success has not been evaluated.

4.5.2.2 Information and support for students

Information and support for students are mostly done by higher education institutions. Special regulations that mandate higher education institutions to inform about their study programmes in an adequate way are not implemented. Nonetheless, in North Rhine-Westphalia the Ministry initiated and funds the website “studifinder.de” that provides a combination of self-evaluation tests and information on study programmes. The website addresses two information needs of students: on the one hand it provides a number of online-test where students can learn about their competencies and interests. Based on their test results the website selects and recommends disciplines and degree programmes. In addition information on programmes is provided. The website transfers the student to the websites of the programme at the higher education institution. A major aim of the measure is to stimulate deliberate study choices and support a better match of students and programmes. The measure has so far been evaluated for its functionality and for customer satisfaction rather than for its impact on study success.
4.5.2.3 Organisation of higher education

The new higher education law in North Rhine-Westphalia that came into force in October 2014 allows higher education institutions to establish part-time study programmes. With this measure the diversity of the student body is addressed - in particular older students with families and/or work obligations. As the regulations is only recent, it has hardly been introduced, thus there is no evidence on its effectiveness.

4.5.3 Policies Berlin

Unlike North Rhine-Westphalia in Berlin study success has currently moderate relevance on the higher education policy agenda. Here the improvement of the quality of teaching and learning is seen as more important. As on the federal level, a general idea here is also that promoting the quality of teaching and learning would affect completion in a positive way. With regard to study success, the Senate distinguishes, however, avoidable and unavoidable dropouts. Avoidable drop outs are defined as those changes of degree programmes or educational pathways that are due to a malfunctioning of the higher education system or the higher education institution. Unavoidable drop outs are defined as relating to personal reasons of the student. Furthermore, it is stated that it is not possible to move completion rates to a very low level as dropout happens naturally and higher education systems will not be able to completely respond to the heterogeneity of the student population. In addition is was stated that changing educational pathways should not be evaluated in a negative way, but modern societies should allow divergent pathways and not treat dropouts as a waste of individual and societal resources.

4.5.3.1 Funding

In Berlin, public higher education institutions are funded by so-called “Hochschulverträge” (Contracts with higher education institutions). These include agreements on goals higher education institutions would like to achieve in the period covered. In this respect to study success higher education institutions have to set goals on the number of students and graduates. Funds are then rewarding achieved results. Money is thus the main incentive for public higher education institutions to address study success in a proactive manner. In addition, the Senate provides additional funds to the public higher education institutions with the scheme “Qualitätsoffensive Lehre” (Quality campaign). In this scheme public higher education institutions can propose measures to improve the quality of teaching that become funded after a positive evaluation of their proposals. The scheme also aims to motivate higher education institutions to take more responsibility for the quality of teaching. Within this programme funds were made available for a number of measures. So far these have not yet been evaluated with regard to their effectiveness.

4.5.3.2 Organisation of higher education

Compulsory Consultation and mentoring talks for students (not in force anymore). Article 28 of the higher education law of Berlin proposes consultation and mentoring talks for students. Until recently these were mandatory. Due to student protests and problems with privacy policy regulations the regulation became a discretionary clause. To date, most higher education institutions have abolished the formerly mandatory consultation and mentoring talks.
4.5.4 Policies Stakeholders

4.5.4.1 Council for Science and Humanities (Wissenschaftsrat)

As an advisory body for federal and state authorities in higher education the council can have an impact on their higher education policy. Currently the Wissenschaftsrat is working on a recommendation that will deal with study success. It is expected the recommendation will be published by end of April 2015.\(^79\)

4.5.4.2 German Rectors’ Conference

The German Rectors’ Conference published in November 2013 recommendations for the further implementation of European higher education reforms, including recommendations how to address dropout in the organisation of higher education (HRK, 2013). In addition the Rectors’ Conference is involved in the dissemination of good practices in higher education. The recent project "Nexus"\(^80\) (funded by the German Federal Ministry for education and research) focuses on study success and the reduction of dropout at higher education institutions. The project (that will run from 2014 to 2018) support higher education institutions in developing and implementing measures in the following areas:

- Optimising the initial phase of studies;
- Promoting mobility during studies;
- Facilitating the transition to employment.

In the project information on developed measures and experiences made while implemented will be compiled and disseminated.

4.5.4.3 Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Programmes in Germany

Currently dropout and completion are not included in the accreditation guidelines as such. Nonetheless study success plays a role in the accreditation guidelines. Here it is addressed as academic feasibility (Studierbarkeit), that is one of the central criteria for accreditation of study programmes. Ensuring academic feasibility of study programmes has been seen as a major success factor in achieving study success. Furthermore, higher education institutions have to show that their internal quality assurance system considers study success.

In the accreditation guidelines study success is identified as the feasibility of an academic programme. This definition was developed against the background of the implementation of the BA/MA structure that led to a complete change of assessment and examination procedures. While before Bologna curricula foresaw examinations at the end of the studies only the new curricula implemented assessments/examinations throughout the study (for example after each study module). Due to a lack of experiences with continuous examination procedures some study programmes became overburdened by examinations. They thus were not academically feasible anymore. This put study success at risk, a number of students stopped their study programmes and dropped out of higher education because of the too high work load. The Standing Conference (KMK) called for

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\(^79\) The recommendation was not yet available when this report was finalized.

\(^80\) www.hrk-nexus.de
an adjustment of the students’ workload. Therefore the guidelines for accreditation were adapted. The accreditation criterion 2.4 Academic feasibility now reads (Akkreditierungsrat, 2013, p. 12):

“The academic feasibility of the study programme is ensured through:

- consideration of the expected entry qualifications,
- an appropriate curriculum design
- the information on the student workload, which is checked for plausibility (or, in the case of the first accreditation, estimated according to empirical values),
- frequency and organisation of examination, which is adequate and has a reasonable workload,
- corresponding offers of support as well as
- technical and interdisciplinary course guidance.

The interests of handicapped students will be taken into consideration.”

Study success is also part of criterion 2.9 “Quality Assurance and Further Development”. Here the guidelines state that higher education institutions have to take study success (here “academic accomplishment”) into account when further developing their programmes. Further evaluation results, studies of the student’s workload and the whereabouts of graduates have to be considered.

These regulations are based on the “länderspezifische Strukturvorgaben/Auslegung ländergemeinsame Strukturvorgaben” issued by the Standing Conference (KMK) that operationalize these requirements.

Currently the accreditation guidelines are revised. It is expected that these will be finalized at the end of 2016. Though the work has just started and no final decisions are made yet it is expected that dropout and completion will have a stronger role in the revised guidelines. Prioritizing dropout and completion in higher education institutions could for example be achieved by a more common use of benchmarks that allow comparing completion rates among higher education institutions.

4.5.4.4 Stifterverband für die deutsche Wissenschaft

The Stifterverband is already active in promoting the improvement of the quality of teaching in higher education. It has conducted/funded several projects and competitions in this area. The project “Qualitätszirkel Studienerfolg” is one of those. Here selected higher education institutions across Germany became funded to develop instruments to improve study success. In the project the higher education institutions funded can participate in regular meetings and exchange about their experiences. Outcomes of the project will be published and disseminated as good practices.

4.5.4.5 Verband Deutscher Maschinen und Anlagenbau – VDMA

The VDMA has established the project “Maschinenhaus” to support German higher education institutions in addressing study success in the engineering sciences. The high dropout rates in engineering programmes and the lack of graduates in engineering

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81 http://www.stifterverband.info/bildungsinitiative/mint-bildung/qualitaetszirkel_studienerfolg/index.html
triggered the implementation of the project. In the project a study on the main reasons for dropout and measures addressing study success has been done. In the transfer phase the measures and instruments were implemented at higher education institutions (using a series of transfer-workshops - in collaboration with the DZHW; see In der Smitten and Heublein, 2014). From the experiences gathered in the implementation a catalogue of measures (the so-called toolbox) has been concluded. The toolbox provides an overview of measures and checklists for the adaption of measures at the institutional level.\textsuperscript{82}

### The VDMA-project “Maschinenhaus”

In the project Maschinenhaus different instruments and measures implemented at higher education institutions that aim to improve the quality of teaching in study programmes in engineering are developed. The project Maschinenhaus established a reference model for the implementation of these different measures. This model picks up the different phases of a student life cycle and indicates useful measures and sets useful benchmarks/targets for each of the phases. Measures, instruments and benchmarks have been summarized in a toolbox.

In detail the following phases have been distinguished:

a) Pre-study phase (1-2 years before entering higher education/the study programme)

Dissemination of useful information for persons interested in the study programme. Most important is here that clear information on the programmes is provided. Prospective students should be able to establish realistic expectations about their later study programmes. Here a manual for higher education institutions on how to provide realistic information has been developed.

b) Study entrance phase (first year in higher education)

Most important is here the integration of the student in the study programme and the higher education institution. This integration includes the disciplinary as well as the social integration of the student, higher education institutions are challenged to establish a “Willkommenskultur” (welcoming culture). Additionally also learning competencies of the students should be improved, sometimes even taught to the student. The study entrance phase is seen as the most important/crucial phase for study success.

c) The study phase

Check if the study runs smoothly.

d) Transfer/international mobility

Support students in finding internships and studying abroad.

e) Transition to the labour market.

Support students in finding adequate employment.

The VDMA reports based on the experiences gathered in the “Maschinenhaus-Project” that it cannot state the best or most efficient instrument to stimulate study success. The choice of instruments has to consider different context variables. To check whether the measures fit the context of the higher education institution the toolbox of the project Maschinenhaus does not only provide the description of the different measures but also

\textsuperscript{82} More information available at: http://www.vdma.org/maschinenhaus

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check lists to test if an instrument is fitting to the special requirements of an institution. Additionally, experience has shown that the establishment of new professional roles in teaching (for example student consultants, coaches for professors) has contributed to the success of the measures. This would not put additional demands on professors and teaching staff. Following-up students and their learning progress has turned out to be another important instrument. Higher education institutions that were able to implement mentoring and student consultancy report positive results with regard to study success.

4.5.5 Institutional policies
Both institutions selected as cases receive funds from the Quality Pact for Teaching. Study success is an important goal in these projects, and has been approached in different ways.

4.5.5.1 Fachhochschule Dortmund
The Fachhochschule Dortmund is a university of applied science located in the Ruhr-Area in North Rhine-Westphalia. Founded in 1971 it currently has about 12,500 students and offers Bachelor- as well as Master Programmes in architecture, design, electrical engineering, computer science, mechanical engineering, social sciences and economics. The Fachhochschule indicates the diversity of the student body as a central characteristic. Currently students come from 80 different nationalities; these account for a variety of 30 different pathways to higher education.

The project “Qualität in der Lehre” (Quality in teaching)83 funded by means of the Quality Pact for Teaching addresses this heterogeneity and diversity. Within the project that started in 2012, various measures have been developed to improve the academic preparedness of students in order to enable them to cope with a high-quality study. In addition, the measures intended to support a better social and academic integration of students in the Fachhochschule Dortmund. The measures shall do so primarily for first-year students. They are implemented at the level of faculties and have been adapted to the specific requirements of their subjects and curricula.

The project builds on three pillars: Individualized support, tailored support for special groups among students, documentation and tracking. For each pillar several instruments have been developed. These are described in more detail in table 6 below. Yet, there is no evidence on the effectiveness of the measures implemented. This is due to the only recent implementation of the project. Interviewees mentioned that it would take several years for the project’s impact to unfold in particular when it comes to dropout and completion. Students, teachers, study deans who have so far been addressed by the project were positive about the instruments. All of them highlighted the higher importance of study success in their daily routines as a positive outcome. Teachers and study deans were in particular positive about the better preparedness of students in the critical subjects. This would make it easier for them to adjust their teaching to the requirements of the students. As weaker students are now better enabled to follow the courses they can now concentrate on the more advanced contents rather than repeating fundamentals. Teachers and study deans also appreciated that additional and professionalized staff is available for mentoring and the discussions on study progress.

83 http://www.fh-dortmund.de/de/hs/qdl/index.php
They also welcome the involvement of advanced students as tutors for the critical subjects. This is not only due to putting less demands on their teaching but also to that they do not find themselves well prepared for these kind of tasks.

Students were mostly positive about the tailor-made courses. In particular students who started higher education later in their educational pathway (for example students who followed a professional training in the VET-sector after high school, working for a number of years and then moving to higher education). The courses help them to refresh their knowledge. Students also mention that being assigned to a group of students with a similar level of academic preparedness is helpful. From their perspective this allows for adequate and tailor-made support. In this respect also non-traditional students in particular first-generation students, feel supported in integrating into higher education.

Nonetheless, although the project is very well received by the different groups in the Fachhochschule Dortmund there is also critique. One major concern, however, is that the money is mid-term project funding, and therefore the interventions might not be sustainable.
Table 6: Study success measures in the “Qualität der Lehre”-project at the Fachhochschule Dortmund

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individualized Support</th>
<th>Tailored support for special groups among students</th>
<th>Documentation and Tracking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>- Mentoring</strong></td>
<td><strong>- Critical subjects</strong></td>
<td><strong>- Digital study journal</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring talks have been integrated as a compulsory module in the curricula of the study programmes. Mentoring talks are organized at the individual faculty level. Guidelines for mentoring talks have been adapted to the requirements of the faculty. Additional staff has been employed to act as mentors by means of the Quality Pact funds (In total 12 mentors). The mentoring takes place at the beginning of the study. In the talk different topics like organization of study programme, time-planning etc. are addressed. A special guideline has been developed for the mentoring talks. Mentors are requested to feedback problems mentioned by students to the central level.</td>
<td>At the beginning of the semester, students must take part in a test in which their skills in the so-called “critical subjects” are tested. Based on test results students are assigned to performance groups that receive tailored support in the critical subjects. The aim of the tailored support is to improve the academic preparedness of students and help them to achieve the necessary skills and knowledge enabling them to easily follow courses in critical subjects.</td>
<td>By means of the project a personalized digital study journal has been established for students providing the following information: Achievements/Credit points achieved so far. Results of aptitude test Minutes of mentoring and status talks including recommendations Overview of achievements still to be rendered Visualisation of study progress using traffic-light-systems for: Performance: completed and pending task Timeline - Module/course completed in time? Early warning system: exams for module successfully passed or no further trials to pass exam possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>- Discussion of study progress (Studienstandsgepräche)</strong></td>
<td><strong>- Blended learning</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the second semester students have to participate in a further talk with their mentors. Then they discuss the students’ achievements as well as problems potentially faced in so called ‘critical subjects’. Based on the outcomes of the discussion the need for support in critical subjects is determined. Similar to the mentoring talks at the beginning of the study also the discussion of the study progress is:</td>
<td>The support for student achieving only low in &quot;critical subjects&quot; is provided by different modes of teaching: face-to-face teaching and online courses tailor-made for the needs of the student. For the online courses E-tutoring is available. Participation in the courses is voluntary.</td>
<td>The data can also be accessed by mentors in case the student agrees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- mandatory for the student</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- based on a guideline</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- organized at the faculty level</td>
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<tr>
<td>- done by special, additional staff</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- results of the discussions are feedback to the central level</td>
<td><strong>- Refresher courses (Repetitorium)</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>In addition to the tailored courses to better prepare also refresher courses are provided. Students failing an exam/exams in critical subjects can attend refresher courses for critical subjects before taking the exam a second time.</td>
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**4.5.5.2 Technical University Berlin**

The Technical University Berlin (TU Berlin) is the second biggest higher education institution in Berlin (currently more than 30,000 students enrolled). As a technical research university it offers a wide range of Bachelor and Master programmes as well as doctoral training foremost in the technical and natural sciences as well as in some selected social sciences. Likewise the Fachhochschule Dortmund the TU Berlin faces an increasing diversity of its student body with regard to social and educational background characteristics. Additionally, the increasing complexity of the degree landscape in higher education, the high dropout rates in the technical and natural sciences and to attract students to the so-called STEM-disciplines are seen as major challenges. Further, the
mostly open access to programmes is mentioned as a problem. Against this background the TU Berlin has identified the support of study choices and the information about programmes in the technical and natural sciences as very important for study success.

In the recent years the TU Berlin has been very active in the area of information and support for students, in particular in the support of study choices. It has established a close cooperation with secondary schools in Berlin, provides training for teachers in secondary schools (to support them in better consulting their students in high school), introducing a number of advertising campaigns that specifically address female students. Besides this, the TU Berlin is very active in raising funds from for example the Stifterverband and other stakeholders in higher education. The funds are used to develop and implement instruments that aim for an improvement of the quality of higher education.

The TU Berlin also receives funds from the Quality Pact for Teaching. The funds are used for various projects\textsuperscript{84}, from which the measure “Mintgrün” will be described in more detail (see also Raue and Schröder, 2014). The measure is a orientation study that addresses high school graduates who are in general interested in the STEM disciplines but are not completely sure in which programme they would like to enrol. The concept of Mintgrün was developed based on a thorough analysis of the student population and reasons for dropout. From this research it became clear that the transition from school to higher education has become more difficult as high school graduates are less well equipped for higher education in particular with regard to their mathematical competencies and their academic preparedness. Further, the increasing complexity of higher education with regard to the landscape of different degree programmes and higher education institutions was found as a major obstacle for students to make deliberate study choices. Despite that there is a huge amount of information available students often lack the opportunity to collect first-hand experiences with higher education. The programme was developed collaboratively by special staff (didactical experts) from the central level of the university, staff from student support services and academic staff from the different disciplines. This allowed a comprehensive analysis of reasons for dropout in the first semester and to combine different competencies in developing the programme.

MINT\textsuperscript{grün} is a short programme of two semesters that includes mandatory, elective and free modules. During the two semesters students can achieve up to 60 credit points. Mintgrün started in the winter term 2012/2013. The two mandatory modules have been especially developed for MINT\textsuperscript{grün}. They aim at orienting and supporting students to make deliberative study choices. In the courses and seminars related to these modules academic staff report about the content of their disciplines and their academic/professional pathways. In these courses also staff from the student support office informs students about study programmes, the organization and functioning of an university. Further to that they consult students in making their final study choice in face-to-face talks. The mandatory modules account for 12 credit points. For the elective part students can choose from 25 modules and have to achieve 42 credit points. The elective part includes basic modules (for example courses in mathematics) and the so-called ”project laboratories” (”Projekt-Labore”). The laboratories have been developed

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\textsuperscript{84} A full list of projects is available at: https://www.tu-berlin.de/qualitaet/qualitaetspakt_lehre_hspiil/
based on the principle of research-based learning (forschendes Lernen). They intend that students should experience the practical application of theoretical knowledge. These experiences include doing research, practicing scientific work, teamwork, learning about the application of principles of sustainable development. Motivating students to set own goals and to work towards realization of these goals is a further important characteristic of the project laboratories. The free modules finally account for 6 credit points. Here students can freely choose courses also from other higher education institutions in Berlin. This aims at enabling students to get to know other institutions and reflect whether they have chosen the most adequate institution. Credit points that have been achieved in the short programme can be transferred to the programme that students finally choose. Also funding regulation of the BAFöG allow that students get funded for the short MINTgrün programme as well as for their ‘final’ study programme.

Teacher appreciate the programme as it does demand an additional teaching load from them: Students can participate in existing modules for the elective part of the programme, the mandatory modules are mostly covered by other (support) staff than academics. Students appreciate the opportunity to reflect about their study choice, to participate in the “project laboratories”. Results for the first two cohorts participating show that 25 to 30 percent of a cohort decide for a different study/different institution, the other 70 to 75 percent of the students choose for a STEM programme. The programme is well-received by high school graduates, so far about 400 students have been participating.

However, due to the only recent implementation of the measure there is no evidence how and to what degree it impacts on the improvement of completion. The interviewees were also critical about the project-character of the funding by the Quality Pact for Teaching. This would not allow for a sustainable improvement of the quality of teaching.

4.6 Reflection of policy mix

Due to the federal structure of the educational system, with stakeholders playing an important role, it is hardly possible to determine a policy mix for Germany in a similar way as for the other countries in the study. And as in the study not all federal states were taken into account except for North Rhine-Westphalia and Berlin, the following will not give a complete picture.

Though the federal level has actually no steering competence in higher education our analysis finds it to be an important driver in promoting quality of teaching and learning and thus study success in higher education. This is mostly done by the two big pacts; the Higher Education Pact and the Quality Pact for Teaching that are actually cooperatively funded by the federal level and the federal states. The rationale underlying both pacts is that an improvement of the quality of teaching and learning would affect an increase in completion. Both pacts intend to stimulate higher education institutions to implement and develop measures addressing study success. In this context, the HEI were encouraged to take on more responsibility for study success. In particular the Quality Pact for Teaching has contributed to this. Due to the openness of the Quality Pact various instruments addressing study success have been developed by higher education institutions. These are mainly from the areas “information and support for students” and “organisation of higher education”. The openness of the funding scheme also allowed higher education institutions to tailor their instruments to their actual needs. These have mostly been
developed based on a thorough analysis of the reasons leading to drop out and completion.

Also the federal states use funding policies to stimulate higher education institution to care for study success. In North Rhine-Westphalia this was done by a funding model using the number of graduates as a performance indicator. Berlin provided additional funds for the development of instruments to improve the quality of teaching. North Rhine-Westphalia also implemented instruments from the areas information and support and the organisation of higher education.

Stakeholders like the Stifterverband, the VDMA and the German Rectors’ Conference actively support higher education institutions in developing study success instruments by disseminating good practices, principles for good teaching and also providing funds for the development of instruments.

The policy mix can thus be described that funding policies have the greatest weight at the federal level and the level of the federal states. These are in particular the additional funds, which intended to stimulate higher education institutions to pay more attention to study success. In this respect higher education institutions become regarded as the actors who have the greatest responsibility for study success. Against this background, since the HEI are the key players, it is difficult to judge the actual number of policies, the extent the three areas, funding, information and organisation are aligned and the extent policies match with study success orientation. By contrast, it became clear that the actors and stakeholders share basic ideas and concepts that are related to study success. Of particular note is the idea that in particular the dropouts, which are caused by a malfunctioning of the higher education system or the higher education institution and can be avoided by taking appropriate measures. Also the definition of study success is shared by most stakeholders. This has brought the aim of enabling students to successfully complete an academic degree to the fore. This shared understanding in turn helps that the responsibility for academic success is increasingly attributed to the institutions and accepted by them.

4.7 Annex

4.7.1 Interviewees stakeholders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Function</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung</td>
<td>Andrea Spelberg</td>
<td>Referat 411 – Hochschulschulpolitik und – entwicklung, DFG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministerium für Innovation, Wissenschaft und Forschung, Nordrhein-Westfalen</td>
<td>Helmut Fangmann</td>
<td>Gruppe 21 – Planung und Controlling - Hochschulen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senatsverwaltung für Bildung, Jugend und Wissenschaft, Berlin</td>
<td>Angela Walter</td>
<td>Abt. Hochschulen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wissenschaftsrat</td>
<td>Sabine Behrenbeck</td>
<td>Teamleader, Abt. Tertiäre Bildung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hochschulrektorenkonferenz</td>
<td>Christian Tauch</td>
<td>Teamleader, Arbeitsbereich B: Bildung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akkreditierungsrat - Stiftung zur Akkreditierung</td>
<td>Olaf Bartz</td>
<td>Managing Director, Board Member</td>
</tr>
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</table>
4.7.2 Interviewees at higher education institutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group/Level</th>
<th>Technical University Berlin</th>
<th>Fachhochschule Dortmund</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University Management</td>
<td>Hans-Ulrich Heiß, Vice-President for Teaching and Learning</td>
<td>Wilhelm Schwick, Rector Werner Link, Assistant to Rector, Head of Department Carsten Wolff, Vice-Rector for Teaching, Learning, International Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality assurance officers, Officers for teaching and Learning at the university management level</td>
<td>Patrick Thurian Cornelia Raue Bettina Liedtke Anne Lessmann Janina Göbel</td>
<td>Barbara Clasen Petra Oesterwinter Gabriele Kirschbaum Ingrid de Jongste Margareta Nasched</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Deans/Officers for Teaching and Learning on Faculty Level</td>
<td>Christian Schröder, Leitung Orientierungsstudium Jörg Stollmann, Dekan für Studium und Lehre, Planen, Bauen und Umwelt Uwe Nestmann, Elektrotechnik und Informatik André Schelewsky, Verkehrs und Maschinenbetriebe, Referent Studium und Lehre, Marcel König, Mathe und Naturwissenschaft, Referent Studium und Lehre</td>
<td>Jörg Winde, Professor, Study Dean Design Christoph Friedrich, Professor, Study Dean Informatics Ralf Dietz, Professor, Study Dean Architecture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students:</td>
<td>Christian Korf Lutz Daniel Rico Clauß Rocio Rocha Stephan Gliese (SG)</td>
<td>Philipp Wangerin Sven Limberger Catalina Restrepo Clemens Müller</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.7.3 References


### 4.7.4 Websites visited

<table>
<thead>
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<tr>
<td>Federal Ministry for Education and Research</td>
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<td>Information on student grants/loan</td>
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<td>Information on Germany Fellowship</td>
<td><a href="http://www.deutschlandstipendium.de">www.deutschlandstipendium.de</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry for Innovation, Higher Education and Research North Rhine-Westphalia</td>
<td><a href="http://www.wissenschaft.nrw.de">www.wissenschaft.nrw.de</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Berlin Senat for Education, Youth and Science</td>
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<td>Council for Science and humanities</td>
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<td>Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Programmes in Germany</td>
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<td>Verband deutscher Maschinen- und Anlagenbau</td>
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<td>Federal Statistical Office</td>
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<td>Projects funded by Quality Pact for Teaching at TU Berlin</td>
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<td>Project funded by Quality Pact for Teaching at FH Dortmund</td>
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5 Italy

Emanuela Reale (Research Institute on Economic Sustainable Growth, IRCRES CNR); Alessandra Decataldo (University of Milan Bicocca)

5.1 Introduction

This country report has a special focus on dropout that derives from the type of people selected for the national interviews and the universities selected for the institutional case studies. Data and information used in this Report mainly come from the National Statistical Institute (ISTAT) and from ANVUR-National Agency for University and Research Evaluation.

A short description of the profiles of the higher education institutions (including achievements in terms of study success) is presented below.

University of Milano Bicocca

The University of Milano-Bicocca was established on June 10th, 1998, to serve students from Northern Italy and relieve some of the pressure on the over-crowded University of Milan. Groups of professors and researchers chose to come and participate in the enterprise. They were driven by their enthusiasm for the new, and by the chance to broaden academic horizons without having their work undermined by traditional methods of education. From the start, this very fertile climate became a unique training ground, which offered something new even in the most traditional disciplines.

The University stands in an area on the northern edge of Milan, which was occupied by the Pirelli industrial complex until the late 1980s. This area is now the location of the biggest urban renewal project carried out in Milan since the end of the Second World War.

In this cityscape the University of Milano-Bicocca arose and hundreds of lecturers have contributed their talents and brought international networks and research groups. This synergy makes the University a laboratory where tradition and modernity are combined to ensure an innovative future.

The University of Milano-Bicocca offers 71 different academic programs, ranging over many scientific fields:
- Economics and statistical Sciences
- Law
- Medicine and Surgery
- Psychology
- Educational Sciences
- Natural Sciences
- Sociology

During the academic year 2013/14 students enrolled in courses of study (i.e., excluding those enrolled in the PhD program, the graduate schools and the master) are 32,340, of which 19,972 women (61.8%). The number of graduates has increased steadily since 2010 and in c.y. 2013 the graduates were 5,922, of which 3,885 women (65.6%). The trend over the years of foreign students enrolled has increased steadily since 2000-01, reaching the amount of 1,815 (5.6% of those enrolled). The teachers at the University of Milano - Bicocca are 860, of which 372 women.

The University of Milano Bicocca (UNIMIB) is constantly improving its educational prospectus in order to let students have the chance to develop the knowledge and skills
necessary to find employment after graduating. This University easily identifies the needs of the job market, due to the fact that the institution is located in the economic heart of Italy: Milan.

Milan and the Lombardy Region are one of the chief economic driving forces in Europe and a plunge into this rich and stimulating environment is a great opportunity for personal growth, study and work. Studying in Milan is also a great way to get a taste of all parts of Italy since so many Italians from all over the nation have made Milan their home. This has happened because Milan is strictly connected to industries, job opportunities and economic growth. These aspects have a fundamental role for the definition of University educational prospectus.

**Sapienza University of Rome**

Sapienza University of Rome is one of the oldest universities in the world, the biggest in Europe, and a good performer among the largest universities in international rankings. It is located in the centre Italy, a fact that favours a large flux of students from other regions, mainly from the South of Italy.

The economic context is characterized by a large presence of firms, even high-tech firms, which provide opportunities for collaborations and firm involvement in training and stage. A further local characteristic is the presence of a high number of research activities, mainly based in universities and public research organizations, which contribute to create a favourable environment.

Sapienza is a generalist research and teaching university, developing research programmes and offering courses covering all disciplinary fields, including degree programmes, PhD courses, one to two year professional courses and Specialization Schools in many disciplines. Sapienza has 63 Departments and 11 Faculties; in the academic year 2011-2012, the University inaugurated the School for Advanced Studies in order to improve the PhD education and to better the national and international attraction.

Sapienza has a very large size: about 129.000 enrolled students (2011-2012 academic year), 20.315 graduates, 3.071 PhD students, about 2.100 professors (full professors and associate professors) and 1.900 researchers. Sapienza offered opportunities through a special programme for visiting professors. More than 8,000 foreign students are regularly enrolled at Sapienza. The University encourages international exchange: there are over 1,100 incoming and 1.100 outgoing exchange students on average per year, thanks to several mobility programmes.

The Rector, the Vice-Rector, the board of Deputy Rectors and Delegates -whose function is to help the Rector to manage the University, compose the internal governance. The Internal Evaluation Unit (NUV) assesses teaching and research activities, oversees the University programming activity and strategic control.

The governance also comprises are other two governing bodies: the Academic Senate, in charge of academic, scientific and teaching issues and the Administrative Board, that deals with financial and administrative issues. In addition a Head of Administration supervises the organisation and management at Sapienza.
5.2 Definitions of study success

In Italy there is neither a unique nor an official definition of study success, but different definitions are in place, mainly related to:

- Completion (completing the study programme)
- Time to degree (completing the study programme in a limited time-frame)
- Employability.

The definitions are put forward by national authorities and stakeholders in higher education. As to the national authorities, the Ministry of Education University and Research (MIUR) confirmed that the definition of study success does not exist. The definition provided by MIUR - Ministry of Education University and Research refers to the data on regular students: "studente iscritto al sistema universitario italiano da un numero di anni inferiore o uguale alla durata legale del corso di riferimento" (student enrolled in the Italian university system from a number of years less than or equal to the legal duration of the course reference).

The key stakeholders in the system include:

- The Rectors’ conference (Conferenza dei rettori delle università italiane - CRUI),
- The National Council of Universities (Consiglio Universitario Nazionale –CUN),
- The Accreditation Agency (L'Agenzia nazionale di valutazione del sistema universitario e della ricerca - ANVUR),
- The employers’ organizations (Confederazione degli industriali italiani and Associazione Italiana Ricerca Industriale - Confindustria and AIRI),
- The doctorate holders organization (Associazione Italiana Dottorandi - ADI)
- The advisory body AlmaLaurea (Consorzio interuniversitario AlmaLaurea).

Hereafter the main definitions provided are summarized.

CRUI and CUN- The primary features of study success include attaining the degree title on time and being subsequently employable in a relevant field of work (i.e. use the competences acquired during education in one’s post-graduate career path). The main factors that can promote study success include both the individual’s skills and a “reliable” organization, where the proper functioning of the teaching is the result of careful planning and continuous management control.

ANVUR - The “success rate” is defined as the rate of enrolled that reaches the degree, and for those who complete the course, the “regularity” with respect to the duration of the courses (examples of indicators: “success rate of graduates in the regular degree courses” and “percentage of regular graduates on the base of students enrolled three years before”). Conversely, academic failure is measured primarily (though not solely) as the dropout rate between the first and second year.

It is highlighted that different views of the study success are also perceived by the universities located in the North and in the South, due to the different socio-economic contexts:

“This difference means that there are different perceptions of study success ... people generally refer to two major elements that are also different from each other. The Rectors of the University of North say ... the most significant element of success is the employability ... The Rectors of the
South say that the value ... should be better measured by the added value that students receive from the university” (ANVUR)

Confindustria - AIRI- Academic success at the individual level is represented by graduate employability; at system-level, study success is given by the matching between demand and offer of work both in terms of quantity and skills. A key role in addressing drop-out is the support for academically “weak” students and policies to standardize starting conditions such as selection. This point is reinforced by the contention that because of the absence of barriers at entry and relatively low costs, students often have low levels of aspirations and professors must accommodate learners with very diverse levels of preparation.

AlmaLaurea - According to AlmaLaurea Study success covers timely graduation, employability and student satisfaction with his/her programme. Key factors include structure of the educational offer, guidance at the entry in higher education and support during the course of study, links between the secondary school, the higher education and the labor market, as well as individual perception of usefulness of the studies.

ADI – According to ADI the academic success is represented by the employability of graduates and PhDs, while system-level success in studies is given by the matching between demand and offer of work both in terms of quantity and skills.

5.3 Short description of the higher education system in the country:

The Italian higher education system is considered binary in that it includes a university and a non-university sector. The university sector consists of public universities, three polytechnics, private universities recognized by the Ministry, university high schools, and institutions of higher doctorate courses. The non-university sector includes a variety of institutes such as institutions for “higher education in art, music and dance” (AFAM), Higher Schools for Linguistic Mediators, Military Academies, Police Colleges etc. Universities are the seat of education and critical transmission of knowledge. They combine research and teaching, and can award up to the highest degree level (Ph.D.)

Currently the university sector includes:

- 68 Public Universities (including 3 Engineering schools and 4 Universities for foreigners)
- Private Universities promoted by public authorities
- 13 Private Universities promoted by private corporations
- 11 Online Universities
- University high schools
- There are also academic institutions that grant foreign diplomas (such as the numerous Pontifical Universities in Rome, which grant canon law diplomas, or the branches of American Universities).

85 Questa differenza fa si che ci siano diverse percezioni del successo...ci si riferisce poi in genere a due grandi elementi che sono poi uno diverso dall’altro. I Rettori delle Università del Nord dicono che .. l’elemento più significativo del successo è l’occupabilità... I Rettori del Sud dicono che il valore ... dovrebbe essere misurato meglio dal plusvalore che gli studenti ricevono dall’università”.

86 University High Schools and Institutions of higher doctorate courses provide only doctoral and/or master courses.
Several characteristics are of interest in describing Italy’s higher education landscape including *inter alia* (i) trends in first time enrolments, (ii) regional differences, and (iii) other characteristics of the learner population, such as gender and age.

The Italian University System, characterized by poor capacity to produce graduates, high levels of dropping out, chronical delays in graduation (Benvenuto, Decataldo, Fasanella, a c. di, 2012), is often considered a self-committed university system, too far from the economic system and the labor market needs (Moscati, Vaira, 2008; Decataldo, Fiore, 2013).

### 5.3.1 Access to higher education

As of 2011-12, 1,751.192 students were enrolled at Italian universities while the number of first time enrolments by 2012-13 was 269,549 (ANVUR, 2014, pp. 38; 41). Over the years there is been a decrease in first time enrolment. Since 2003/04 the number of enrolments has fallen by about 20%, from 338,000 to 270,000. The drop has been attributed largely to a reduction in mature enrolments caused by policy changes, which cut support for working students. However, there has been also a decrease, albeit mild, in enrolments more generally (*Ibid.*, p. 26).

### 5.3.2 Retention and Completion in Higher Education

The OECD and Eurostat data show the considerable delay of Italy: against an EU average of around 25%, Italy is positioned at third to last place among the considered country with 13.8% of graduates in the population between the ages of 15 and 64. Also the trend that is registered since 2000 does not indicate a convergence than the European average: although the number of graduates has increased by 5.7 percentage points in Italy, the EU average has increased to a greater extent. Considering the younger population (25 to 34 years old), the Italian position has not improved and, despite significant increases registered between 2000 and 2012, also for this segment of the population it is impossible to register an accord to the European average (with 22.3% of graduates, Italy ranks second from bottom).

The graduate trend shows a significant increase (from 201,118 to 301,298) between 2002 and 2005 as a result of the introduction of the so-called 3 + 3 reform (DM 509/1999). The reform produced an increase in enrolments at the university and permitted many students, which were still enrolled in an old system course, to make the switch to shorter courses of the new system (with the recognition of part or all of the university credits). It is also necessary to mention the effects of some legislative measures in the period 1999-2006: they permitted the recognition of a large number of credits to students who had gained specific professional experiences. These measures encouraged the growth of students and graduates. In addition, the three-year courses (shorter than the previous ones) have proved more attractive for non-high school graduates, who seek university courses that previously would not have scope (as clearly shown by the Anagrafe degli studenti - National Registry of students).

During the a. y. 2013/2014, as the Educational offer database shows (the official Ministry of Education catalogue of university courses available at http://offf.miur.it/), there are 4,662 courses of study, including 2,334 bachelors, 2,010 masters and 318 five years courses. The number of courses reached the value of 5,879 in a.y. 2007-08. From 2007/2008, in line with government guidelines, a rationalization of the educational offer...
occurred. The number of courses, which had grown a lot since the introduction of the 3 +2 reform, dropped significantly with a decrease of 1,217 courses, that is 20.7% (26.2% for the bachelor courses, 17.8% for the master courses). However this rationalization did not originate from an analysis of the duplication of university courses, but it was simply based on the possession of minimum requirements in terms of number of enrolled registered compared to the number of teachers within the individual course of study.

5.3.3 Funding
In 2013 the budget allocated by the Ministry of Education for the funding of the university system and the support to students and the right to education amounted to 7.3 billion euro, of which 6.9 to finance the system.

Since 2008 there has been a significant reduction in resources, both in nominal and real terms (-11 and -18%, respectively). The decline, significant for many items of expenditure was mainly determined by that of the Ordinary Fund, which alone accounts for over 90% of total resources.

5.3.4 Contextual factors
Drop out and more generally study success are seen to derive from a number of factors such as:

- Student characteristics (gender, age, educational qualification)
- The educational offer of the high education/tertiary education structure, which is almost absent in the professional segment
- The quality of education in the lower levels of education
- Poor guidance and orientation to match prospective students to the most suited programme
- The quality of teaching and support policies in the course of study

Policies implemented to deal with the mentioned factors have been and actually still are mainly developed at institutional level: this is one of the key characteristics of Italy.

5.4 Description of national and institutional policies
This section addresses the national policies and the typical institutional policies that have been implemented in the country to achieve study success. In the description the background (process beyond, contribution and initiatives of stakeholders in higher education) of the policies is presented. Also the intended effects of the policies and the unintended effects are addressed.

5.4.1 National policies

5.4.1.1 University reform
L.240/2010 General reform of the University system was supposed to push for a new effectiveness of graduation course reducing dropout rates and improving the job placement. The reform of the 3+2 produced some results in the first two years allowing students to complete the study course in due time; after this first phase data show that the number of students leaving the university increase and the number of enrolled students start to decline (CNVSU, 2012). ANVUR pointed out the difficulty students have
in moving from school to university life. There has been “ineffective orientation, a deficit in preparing students [and] a weakness in training staff [to help] those enrolled,” (ANVUR 2014).

"From the Ministry viewpoint these policies derive the measures of the early 2000s, with respect to educational reform. These measures expected since the rule on access programmed, which is a rule (the 264/99), expected there was an accurate orientation system at universities. This, however, did not have a complete realization, if not patchy throughout the country and also according to the sensitivities of the different universities. [...] The second thing is the co-design system, theoretically with professional associations, the corporate world and whatnot, which were provided by the 509/99 and 270/2004 ministerial decrees. [...] But, let’s be honest, most of the things were formalistic and never really applied” 87 (MIUR)

"The most significant policy choice was to promote the two degree levels. However, this was done by some universities in an anarchic way” 88 (ANVUR)

"The old curriculum ... it was definitely better than the current that provides very specific specializations and parcelled for which the young graduate comes out ... that knows little about the general themes ... this specialization is detrimental both to a general ability of the young graduate in search of occupation and it .. results in a lack of flexibility of the young graduates to address problems” (AIRI) 89

5.4.1.2 Quality assurance

With the decree of 27 January 2012, n. 19, the government has exercised its powers prescribed by law 240/2010 for the introduction of a system of accreditation and evaluation of universities and courses of study. Article 5, paragraph 3 of Law 240, provides:

87 "Dal punto di vista centrale queste politiche discendono da quelli che sono i provvedimenti assunti nei primi anni 2000, relativamente alla riforma didattica. Lì si prevedeva fin dalla norma sull’accesso programmato, che è una norma, la 264 del 99, si prevedeva che vi fosse un accurato sistema di orientamento presso le università. Questo, però, non ha avuto una compiuta realizzazione, se non a macchia di leopardo sul territorio nazionale e secondo anche le diverse sensibilità delle diverse università. [...] La seconda cosa è quel sistema di co-progettazione, teoricamente con gli ordini professionali, il mondo delle imprese e quant’altro, che erano previsti prima dal 509 e poi dal 270 decreti ministeriali. [...] Ma, diciamo la verità, erano più delle cose formalistiche e mai veramente applicate» (MIUR).

88 “La scelta politica più rilevante è stata quella di passare ai due livelli di laurea. Però questo è stato fatto da alcuni atenei in modo anarchico” (ANVUR).

89 “Il vecchio percorso formativo ...era sicuramente migliore di quello attuale che va a fornire specializzazioni molto particolari e parcellizzate per cui il giovane laureato viene fuori che ... conosce poco le tematiche generali... questa specializzazione spinta è dannosa sia per una capacità generale del giovane che cerca lavoro sia perché.. si traduce in una scarsa flessibilità del giovane laureato ad affrontare i problemi”.
the introduction of a system of accreditation of university courses based on the use of specific indicators defined ex ante dall'ANVUR for the purpose of verification of the possession - by universities - of appropriate educational requirements, structural, organizational, qualification of teachers and research activities, as well as economic and financial sustainability;

- the introduction of a system of periodic evaluation based on criteria and indicators established ex ante by ANVUR, related to the effectiveness and the results achieved in the field of teaching and research by universities and their internal structures.

The Legislative Decree 19/2012 initiate the process that later led integrated system of Self Assessment, Evaluation and Accreditation (the so called “AVA - Autovalutazione, Valutazione, Accreditamento”), which was approved by ANVUR (2013). Between the requirements of initial accreditation, it is compulsory to expose in a document called "Card Unica's Annual Study Course" (USA-CdS), the objectives of the training, including those in the expected learning outcomes of both a specialist of both a generalist, defined for homogeneous training areas, according to European principles initially adopted in Bergen by the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education (2005). In the AVA system, therefore, is integrated with the assurance of quality, attention to the minimum conditions necessary to promote economy and efficiency in the provision of training, with an approach centered on its effectiveness, as measured by the actual results and the "learning outcomes" (see project TECO). The AVA system points out the need to move further in the definition of study success including not only drop-out and completion but also skills acquired and placement gained (ANVUR interviews).

In addition, the DM 45/2013 "Regulations on the modalities for the accreditation of universities and doctoral courses and criteria for the establishment of doctoral programs by accredited bodies" requires that doctoral programs are subject to accreditation by the Ministry of Education with the assent of ANVUR. Starting in the. 2014/15 courses must satisfy the requirements of Art. 4, in terms of: the composition and number of the Board of teachers, scientific production, the number of available scholarships, the availability of adequate financing, the availability of qualified scientific and operational structures and the provision of disciplinary and interdisciplinary training. The effects of the mentioned reform are not visible yet. The expected advantages should be to improve the capability of the courses to meet some standard requirements of quality.

Nonetheless a key problem for the quality assurance produces the desired effects is the high rate of students per academic teacher, which is supposed to impede a good relationship between the two:

“Difficult and critical (is the) relationship between students and teachers of Italian universities, where there is a media particularly unfavourable to a close relationship between students ... that allows you to develop a teaching centred on the learning outcome of the student” (CUN, the data quoted are: 15,5 vs 18,7 student/professor, source: Education at a glance 2012)

90 “Difficile e critico (è il) rapporto tra studenti e docenti delle università italiane, dove vi è una media particolarmente sfavorevole a una contiguità dei rapporti tra studenti ... che non consente di sviluppare una didattica centrata sull'apprendimento dello studente”. 
5.4.1.3 Funding

With regard to the instruments in favor of the students and the right to education, the policies are developed at regional level. They mainly consist in funding for scholarships postgraduate, the provision for the mobility of students; these provisions are sometimes (such as in the case of Milano Bicocca) complemented by funding for scholarships at institutional level to supplement the regional resources for the right to education.

In real terms, from 2008 the decrease in the total public funding was 18.7% for funds to the university system, and 15.8% for funds to support students and the right to education.

The main intervention for students with low socio-economic status is constituted by the scholarship grant, which is delivered at the regional level on the basis of resources in part collected locally, through tuition fees and the amounts allocated by the regions, and in part from a special found provided by the Ministry of Education.

The resources are not sufficient to ensure scholarship grant to all the eligible students, with a share of coverage that varies over time and among regions. Because of the reduction of resources between the aa. yy. 2009/2010 and 2011/2012 it has gone from a coverage rate of 86% at a rate of 69%.

5.4.1.4 National system of certification of skills (Sistema nazionale di certificazione delle competenze)

To ease the transition to work, the government has adopted on 11 January 2013 a decree establishing the National System of certification of skills, to include the identification and recognition of non-formal and informal apprenticeship. The aim is to contribute to a better understanding of the skills acquired at university and in general in the course of the working lives, which is supposed to easy the placement of the graduates in the labour market. The reform has been recently implemented and evidences of the effects are not yet available.

5.4.2 Institutional policies

Besides the points stated for the national policies the main policies at institutional level (both at Milano Bicocca and Sapienza) are described in the following. They come as implementation at institutional level of national policies and as autonomous policies developed by the universities.

5.4.2.1 Quality assurance

Every university/Ateneo has a “Nucleo di Valutazione” (an internal evaluation group), which is a collegial body that has the task of assessing the quality and effectiveness of the educational and research activities carried out by the departments as well as to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of the administration and respective services.

According to DM January 27, 2012, n. 19 the internal evaluation group “Nucleo di Valutazione”:

- Check annually whether the courses of study are in line with the indicators of initial accreditation defined by ‘ANVUR and, only in case of a positive result of the review,
draws up a technical illustrative report, that the university is required to send to the Ministry of Education (art. 8, paragraph 4);

- Performs an annual activity of control over the application of criteria and indicators for the periodic assessment of the efficiency of the financial sustainability of the activities and results achieved by the university in teaching and research, and for insurance the quality of the universities (Article 12, paragraph 1);

- Helps the university/Ateneo in the definition of internal methodologies for the monitoring of the implementation of the strategic objectives planned every three years, which are translated into annual plans and consequent specific tasks assigned to the individual in the Ateneo/university (Article 12, paragraphs 3 and 4);

- By April 30 of each year shall prepare an annual report which takes into account the results of the annual inspection, monitoring of indicators defined in paragraph 4 of Article 12 and the proposals included in the report of the joint committees of faculty-student (article 14, paragraph 1);

- Monitors the application of the indicators for the periodic accreditation of locations and university courses and for this purpose draws up every five years a report on the academic results of the application of the indicators, and every three academic years a report on the application of the indicators in each course of study (art. 9, paragraph 2).

NUVs play a significant role for monitoring and assessing the study success:

“There is a very sophisticated system that makes monitoring of the students ... the Nucleo itself and the Presidium of quality ... deal with studying these phenomena ... there's a process ... and a great attention to this type of phenomena (drop-out, credits) ... produce very accurate reports that investigate all aspects ... which are the continuity of the studies, dropout, times to the graduation, student satisfaction ...”(NUV Member Sapienza).

5.4.2.2 Funding

Over time the weight of tuition fees on the total university revenue has increased and constitutes an important part of the financing. The student contribution varies from university to university, and according to family income. In addition, universities are required to exempt from the payment of tuition fees certain categories of students and they are able decide to exempt independently other specific categories.

Interviews at Sapienza outlined in all the cases the need to reduce the student fees, which are among the highest at the national level; the feeling is that they contribute to the drop-out of the students.

The problem of funding also relates to the cutting of the government core funding in recent years (from 2000 onward). The introduction from 2010 of the Standard Cost per student (a fixed amount that is considered as the cost of each student) creates some

91 “Esiste un sistema molto sofisticato che fa monitoraggio degli studenti... il Nucleo stesso e il presidio di qualità ... che si occupano di studiare questi fenomeni...c'è un processo ...e una grande attenzione a questo tipo di fenomeni (drop-out, crediti)... produciamo Report molto accurati che indagano tutti gli aspetti ... che sono la continuità degli studi, gli abbandoni, i tempi di laurea, la soddisfazione degli studenti”.

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problems at institutional level, which are addressed in different ways by Sapienza (large university) and Milano Bicocca (medium-sized university):

There is a "blackmail on resources that pushes to lowering the total levels weighs particularly on large universities which have a double mission that is not only to produce excellence but also to raise the average level (of education) of the population" (PO Sapienza)\(^92\)

"Universities are strongly affected by the system of national rules ... the players play as the referee allows him to play." ... "Sapienza is strongly influenced by this system of standard cost per student ... which leads to increase the number of enrolled students ... the more traditional indicators of the continuity of the learning ... they seem to have a lower weight at this time" (NUV Member Sapienza)\(^93\)

"Bicocca University has 30,000 students, we are a medium-sized university and we don’t want to grow, we are convinced that we want to be like the average European universities and mastodons as Sapienza, Bologna and Padua exist only in Italy. We believe that these are the ideal size to allow the 10,000 enrolled each year will became 9,000 in the following year, instead to see them reduced in 7,000" (Pro Rettore Vicario e Pro Rettore didattica Milano Bicocca)\(^94\).

5.4.2.3 Vocational training

During the university pathway it is possible to carry out traineeship and so-called "stage" activities.

The traineeship is a training activity on the job and is categorized into:

- Curriculum traineeships required by the university curriculum, it is necessary to do it before completion of studies, with a maximum duration of 12 months, and aims to integrate the knowledge gained from attendance at university courses, through the acquisition of professional experience;

- In Italy the "stage" is aimed at anyone who is about to complete their course of study or has completed it no more than 18 months; it is an optional training that allows the

\(^92\) C’è un “ricatto sulle risorse che spinge a un abbassamento totale dei livelli pesa particolarmente su università di grandi dimensioni che hanno una doppia missione che non è solamente quella di produrre eccellenze ma anche quella di alzare il livello medio (di istruzione) della popolazione”.

\(^93\) "Le università sono fortemente condizionate dal sistema delle regole nazionali... i giocatori giocano come l’arbitro gli consente di giocare.”... “Sapienza è fortemente influenzata da questo sistema del costo standard per studente ... che porta ad aumentare il numero degli iscritti ... gli indicatori più tradizionali della continuità del percorso didattico ... mi sembra abbiano in questo momento un peso inferiore”.

\(^94\) “Bicocca ha 30.000 studenti, siamo un ateneo di medie dimensioni non vogliamo crescere siamo convinti che vogliamo essere come le medie università europee e che mastodonti come Sapienza, Bologna e Padova esistono solo in Italia. Siamo convinti che queste siano le dimensioni ideali per permettere che i 10.000 che ogni anno si immatricolano anziché vederli ridotti l’anno dopo a 7.000 siano 9.000” (Pro Rettore Vicario e Pro Rettore didattica Milano Bicocca).
trainee to gain work experience during or immediately after completing his/her studies.

- The utility of vocational training is not clear. The interviews at Sapienza and Milano Bicocca do not show evidences of positive results or even some type of impact of vocational training on the reduction of drop out.

5.4.2.4 Selective test for admission

There is two types of tests universities apply: "selective" test and "guidance" test.

Universities for those degree programs that have an excess of enrolled students each year activate the selective tests. Overcoming them is a prerequisite for admission to a particular degree program and to be eligible it is necessary that the candidate fall within the final ranking (a fixed maximum numeric limit is established by the university). There are "selective" tests for admission to degree courses in Medicine and Surgery, Veterinary, Architecture and Health Professions. The tests are established at national level by the Ministry and take place on the same day in the various universities. It has been also introduced a national ranking that is used to determine who will have access to various courses activated in the territory. The test consists of 30 questions of logic and general knowledge and by another part in order to ascertain the specific skills related to the degree to which the candidate student wants to access. In addition, the high school grade contributes a "bonus" to determine the final score.

The guidance tests are used to determine the minimum level of knowledge required to address the student's university career in that particular curriculum. Even in this case, each individual university defines the mode, the dates and the skills required. Actually these tests, unlike those selective, do not prevent the student to enroll for the chosen course when the score is less than the minimum established by the university. In this case, in fact, are usually provided to the student the OFA, Training Additional Obligations, relating to the subject (or subjects) for whom the student has been assessed under the minimum level of skills. In this way, the student is supposed to recover the level of skills required to complete in the best way the university path.

Guidance tests now show a set of limitations reducing the dropout and universities are questioning about the maintenance of them. Also the interviews at institutional level pointed out the problem of strategies toward reducing the drop out:

"For too many years ... especially the 5-6 larger (Italian) universities have suffered the idea that the university reform ... in fact encouraged a reduction in access ... the large universities especially in the South have pointed to no longer make marketing communications against the new members ... for years the great universities-including my own, have not analysed the data on the potential students, which means how many students you can take from the college to the graduation, how many students you can retain ... ... that let you understand that there are sharing activities the university classroom " (Pro Rector Institutional Communication Sapienza)95

95 "Per troppi anni ... soprattutto negli ultimi 5-6 i grandi atenei hanno patito l'idea che il riformismo universitario ... incoraggiava di fatto una riduzione dell'accesso ... i grandi atenei soprattutto al sud hanno puntato a non fare più una campagna marketing di comunicazione nei confronti dei nuovi iscritti... per anni i grandi atenei -compreso il
5.4.2.5 Orientation

Both the universities carry out substantial effort for orienting students coming from secondary schools to the university course. Services are provided inside the university (open days, services on demand, etc.) and inside schools (workshops and seminars). Both universities also apply orientation to students after the first enrolment in order to help them to modify the course choice.

Both universities consider orientation a key factor for taking drop-out under control, and to contribute to the study success.

5.4.2.6 Job placement

Several universities have established a job placement service in order to help students to find a job and firms to be informed about the skills and competences available. It is mainly based on large information sources available for students, graduates and public and private organizations with curricula. (See part on policy mixes).

Job placement includes also the orientation to work traineeship: it is a period of training conducted at private or public institution in order to "achieve moments of alternation between work and study in the field of educational processes and to facilitate career choices through direct knowledge the world of work "(DM 142/98, art. 1). It is carried out after graduation to complete the training of graduates in the professional way, to facilitate career choices of graduates and/or to support graduate in preparing for the State License to practice professions. The curriculum and orientation to work traineeship are regulated by regional laws on the basis of "Guidelines on internships" adopted by the Permanent Conference for relations between the State, the Regions and Autonomous Provinces (agreement dated January 24, 2013).

The effects produced by the institutional policies are positively perceived in Milano Bicocca:

"The explicit goal of our policy has been [...] to reduce dropout rates in the first year of Bicocca by 3 percentage points and increase the number of graduates in the course of about 3 percentage points within three years from last year. [...] In 2013/14 over the previous year [...] I do not know if it was the effect of our policies of the ten points for the student or by the merest chance, we had a reduction of 6% of dropouts in the first year” 96 (Pro Rettore Vicario e Pro Rettore didattica Milano Bicocca).

In the case of Sapienza, the expectations are mainly linked to the building of a system for monitoring and assessing the study success:

"Come obiettivo esplicito la nostra politica è stata quella di proporsi l’obiettivo entro tre anni dall’anno scorso [...] di ridurre i tassi di abbandono al primo anno della Bicocca di 3 punti percentuali e aumentare il numero di laureati in corso di circa 3 punti percentuali. [...] Nel 2013/14 rispetto all’anno precedente [...], non so se è stato come effetto delle nostre politiche dei dieci punti per lo studente o per pura fortuna, abbiamo avuto una riduzione del 6% degli abbandoni al primo anno” (Pro Rettore Vicario e Pro Rettore didattica Milano Bicocca).

96 mie, non hanno analizzati i dati sull’utenza studentesca che significa quanti studenti riesci a portare all’università dal diploma,... quanti studenti riesci a fidelizzare ... che faccia capire che c’è condivisione dell’aula dell’università”
Sapienza wants to "evaluate and monitor students ... in critical areas ... the goal is to reverse the trend of negative enrolments that Sapienza has particularly suffered ... by analysing the individual perceptions of the students" ... It is to implement "changes in governance which are supposed to create a landmark administrative structure on the problems of the students: for this new governance, orientation of enrolled students and placement of graduates are strategically at the first place". (Pro Rector Didattica Sapienza)

5.5 Reflection of policy mix

This section describes how the policies presented in earlier sections interact: there are policies working together, and policies working against each other in creating an environment that promotes student success. We also take the institutional level into account in the assessment of the policy mix that is used in Italy.

In the prospect below the policy mix and the correspondence between national policies and institutional policies are outlined, as well as the measures implemented in the two universities analysed.

Table 1: Overview study success policies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National level</th>
<th>Institutional level</th>
<th>Milano Bicocca</th>
<th>Sapienza Rome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University Reform - Reform of the courses 3+2</td>
<td>Vocational training Standard cost per student</td>
<td>No implementation</td>
<td>No implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QA - Accreditation - Quality Assurance</td>
<td>QA</td>
<td>University credit based on merit Special rules for the credit system of the working students Teaching evaluation</td>
<td>Monitoring of students and assessment of the courses performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>Traditional policies (open days and services on demand) Admission test cheap and available online</td>
<td>No specific new policies (open days and services on demand)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"Sapienza vuole "valutare e monitorare studenti... aree critiche... l’obiettivo è invertire il trend di iscrizioni negative che Sapienza ha particolarmente sofferto... attraverso l’analisi delle percezioni individuali degli studenti”... Si tratta di attuare “cambiamenti di governance che consentano di creare un punto di riferimento amministrativo strutturato sui problemi degli studenti: per questa governance l’orientamento in ingresso e il placement in uscita sono strategicamente al primo posto”.

97
The table shows the possibility that national level policies and institutional policies could be aligned in principle. Universities want to favour the mentioned alignment:

“Our goals of fostering a degree in progress and reducing drop outs are not goals in themselves, but we would like them to be seen as consistent with the strategic goals of Italy system and Europe as a whole. Higher education is an investment that also works in terms of the income of the future graduate/worker only if it is done at the right time”98 (Pro Rettore Vicario and Pro Rettore didattica Milano Bicocca).

Nonetheless there are cases of incongruences between the policies at national level and at the institutional level. For instance the Standard cost per student pushes large universities such as Sapienza to search for improving the number of students, and let the drop-out problem becoming less urgent. In other words, in the case of Sapienza accepting high drop out rates could become more sustainable from a financial point of view than reducing the core funding allocation (mainly based on the number of students).

### 5.6 Effectiveness of the Policy Mix

This section summarises the case study and the country’s approach to student success.

Eurostat more recent data shows that Italy still presents a low proportion of persons aged 30-34 with tertiary education (23,9%), lower than the Europe 2020 target (26%) but substantially improved from 2002 (13,1%); the same holds true for the share of

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98 “I nostri obiettivi di favorire la laurea in corso e ridurre gli abbandoni non sono fini a se stessi, ma vorremmo che fossero visti come congruenti con gli obiettivi strategici del sistema Italia e dell’Europa nel suo complesso. L’educazione superiore è un investimento che funziona anche in termini di income del futuro laureato/occupato solo se viene fatto nei tempi giusti” (Pro Rettore Vicario and Pro Rettore didattica Milano Bicocca).
early school leavers, a fact impacting the number of people that could ask for higher education (15% of those aged 18-24 with at most lower secondary education and who were not in further education or training).

This problem is well known at institutional level:

"Europe gave us an obvious goal: 40% of the European population should have a tertiary degree by 2020. Realizing that we are unable to reach this goal, Europe offered to us the target of 26%. We are at the 17% (of the total population), we will never reach it" 99 (Pro Rettore vicario e all'orientamento, Milano Bicocca).

Factors contributing to the effectiveness of the policy mix in the country are:

- A good orientation system inside universities;
- An important investment in monitoring activities and job placement.

Factors impeding the effectiveness of the policy mix are:

- The availability of funding resources, especially those coming from government core allocation:
  "there is a resource problem because nothing you do with anything ... if we want to have more attention to the individual paths of the guys we have to have mentoring schemes, management of teaching different ..." such as ensure that the student has to enter into a group that "helps you losing less" (PO Sapienza)100

- The resistance of different disciplinary sectors based on different traditions and habits:
  "C’è un certo conservatorismo in una parte del corpo docente«. (Pro Rettore vicario and Pro Rettore didattica Milano Bicocca) There are "resistances in more traditional sectors thinking that the only problem is to produce great geniuses, that the selection at the entrance is a quality problem ... a big part of the confusion was also fuelled by the reform of the credits" (PO Sapienza)101
5.7 Annex

5.7.1 List of interviewees

National Stakeholders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position and Affiliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marco Mancini</td>
<td>Head of the University Department – Ministry of Education University and Research – MIUR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carla Barbati</td>
<td>Vice President of National University Committee - CUN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massimo Castagnaro</td>
<td>Member of ANVUR – in charge of Quality assurance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luisa Ribolzi</td>
<td>Member of ANVUR – former OECD CERI member of the governing Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sesto Viticoli</td>
<td>Vice President AIRI – Italian Association for Industrial Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alberto Silvani</td>
<td>Expert of valorisation of research results at Universities, Member of the board of AIRI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franco Passalacqua</td>
<td>Member of the Governing Board of ADI – National Association of PhD students and PhD holders</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Institutional level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Partners</th>
<th>University management (Rector, Vice-Rector for Student Affairs)</th>
<th>Milano Bicocca</th>
<th>Sapienza</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University management (Rector, Vice-Rector for Student Affairs)</td>
<td>Paolo Cherubini Pro Rettore vicario and Pro Rettore didattica</td>
<td>Tiziana Pascucci Pro Rettore didattica</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading officers of quality assurance and other departments related to student support/counselling</td>
<td>Loredana Garlati Pro Rettore orientamento and Job placement</td>
<td>Mario Morcellini Pro Rettore comunicazione istituzionale</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study deans or similar representatives from faculty level, representing the different disciplines at the institution</td>
<td>Carla Facchini Dean of Department of Sociology and Social Research Silvia Kanizsa Dean of the Department on Human Science for Training Patrizio Tirelli Dean of the Economy, quantitative Method and Firm Strategy</td>
<td>Leonardo Cannavò Representative of the Department of Social Sciences and Economics Paolo Piazza Representative of the Department of Mathematics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students, optional dropped out students, Alumni (5 – 6 persons)</td>
<td>Focus group (5 alumni and dropped out students)</td>
<td>Focus group (5 alumni)</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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6 The Netherlands
Leon Cremonini, Renze Kolster (both CHEPS)

6.1 Introduction
This report is based on visits conducted at two Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) between January and April 2015 and four interviews with national stakeholders. The latter included representatives from the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, [MOCW]), the Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organization (Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie [NVAO]), the Association of Dutch Universities (Vereniging van Universiteiten [VSNU]), and the Inspectorate of Education (Inspectie van het Onderwijs). In addition, a key organization in the field is the Review Commission on Higher Education and Research (Reviewcommissie Hoger Onderwijs en Onderzoek) established by the State Secretary for Education, Culture and Science also on behalf of the Minister of Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation. The Review Commission advises the Minister on performance agreements between the Ministry and each funded UAS and university. Its views were included through several contacts with members of the Committee’s secretariat.

The field work at the institutions included a number of focus groups with institutional and programme management as well as students and staff, with a total of over 30 participants across the two HEIs. This report looks specifically at the University of Applied Sciences (UAS) of Rotterdam (Hogeschool van Rotterdam) and the Utrecht University (Universiteit Utrecht [UU]). These cases were selected because they are representative of the binary divide that characterizes Dutch higher education and because they are both well-known for their specific initiatives to promote study success. Improving study success has been high on the agenda of Rotterdam UAS for several years also because of its high drop-out rates (and specifically for certain vulnerable groups such as students of non-western descent). This led the institution to introduce its “study success programme” in 2009 (i.e. before the 2012 performance agreements with the Ministry). Similarly, Utrecht University has been well-known in the country for many initiatives it took to increase study success, e.g. by developing professionalization of teaching (now common in all HEIs) or because it initiated a “matching process” to improve retention a year ahead of the national policy.

The next sections are organized as follows: first, the report reviews the definitions of study success that apply most strongly to the Dutch context and how they influence the policy discourse in the country. The following section describes the Dutch higher education system and shows a snapshot (i.e. not a trend analysis) of participation patterns across the system. The central part of the study presents the findings of the national and institutional research. The final section of this document reflects on the balance between different policies to improve study success in the Dutch higher education system and visible trends so far.

102 The acronym is based on the obsolete denomination of Vereniging van Samenwerkende Nederlandse Universiteiten (Association of Cooperating Dutch Universities)
6.2 Definitions of study success

Promoting "study success" in Dutch higher education has been a central policy concern for years. However, there is no definition all stakeholders agree upon and the MOCW does not provide an unequivocal definition. In its 2007 Strategic Agenda, the Dutch Ministry set out targets to reduce drop-outs by 50% and ensure similar graduation rates of native (so-called "autochtonen") and non-Western students (so-called "niet-westerse allochtonen") by 2014 (MOCW, 2007; Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2009)\textsuperscript{103}. These objectives led to agreements with HEIs—first collectively (Long Term Agreements on Study Success and Quality, 2008-2011\textsuperscript{104}) and then individually (Performance Agreements, 2012-2016)—on specific targets for study success thus indicating its underlying understanding.

These agreements emphasize the need to reduce the number of drop-outs and programme transfers\textsuperscript{105}. Moreover, in its annual report on the “State of Dutch higher education”, the Ministry’s Inspectorate bases its evaluation of study success on the Basic Education Registry for Higher Education of the National Office for the Implementation of Education (Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs, [DUO]), which provides the number of students who are enrolled, dropped out, or transferred. In programme accreditation processes, graduation rates, retention, and timely completion are indicators for peer review teams to assess and discuss the quality assurance processes and development of the programme, though they are not indicators of quality per se\textsuperscript{106} (see also Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2013, p.30; NVAO, 2014, p.37)

In theory, according to the Ministry, the concept of study success is multifarious, but in fact to date it has been interpreted as “time to degree” (with its corollary targets of reducing programme transfers and drop outs after year-1) (\textit{interview}). A central idea which is increasingly relevant in the Dutch policy discourse is that a good match between student and study programme leads to study success. In other words, retention and a reasonable time to degree\textsuperscript{107} depend on ensuring a good study choice ("putting every student on the right study place").

However, looking at graduation rates and time to degree is part of what some (notably, but not solely, national students unions) in 2015 have begun to call “efficiency mind-set” (\textit{rendementsdenken}), believed to promote institutional study success at the expense of students’ study success (LKvV, LSVb and ISO, 2014). An “efficiency mind-set” is said,

\textsuperscript{103} For some years there have been critiques raised against the persistent use of racially loaded terminology (such as \textit{allochtoon} and \textit{autochtoon}) in government research (see for example: Institute of Race Relations, 2010, p. 50). However, in this case study this wording is adopted because most national and institutional statistics still embrace this taxonomy.

\textsuperscript{104} \textit{Meerjarenafspraken studiesucces en kwaliteit} between the Minister, the Association of Dutch Universities (\textit{Vereniging van Universiteiten}, or VSNU), and the (then) Council of Universities of Applied Sciences (\textit{HBO-raad})— currently the “Association of Universities of Applied Sciences” (\textit{Vereniging Hogescholen})

\textsuperscript{105} See: \url{http://www.vereniginghogescholen.nl/onderwijs/1451-balans-tussen-rendement-en-persoonlijke-ontplooiing-belangrijk}

\textsuperscript{106} Standard 9 (Quality Assurance) of the framework for extensive assessments of new programmes for example states that “[…] the programme also collects management information regarding the success rates and the staff-student ratio. […]”

\textsuperscript{107} 70% of students graduating within the statutory number of years +1, according to the Ministry, \textit{(interview)}
inter alia, to emphasize quantity over quality (e.g. graduate production), to focus on institutional prestige, and to support the closure of unprofitable programmes. In contrast, several stakeholders have called for a broader definition of study success to include personal development, social involvement and added value for the student (ibid). In turn, this means more individualized attention towards the student, for example through more and better supervision, pre-enrolment matching, and no limitation of examination re-sits.

But the concern with the “efficiency mind-set” might not fully reflect the current policy discourse. First, regarding the performance agreements, the budget linked to study success is limited (5% of the total allocation is meant for “education and study success”, see also below). But in addition, study success is increasingly considered (also at ministerial level) in the broader sense described above. Matching, for example, is expected not only to boost (in time) graduate production, but also to support students’ social, personal and professional development by placing them in well-suited programmes where they can capitalize on their learning experience. While until now efficiency (i.e. graduation rates, reduction of drop-outs after year-1) was the key policy driver, for example leading to policies such as financial sanctions for overdue graduating students (the so-called langstudeerboete, subsequently withdrawn, see below), the study success agenda is now giving more attention to promoting student motivation, personal development, interdisciplinary competency-building, employability and, more generally, the concept of “bildung”. These elements will be part of the Ministry’s next strategic planning cycle and represent the key challenges for future study success policy-making (interview).

From a higher education policy perspective, promoting study success is part of a more general reform agenda to maintain and improve teaching and learning, research excellence, attractiveness to foreign students, employability, and accessibility. Hence, study success is complementary (as opposed to supplementary) to other national and institutional objectives. For example, recruitment and retention of talented international students is said to be imperative for the Dutch knowledge economy and to improve aggregate study success (MOCW, 2014). In its report on the Long Term Agreements the VSNU (2011) pointed out that promoting study success usually involved less student freedom (e.g. through the BSA), more binding (e.g. through smaller classes or more mentoring) and more challenges (e.g. promoting international mobility). The new student loan policy (which replaces the earlier student grant system, see below) is expected to yield revenues to support higher education performance generally (including inter alia institutional excellence and research).

6.3 Short description of the higher education system

The Dutch higher education system is binary, including research universities (wetenschappelijk onderwijs (WO) [Scientific Education]) and universities of applied sciences (hoger beroepsonderwijs (HBO) [Higher Vocational Education]). Research

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108 See: https://fd.nl/Print/krant/Pagina/Opinie/1096801/weinig-mis-met-rendementsdenken

109 After the Binding Study Advice (BSA), which takes place at the end of year-1. Art. 7.34 par. 1b of the Dutch Law on Higher Education (Wet op het hoger onderwijs, WHW) already forbids HEIs from imposing limitations on (post-BSA) re-sits but a UAS did nevertheless impose a limit (and was subsequently forced to repeal the policy).
universities include general universities, universities specialising in engineering and agriculture, and the Open University (Open Universiteit, [OU]). Universities of applied sciences include general institutions and institutions specialising in a specific field such as agriculture, fine and performing arts or teacher training. There are both public and private HEIs. 14 research universities and 37 UASs are publicly-funded\(^{110}\). In addition, there are a large number of non-publicly funded institutions (particulier onderwijs). The latter include one private university (Nyenrode for business administration programmes), about 75 private UASs, the Police Academy and the Dutch branch of US-based Webster University. Distance education is primarily provided by the Open University. By 2014, Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) were provided at four universities (University of Amsterdam, Delft University of Technology, Leiden University and University Of Groningen), with many other universities planning activities in this area\(^{111}\).

The system follows the Bologna three cycles (Bachelor, Master and PhD). Short-cycle higher programmes (i.e. Associate Degrees, at level 5 on the European Qualifications Framework [EQF]) are offered by many universities of applied sciences. Degree programmes and periods of study are quantified according to the European Credit and Transfer System. The focus of degree programmes determines both the number of credits required to complete the programme and the degree awarded. A research-oriented Bachelor programme requires completion of 180 European Credits (ECs) over three years, leading to a Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science (BA/BSc), depending on the discipline. Typically, a UAS Bachelor requires 240 credits over four years, leading to a degree usually indicating the field of study (e.g. "Bachelor of Engineering" of "Bachelor of Nursing")\(^{112}\). Masters require 60 to 120 ECs in both universities and UASs, but also in this case the titles differ (Master of Arts or Master of Science at universities vs. the title "Master" followed by the field of study). The third cycle of higher education, leading to a Philosophy Doctorate (PhD) or to a Professional Doctorate in Engineering (PDEng), is offered only by research universities.

Access to higher education depends on a tracking system by which different secondary education choices pave the way to different tertiary education options. However, there are ways to enable transfers between sub-systems. For example, access to university requires a voorbereidend wetenschappelijk onderwijs (VWO) (Preparatory Scientific Education) diploma, which is gained after six years. But the VWO diploma also grants access to universities of applied sciences and, based on this diploma, many UASs offer fast-track study options, allowing the VWO-students to complete the Bachelor programme sooner or with higher outcome levels. The hoger algemeen voortgezet onderwijs (HAVO) (Higher General Secondary Education), which lasts five years, allows entry to the UASs sector, as does the middelbaar beroepsonderwijs (MBO) (vocational education and training), under certain conditions. In addition, under conditions set by the receiving university, UAS students may transfer to a university after having achieved the 60EC “propaedeutic certificate” (propedeuse).

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\(^{110}\) See: http://www.vereniginghogescholen.nl/hogescholen/overzicht-hogescholen

\(^{111}\) See: http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/nieuws/2014/01/09/groen-licht-voor-online-onderwijs.html

\(^{112}\) Since 2014, some – by the NVAO approved – UAS Bachelor programmes may award the previously exclusive to university titles: Bachelor of Arts / Science. See: http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/hoger-onderwijs/vraag-en-antwoord/welke-titel-mag-ik-voeren-als-ik-ben-afgestudeerd-of-gepromoveerd.html
Traditionally, Dutch higher education has a strong focus on continuous learning careers with regular, full-time programmes. Therefore, part-time education, lifelong learning and distance learning are developed to a limited extent. As a consequence, as shown in Chart 2, most students are of traditional “university age” (18-25); moreover, the overall majority is autochtoon\textsuperscript{113}.

Standards of higher education and alignment with the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area are maintained through a system of legal regulation and quality assurance. External quality assurance is carried out through a system of accreditation, administered by the Netherlands and Flemish Accreditation Organisation (\textit{nederlands-vlaamse accreditatieorganisatie} [NVAO]\textsuperscript{114}). Prior to the accreditation of degree programmes, the MOCW recognizes HEIs by conferring on them the status of either “funded” or “approved”. “Funded” indicates the institution is fully financed by the government; “approved” means that the institution does not receive funds from the government. In both cases, however, Bachelor and Master programmes offered must be accredited and students get access to the public student grants and loan system. All accredited programmes are registered in Central Register of Higher Education Study Programmes (\textit{centraal register opleidingen hoger onderwijs} [CROHO]).

Finally, the Netherlands has a National Qualifications Framework (NLQF\textsuperscript{115}), which is compatible with the EQF (see Chart 1). Table 1 and Chart 2 provide a snapshot of the higher education population in the Dutch institutions.

\textsuperscript{113} This does not indicate an under-representation of \textit{niet-westerse allochtonen} in the system since it is broadly in line with the proportion of citizens of non-Western background in Dutch society. According to CBS data, in 2014 there 16.7\% of people aged 20 to 25 were non-Western minorities, and 73\% in the same age group were native Dutch (see: \url{http://statline.cbs.nl/Statweb/selection/?VW=T&DM=SLNL&PA=37325&D1=0&D2=0&D3=105&D4=0&D5=0&D6=0,4,9,17-18&HDR=G2,G1,G3,T&STB=G4,G5})

\textsuperscript{114} \url{http://www.nvao.net/home.html}

\textsuperscript{115} \url{http://www.nlqf.nl/}
Table 1. Characteristics of the Dutch Higher Education Population in Publicly Funded Institutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bachelor</th>
<th>Master</th>
<th>Bachelor and Master</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>University</td>
<td>UAS</td>
<td>University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>77,794</td>
<td>210,883</td>
<td>42,933</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>79,303</td>
<td>219,960</td>
<td>46,939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-Time</td>
<td>2,369</td>
<td>52,040</td>
<td>4,324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-25 years old</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>193,436</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;25 years old</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>49,872</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Dutch</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>173,544</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Western Descent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>32,898</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Numbers refer to students enrolled 2013/14; Sources: CBS, Statline; VSNU website; VH website; DUO
6.4 Description of national and institutional policies

6.4.1 National policies
Several policies in the Netherlands are aimed at stimulating study success in higher education, even though most fit within larger (ongoing) system reforms. Policies fall under three categories, namely (a) funding, (b) support and information for students and (c) organization of higher education. ResearchNed, a Nijmegen-based independent research institute, has been tasked by the Ministry to annually monitor policies introduced since 2010. This section describes the key national policies meant—whether explicitly or not—to promote study success.

6.4.1.1 Funding policies
Bill on the advance instalment for study (Wetsvoorstel studievoorschot)
The bill, passed on January 20th, 2015, is a major change in the way students are financially supported in their studies. From September 1st, 2015 new Bachelor and Master students may (but are not obliged to) apply for a loan known as the “advance instalment for study” (studievoorschot). At the same time, the existing basic grant is

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abolished. The loan is taken out with the government and is subject to favourable repayment conditions, including a 35-year repayment term at 4% of the income exceeding the legal minimum (anyone earning the legal minimum or lower social benefits is exempt from repayment, and any open balance after 35 years is forgiven).

Explicitly, the new system aims at improving the quality of higher education whilst maintaining accessibility. The funds accrued by abolishing existing grants will be invested in the quality of education. The government expects that up to €1bn can be invested in (a) better student supervision, (b) more contact hours and (c) rewards for good scientists who lecture.

At the same time, students are expected to become more aware of the costs of studying, thus:
- Make more conscious study choices (and avoid transferring to new programmes with outstanding debts)
- Increase motivation and timely completion (in order to limit indebtedness and pay off time)

In 2013, during the debates about this legislation, Statistics Netherlands (centraal bureau voor de statistiek [CBS]) estimated the possible effects of introducing a loan system (and abolishing the basic grant) on student participation. At that time, the CBS expected a drop in first-time enrolments of about 1.5% in the universities of applied sciences and 2.1% in research universities, and similar changes in participation overall (CBS, 2013). Whether this will in fact materialize will be seen in the coming years.

A visible (albeit short-term) by-effect of the new legislation seems to be that in year 2014 there was more Bachelor-to-Master progression in the university sector. This might be explained by the desire of last-year Bachelor students to enter Master studies under the current conditions (van den Broek, 2014, p.72).

Performance-related grant (Prestatiebeurs)

Performance-related grant include student travel passes (i.e. a public transport subscription which enables travel across the country) and an “additional grant” for the duration of the programme for students with an income below a certain threshold. Although these benefits are called grants, they are in fact loans which are forgiven only if students graduate within ten years. Performance-related grants will be maintained under

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118 At the time defined “social loan system” (sociaal leenstelsel)
119 This outcome is reminiscent of an earlier experience with the so-called langstudeerboete (financial sanctions for overdue graduating students), which was in force in year 2011-2012. According to this piece of legislation (repealed after one year following), students who graduated late (i.e. over two or more years after the statutory degree length) were subject to increased fees. During that year there was a visible increase in graduations (about 10% year-on-year, see: http://statline.cbs.nl; http://statline.cbs.nl/Statweb/publication/?DM=SLNL&PA=71113ned&D1=0&D2=0&D3=0&D4=0&D5=0&D6=15-17&HDR=T,G3,G4,G2,G1&STB=G5&VW=T). This appeared to be an unintended consequence of the policy which was said to have produced a higher number of graduations of lower quality (because of the urge to terminate as soon as possible) and not to have improved ambition (interview).
the new Advance Instalment for Study system, which will abolish only current basic grants\textsuperscript{120}.

**Performance agreements between the minister of education and individual HEIs**

The 2010 Committee on the Future Sustainability of Dutch Higher Education (Veerman *et al.*, 2010) concluded that student drop-outs and transfers to other programmes were a hindrance to the Netherlands’ ambitions to remain a leading knowledge-intensive economy. Moreover, the Committee pointed out that many students were unsatisfied with their programme, its level or the expectations raised, and recommended action be taken to address these shortcomings and, particularly, to improve the match between students and programme. Collective agreements with the HEIs to improve this situation (*meerjarenafspraken*) had not had the expected effects. The Ministry’s subsequent strategy document “Quality through Diversity” (MOCW, 2011) led to the 2012 performance agreements between the Ministry and all Dutch HEIs (individually). These agreements stipulate that 7% of universities’ and UASs’ teaching budgets is contingent on reaching certain targets. 5% is linked to a fixed set of quality and study success indicators while 2% is tied to so-called “profile-indicators”. As it is a reallocation of existing resources there is no extra money set aside for the performance agreements.

Quality and study success indicators are defined for institutional ambitions, balancing all of the following areas:

- Student dropout rate after one year,
- Programme transfers after one year,
- The percentage of Bachelor students graduating within the nominal duration plus one year,
- Excellence, measured by the student evaluation scores in the National Student Survey (NSE) or the number of students in excellence programmes,
- The number of in-class contact hours,
- The proportion of teachers with a “University Teaching Qualification” (BKO or SKO),
- The proportion of overhead costs.

While the target areas are fixed, the contracts are based on mutually agreed measures put forth by institutions themselves (i.e. there are no “national” externally imposed targets that all HEIs need to reach).

The performance targets per HEI are set for 2015 and will be evaluated in 2016. The Review Commission that advises the minister about these performance contracts conducted a mid-term review in 2014 to evaluate to what extent HEIs have made a good start. In general, the Commission points out that universities are likely to reach the targets by 2016 (and have in some cases already reached them). At the same time, the (still) sluggish performance in study progress at a number of UASs is reason for concern. Still, there is evidence that performance agreements have become very important internal steering objectives for universities. This means that improving study progress and completion—including an emphasis on matching and ousting underperforming students as soon as possible—have become institutional priorities. For example, the BSA, the “hard cut” allowing progression to a Master only upon completion of a Bachelor, and

\textsuperscript{120} See: \url{http://www.duo.nl/SRVS/CGI-BIN/WEBCG1.EXE?St=18,E=000000000045940079,K=4455,Sxi=1,Case=obj(1810),ts=OcwDuoNew}
the University Teacher Qualification requirements, are increasingly important (Reviewcommissie, 2014; VSNU, 2012; Vossensteyn, 2013).

**Information and support for students**

*Information and matching procedures: the May 1st registration deadline*

Since 2014 prospective Bachelor students must register for a study programme before May 1st. They then have the right to have their study choice checked. The institution's or programme’s study advice is not binding. However, students who register after the May 1st deadline (at programmes that still allow this) may be refused\(^\text{121}\). Moreover, independently from the study check, since 2013/14 research universities may set admission requirements for students transferring from a UAS after year-1\(^\text{122}\).

Every study programme must offer some sort of check. This can be done using a digital survey, participating in the study for one day (the so-called “trial study” (*proefstuderen*)), and/or through an interview with someone from the programme\(^\text{123}\). HEIs are allowed to set their own “matching” activities but in general the key expected effect is that students will be more aware of their choice, and thus be more successful. However, the system’s non-binding nature is seen as its main drawback. For example, in August 2014 the *Volkskrant*, a newspaper, reported that at Utrecht University, where a compulsory study check had been introduced in 2013, the number of drop-outs after six months decreased a mere .9% (from 14.7% to 13.8%), though marked differences by programme have been reported\(^\text{124}\).

**Binding Study Advice (BSA)**

The BSA is an institutional policy (used by almost all institutions in the Netherlands) and happens at the end of year-1. Typically, a BSA is negative if students have not earned enough ECs. On average, the limit is about 45 ECs, but HEIs or study programmes can choose to set a lower or higher threshold. For example, Wageningen University requires 36 ECs\(^\text{125}\) while the Erasmus University of Rotterdam requires 60 ECs\(^\text{126}\). A negative BSA means students must discontinue their studies. Moreover, students are not allowed to enrol in the same/similar programmes at the same HEI for a number of years, as determined by the institution.

In recent years, the use of the BSA has expanded to all study programmes, and requirements have been made stricter to select only capable students for the second year. In exchange for the right to issue a negative BSA, institutions are expected to improve the academic counselling and support structures for their students in (especially) the first year. There are some rules set out in law that institutions must abide by,

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\(^{122}\) Access to university education is possible either via the proper secondary diploma or after achieving the UAS propaedeutic certificate  after the first year (equalling 60ECs)

\(^{123}\) See: [http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/hoger-onderwijs/studiekeuze-toelating](http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/hoger-onderwijs/studiekeuze-toelating)


\(^{125}\) See: [http://www.wageningenur.nl/nl/artikel/Bindend-Studieadvies.htm](http://www.wageningenur.nl/nl/artikel/Bindend-Studieadvies.htm)

including providing proper support to students, issuing a warning in the first semester in case of possible negative BSA, taking into account personal circumstances (such as a disability), and having a system in place for student appeals.

Moreover, in July 2013, the Ministry allowed institutions to utilize the BSA in later years too. This is an experiment that started in academic year 2013/14 and is scheduled to end in 2019. It does not apply to “unique” programmes (i.e. students must have alternative programmes of the same type) and may apply at most to 10% of all students in Dutch higher education. The goal is to create an ambitious study culture and improve success rates. Yet, to date, few institutions have decided to participate (the University College Amsterdam, Leiden University, the Gerrit Rietveld Academy (a fine art school), and Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences). About 15,000 students (2.3% of the total student population) are expected to be affected.

The goals of the BSA are to help students progress more rapidly into year-2 and complete their studies on time. It is generally believed that the BSA has indeed been beneficial, albeit marginally (Vossensteyn, 2013, p.47). However, on the aggregate there appears to be no clear correlation between the EC threshold for a positive BSA and drop-out rates. For instance, in both the UAS and research university sectors dropouts and switches are lower in programmes with a 40 EC (or lower) BSA norm (van den Broek et al., 2014, p.45).

"Hard Cut” Bachelor-Master progression (harde knip)

With the introduction of the Bachelor—Master structure most universities allowed students who had not yet fully completed their Bachelor to enrol in a Master programme and complete their Bachelor thesis and last module(s) while already attending a Master programme. Universities allowed this practice primarily for financial reasons, in order to retain their own Bachelor students for a successive Master programme while reducing their delay towards the Master degree (delaying a few months instead of a semester or even a whole year). However, the Ministry introduced the so-called “hard cut” (harde knip) as of academic year 2012/13. This means that now students may enrol in a Master programme only upon successful completion of their Bachelor.

This reform is consistent with the Bologna Process argument that Bachelors are terminal degrees which should enable entry into the labour market or access to the next level of education (Master). There is some evidence to show that Bachelor success rates have improved since the introduction of the “hard cut” (Vossensteyn, 2013, pp. 47-48). Moreover, universities may require UAS Bachelor graduates to follow a pre-Master bridging programme prior to accessing a University Master programme (van den Broek et al., 2014, p.4).

Other Information Tools

- The online student choice information provision (http://www.studiekeuze123.nl): Foundation "Studiekeuze123“ provides independent information on higher education through an extended national web portal to help (prospective) students make well-considered choices for their study career. It contains factual information for prospective students on each Bachelor and Master programme in the country regarding access requirements, content and labour market prospects, as well results

from the national student satisfaction survey. Studiekeuze123 is responsible *inter alia* for the National Student Survey (NSE) and the study choice database, which underlie Studiekeuze123.nl. The portal also links to open days and similar orientation events, to online tests of interest in fields, etc. It is a joint initiative of the associations of all HEIs (publicly-funded and other recognised ones), and student organizations ISO and LSVb, and is funded by the Ministry.

- Study in figures (see: [http://www.studiekeuzeinformatie.nl/studieincijfers](http://www.studiekeuzeinformatie.nl/studieincijfers)) is a small fiche providing six or seven key figures on study programmes (enrolment, intensity, satisfaction, completion rates, employment). It is included in flyers, on university websites, etc. and can always be found on [http://www.studiekeuze123.nl](http://www.studiekeuze123.nl). It intends to inform prospective students at a single glance of some basic facts of the study programme compared with the national average. This initiative of some UASs is now supported by government and is in the process of being extended to all HEIs.

### 6.4.1.2 Organisation of Higher Education

**Teachers’ qualifications**

Basic and Senior teaching qualifications (*basiskwalificatie onderwijs* [BKO] or *seniorkwalificatie onderwijs* [SKO]) being promoted to teach in higher education. The goal is to improve didactic qualifications for university teachers within HEIs, which is expected to have a positive effect on study success. They were introduced 10 years ago at the UU and subsequently became national policy (included in performance contracts as indicators in research universities).

**Selection mechanisms**

In principle, there is no selection in the Netherlands. Students with the necessary secondary qualification have the right to access the programme of their choice. However, there are a limited number of programmes where demand exceeds available places. These are so-called *numerus fixus* programmes. Every year, the DUO office announces for which UAS or university programmes a lottery applies. Prospective students may register to *numerus fixus* programmes up to May 15th each year. There are currently two possibilities for selective admission, i.e.:

- a) Decentralized selection: institutions may decide conditions (and must make these conditions known in advance). To gain admission through decentralized selection applicants must satisfy the requirements for access to the programme. Decentralised selection may be a stand-alone selection mechanism, or it may be used for a number of student places in addition to the complex lottery system;
- b) Weighted lottery, related to applicants’ secondary school exam results. This works in two tiers:
  - i. First, the best-performing students gain direct admission: all applicants with the necessary secondary qualification will be admitted to the programme of their preference if they have an average grade of 8 or higher for the courses in their secondary school exam,

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128 However, those who register before May 1st are allowed to apply to other (non-selective) programmes if they fail to be admitted (i.e. they are exempt from the strict May 1st deadline)

129 On a scale from 1 to 10, where 10 is the highest
ii. **Second, for the other applicants** a weighted lottery is organised: the higher the secondary school exam grade average, the higher the chance of being selected for the programme of choice.

The weighted lottery system will be discontinued as of year 2017 giving more freedom to institutions to select students who want to follow limited enrolment programmes\(^{130}\).

### 6.4.2 Institutional policies

This section explores practices to stimulate study success at Rotterdam UAS and at Utrecht University. As mentioned in the introduction, these HEIs are well-known for their specific initiatives to promote study success. Improving study success has been high on the agenda of Rotterdam UAS for several years also because of its high drop-out rates (and specifically for certain vulnerable groups such as students of non-western descent). This led the institution to introduce its “study success programme” in 2009 (i.e. before the 2012 performance agreements with the Ministry). Similarly, UU initiated its “matching process” as a way to improve retention a year before the new May 1\(^{st}\) deadline was decided by the government.

#### 6.4.2.1 Rotterdam University of Applied Science

**6.4.2.1.1 Introduction**

Rotterdam UAS was established in 1987 from a merger of several small colleges. At that time it had around 10,000 students. Today, it provides for over 30,000 students and has about 3,000 personnel. Over 80% of the student population is from the Rotterdam region, which is one of the most multi-cultural parts of the Netherlands, but also one with a relatively low educational level (Hogeschool Rotterdam, 2012). Between 2011 and 2013 every year around 4,500 students graduated here. Rotterdam UAS sees its links with the region as a fundamental part of its mission and a basis for implementing its policies (i.e. improving study success is seen as an essential contribution to regional economic development, see also Hogeschool Rotterdam, 2012, pp. 5ff.). Table 2 summarizes the features of the student population and first time enrolments.

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Table 2: Students and first-year students at Hogeschool Rotterdam, by ethnic background, age and secondary education, (years 2011, 2012, 2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Enrolled students</th>
<th>First-year students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>31,429</td>
<td>31,997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native</td>
<td>63.7%</td>
<td>63.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-native (Western)</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-native (non-Western)</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>16,530</td>
<td>14,420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>14,899</td>
<td>12,509</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;20</td>
<td>7,916</td>
<td>7,733</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>18,204</td>
<td>18,953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>2,919</td>
<td>3,055</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;30</td>
<td>2,390</td>
<td>2,256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary education MBO</td>
<td>8,899</td>
<td>9,119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary education HAVO</td>
<td>14,663</td>
<td>15,030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary education VWO</td>
<td>2,989</td>
<td>2,901</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary education other</td>
<td>3,624</td>
<td>3,757</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary education foreign</td>
<td>1,254</td>
<td>1,190</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Rotterdam UAS Annual Report (Jaarverslag) 2013, Annex 4 (adapted to table by Author)

On the whole, Rotterdam UAS defines study success as reducing drop-outs and boosting in-time graduations. These are the measures to evaluate (institutional and programmatic) progress in study success, and are related to the programme a student chose at the outset (i.e. programme transfers are an indication of a failure rather than success). Study success indicators are included in two phases of the study, i.e. the so-called “propaedeutic phase” (P-phase), and the “main phase” (hoofdfase). The P-phase is completed once a student has gained 60 ECs, i.e. the number of ECs included in the full regular first year of study. The main phase is the subsequent period of study, leading to graduation.

The measures of study success in the P-phase include (Bajwa, 2015, p. 9):
- Propaedeutic % after 1 and 2 years,
- % who stopped education before February 1st, during the first year and during the second year,
- % of negative BSA in the first and second year,
- Average number of ECs in the first year (if studying without having obtained the P, but having passed the BSA norm).

The values of academic achievement in the main phase include:
- Progress five years after the start of the study (diploma, still studying, stopped),
- Percentage of long-term students (registered for more than five years) in the student population.

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131 The importance of personal development and added value for the learners was not underestimated during the interviews but is not part of the evaluation of study success.
132 Like elsewhere, at Rotterdam UAS a positive BSA requires 45 ECs, hence one can—and often does—progress to year 2 prior to completing his/her propaedeutic.
6.4.2.1.2 Rotterdam UAS’ programmes: “Study Success” and “Binding on Content”

Rotterdam UAS has implemented two programmes which are specifically meant to promote study success, namely (a) the “Study Success” programme and (b) the “Binding on Content” programme. The latter—a.k.a. Study Success 2.0—is in fact a spinoff from the former (established in 2009), and focuses on teachers managing an “inclusive classroom”.

The Study Success Programme was initiated because drop-outs in the P-phase were high (at 14% abandonment rate within six months), the overall attainment was low (about 50% of the student population graduated within eight years), the composition of the Rotterdam population is very diverse, and the Ministry provided additional financial resources for the so-called G5—five big UASs in the Randstad area of the Netherlands (Wildschut and Beentjes, 2011). The government funds were aimed at developing activities for improving the academic achievement of non-Western ethnic minority students. It focused on, and was evaluated against, five key areas, including (Zijlstra et al., 2013):

- Study choice,
- Social integration,
- Academic integration,
- Study motivation and academic self-confidence,
- Inclusive education climate.

Rotterdam’s Study Success programme is a suite of interventions that are meant to ensure the right students are in the right place and complete their studies in a reasonable time. It includes several elements:

- **Study check** consisting of a mandatory intake interview with candidates prior to May 1st (this provision is in line with the national May 1st registration regulation described in the section on national policies) and a digital questionnaire to be filled out by prospective students. All applicants who wish to start their studies in September must undergo an intake interview before May 1st of the same year. The interview is conducted by a Study Career Coach (studieloopbaancoach) who, in most instances, will remain the student’s Study Career Coach during his or her studies. The outcome of this phase is a non-binding study advice. If the student has missed the May 1st deadline s/he might still be eligible to attend a study programme but the study advice can be binding.

- **The Study Career Coach (SCC)** is a teacher who mentors students throughout the programme. Each student meets with his/her SCC at least four times per year and discusses any issues that might arise. At its inception the SCC’s role was primarily to guide learners with regards to academic issues only (i.e. content of the programme, etc.). Today, however, an SCC is expected to be able to discuss also broader matters relating to the student and the programme (e.g. choices with regards to internship positions and employment prospects). Being an SCC is not an obligation for all teachers but, as an institutional policy, it is encouraged and there is provision for teacher-to-teacher peer-training.

- **Peer coaching**: a peer coach is a senior student who helps other students in their study, both on the content and in learning skills and planning. He or she is a “role

133 See: [http://www.echo-net.nl/#!g5/c573](http://www.echo-net.nl/#!g5/c573)
model”, especially (but not exclusively) for first year students. Students are not obliged to have a peer coach, however, the systems appears to be strongly appreciated. Peer coaches are trained (there are eight meetings and students get ECs) and paid (see Hogeschool Rotterdam, 2013a, p.17). There are about three hundred peer coaches at Rotterdam UAS and over 2,000 followed the peer coaching training. Each school has its team of peer coaches and students may submit a request for coaching at https://peercoach.hr.nl/. Finally, there are also peer coaches targeted at specific groups (for example mature students or students of non-western ethnic background).

- Summer Schools: there are two forms of summer school. The “regular” summer school takes place prior to commencement; it targets prospective students and is voluntary (it may be recommended as part of the study check). Instead, the so-called “Summer School-P” is remedial. It supports students in year-1 and in year-2 who have not (yet) achieved their propaedeutic certificates. The “Summer School-P” consists of a week of intensive lectures focussing on the courses for which the students have not yet passed (or sat) their exams and it ends with an examination approved by the examination committee. If successfully passed, this examination allows students to complete their P-phase. According to the Rotterdam UAS Annual Report 2013, about 33% of “Summer School-P” participants receive their propaedeutic certificate in this way.

The Binding Programme - or Study Success 2.0 - purports to intensify intra-institutional and intra-programme contact (between teachers and between teachers and students) and thus improve achievement. This initiative is consistent with a broader body of literature that emphasizes institutional commitment as a key factor for improved rates of retention, success, and student engagement (Yorke and Longden, 2004; Thomas, 2012). For instance, Thomas, (2012) found that the early development of student engagement, the monitoring of students’ behaviour and progress, and a holistic approach to institutions engaging in study success, are important steps in building a culture of belonging at the institutional level; this, in turn, encourages study success. Also the Dutch Inspectorate (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2009) identified that institutions with a strong teaching culture supported by the management boards, and that have implemented comprehensive approaches to teaching (i.e. are active in implementing teaching policies such as the professionalization of teachers, small scale teaching, and close supervision and advise for students) show more study success.

The Programme is based on the idea that binding with students starts with the programme content and that there should be one vision (a “team vision”) between the teachers and towards the students. Both groups should feel part of the same community and share the same interests (both in terms of content and for the institution/programme). It:

- Strengthens the Study Career Coaching and Peer Coaching models. In particular, Study Success 2.0 requires teachers to be part of “teacher teams”, which should (also) be an SCC contact point for students. Students may approach any teacher and the team should be able to identify an appropriate SCC to provide support;
- Calls for knowledge and experience sharing (rather than top-down steering). Students and teachers and teachers amongst each other, as well as the different hierarchical roles within the UAS should share knowledge and experiences and, thus, create a stronger bond;
Introduces a “preceptor” system for junior teachers. New teachers (both full- and part-time) can learn from experienced excellent teachers. This is the so-called “new HBO (UAS) teacher” component and will be organized at school level (as yet it is neither operational nor mandatory).

6.4.2.1.3 Reflection on the Practices

Five years on, the results of Rotterdam UAS’ endeavours to boost its study success performance are mixed. On the one hand, there is a general sense within the institution (both from staff and students) that the practices are relevant and useful. For example, reportedly the request to have a Peer Coach is today commonplace whereas until recently it was almost seen as a stigma (i.e. needing a peer coach was an identification mark for “weak” students). Moreover, while the programmes started top-down (and were initially also incentivized thanks to G5 government funds), currently individual schools within the institution take the initiative and put forth new proposals. The institution also provides substantial investments (over €10m for the period 2007-2013 [interview]). Prospective students are said to take the intake interview increasingly seriously, despite their right in most cases to enrol regardless of the advice received. All these elements indicate that students and staff consider promoting study success through these programmes a normal part of everyday life at Rotterdam UAS.

Furthermore, the institutional policies have taken advantage of the opportunities national higher education policies afforded (e.g. by increasing the BSA norm, introducing a tougher study check and using the possibility of a binding negative advice if applicants fail to meet the May 1st deadline). However, the problems (and envisaged solutions) are said to be evident in the classroom and therefore initiatives focus on that level. The Performance Agreement 2013-2016 between Rotterdam UAS and the Ministry set ambitious targets, including inter alia (Hogeschool Rotterdam, 2013b, p.10):

- Reducing drop-outs in year-1 to 25% by 2015
- Switches from one programme to another within Rotterdam UAS at about 10%
- Graduation rates of re-registering will be ± 65% (or more) after 5 years, by 2015

Nevertheless, according to the institution’s analysis on study success released in March 2015 (Bajwa, 2015, p. 14 ff.), between 2009 and 2013, dropouts in the first semester increased from 12.2% to 18.4%, during year-1 from 32% to 40.5% (but during year-2 they decreased from 7.9% to 6.3%). The “P-attainment” in year-1 increased from 23.4% to 24.3% (this was also the first time in years it broke the 24% threshold) but in year-2, which is considered the measure of study success in the P-phase, it dropped from 50.9% to 49.8%. In general, the figures show that five years after enrolling, students’ graduations have declined (from 42.9% to 38.1%) while drop-outs have remained largely stable at about 47% — which suggests an increase in long term students (Bajwa, 2015, p. 20).
These numbers conceal significant differences among groups. For example, it is apparent that during the 2009/10-2013/14 period performance declined particularly for students with secondary vocational education (MBO) vis-à-vis those with a general secondary education (HAVO) entry diploma (see Chart 4). Specifically, during the last year (2013-2014) all HAVO students (irrespective of their ethnic background) outperform MBO students. Moreover, across the board young men of non-Western descent perform worse than others, though gaps between ethnic groups are more apparent in cohorts with an MBO background qualification (see Chart 3, taken from Bajwa, 2015, p.17).
This data may raise questions as to the effectiveness of the Study Success programmes initiated at Rotterdam UAS. However, two considerations should be made. First, as shown in Chart 2, improvements have taken place over the last year, which might suggest the need for a reasonable time-lag for such policies to take hold and have visible effects. Second, although Rotterdam UAS provides targeted mentorship programmes for specific groups of non-Western students, the study success programmes are meant

134 It might also indicate an excess of ambition in the performance agreement targets
135 “Amani” for Moroccan students, “Antuba” for students from the former Dutch Antilles and Aruba, “Lale” for Turkish students, and “Makandra” for Surinamese students
to be general rather than targeted in order to promote inclusivity and a shift from a
generic “care structure” to individualized attention in the classroom. The former is
believed to reinforce existing divides amongst the student population, while the latter is
one of the cornerstones of the new Binding Programme.

6.4.2.2 Utrecht University

6.4.2.2.1 Introduction

Founded in 1636, today Utrecht University (UU) offers 45 Bachelor and 138 Master
programmes to over 30,000 students (of which over 1,500 are foreigners). It has seven
faculties and two university colleges (“University College Roosevelt” and “University
College Utrecht”) and around 6,000 staff136. Its mission is to provide education and
research of international quality and educate young people, train new generations of
researchers, conduct academic training that combine knowledge and professional skills,
produce cutting-edge research and contribute to solving social issues (Utrecht University,
2013a p.13). Table 3 summarizes key figures about first-year students as presented in
UU’s Annual Report.

Table 3: First year Students by Gender and Prior Education (year 2012)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First year students</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6,227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary education VWO</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary education other</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary education foreign</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior Education UAS diploma</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior Education UAS propaedeutic certificate</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior Education university</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Year 2013

At UU study success is considered as an indication of quality of education and is defined
primarily as graduating in a reasonable period of time (the nominal length of the
programme plus one year). The measure of study success is considered net of year-1
(i.e. it is based on students who have not transferred or dropped out after year-1).
Hence, for example, according to UU’s Annual Report (p.34), 62% of students who
enrolled in 2008/09 had graduated within four years. However, this number is 77% of
those who did not switch programmes (the number is 79% for 2009/10 freshmen, see
p.18).

Key indicators in terms of study success, as defined in UU’s Strategic Plan 2012-2016
(p.16), include:
- Graduation rates at 77% or more by 2016,
- At least 12% of students take Honour courses education by 2016,
- The number of full-time undergraduate students switching programmes after one
  year at 7% at most,

136 See: http://www.uu.nl/organisatie/profiel/cijfers-en-feiten
The dropout rate in first year undergraduate education is at most 20%.

6.4.2.2.2 Study Success at UU: the “Matching” programme

Over 10 years ago UU introduced its education model (onderwijsmodel), known as “BaMa 1.0”. This was triggered by the need to address the relatively low satisfaction of students compared to other universities in the country. It is based on four main principles, i.e. (a) a clear distinction between Bachelor and Master phase wherein the Bachelor should form broad-based academics and the Master phase should be geared towards a specialization, (b) flexibility and freedom of choice, including, for example, Honours programmes for students who seek more challenges, (c) attention to personal development, e.g. via better supervision and counselling and (d) professional development of teachers (e.g. through the implementation of educational qualifications for teachers, such as the Basic or Senior teaching qualifications (BKO or SKO)). The model was assessed, first in 2006 and then in 2011. In 2011, UU initiated what is commonly referred to as “BaMa 3.0”, a strengthening and updating of the educational model. BaMa 3.0 includes the following features (Utrecht University, 2011; NVAO, 2012):

- Adjustment of year schedule,
- Introduction of matching, selection and supervision (matching procedures compulsory since 2013),
- Broadening of the first year,
- Improving the teaching and testing,
- Continuation of honours programmes,
- Further focus on professional and career education for teachers.

Utrecht University is the first university in the Netherlands to focus on matching, an initiative designed to ensure that prospective students choose a study programme that reflects their abilities and interests (Utrecht University, 2013b). A mandatory “matching” procedure for all students with Dutch pre-qualifications who register for a non-selective Bachelor degree programme before or on May 1st, was introduced in 2013. Its goals are (a) to reduce dropout rates in year-1, (b) help students make a good and informed study choice including providing students who wish to engage in a more challenging education new options such as Honours programmes, and (c) to build a connection with prospective students from the very outset of their relationships with UU.

Matching begins during the registration phase and takes place after the orientation phase (e.g. after the open days or walk-in days where prospective students can visit the campus and get an idea of the offer). Typically, it includes two components, namely:

- A questionnaire: applicants must fill out a “matching form” indicating their previous experiences, grades, motivations and expectations of the study, and

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137 See: http://www.uu.nl/onderwijs/onderwijs-aan-de-uu/het-onderwijsmodel
138 Matching activities can be used, but are not necessarily applied by selective programmes (i.e. programmes with a numerus fixus), including: Teacher Training Primary Education, Management studies, Biomedical Sciences, College of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Veterinary Medicine, Pharmacy, Medicine, Psychology, University College Utrecht, and University College Roosevelt (Middelburg). Matching does also not apply to students who are eligible for higher education in the Netherlands based on a foreign qualifications
139 See: http://matching-uu.wp.hum.uu.nl/
Study activities at home and at the university: applicants must participate in a real-life class or practical. They receive preparatory work to do at home, an assignment or test which is evaluated and discussed with the tutors afterwards. The interview (either in a group or individually) covers the assignment results, the other experiences during the study activities, and the applicant’s motivation (first component), and may lead to a cautious advice to the candidate.

The process is mandatory but the advice resulting from it is not binding. Thus, in principle students can—and do—enrol in any programme for which they are eligible. However, prospective students who fail to participate in all the matching activities organized by their preferred study programme are not eligible for enrolment. Similarly, students who do not register before the May 1st deadline are also not eligible.

Matching does not end with the enrolment (is it, in fact, called a “matching trajectory”). While the pre-enrolment phase is pivotal, the process continues until the BSA at the end of year one. Therefore, the tutoring during the first year plays an important role throughout the entire process. Tutors have received specific training to this end. Moreover, especially during the first ten weeks students who appear not to perform very well receive additional tutoring. The university has developed frameworks—implemented at programme level—for both the pre-enrolment matching days and for tutoring (Utrecht University, 2013a, p.30).

Both students and programmes appreciate the matching activity. Apparently students believe matching does help them to make a better study choice (Ibid). However, it is also true that participating in the matching does not necessarily change their study choice. In fact, very few participants of the matching activities change their initially chosen study programme (interview). Matching is perhaps rather a way to better acquaint students with university study in a particular programme and to make them aware of the programme’s expectations. In 2014, the University implemented some improvements in the process (for example, more exacting tests, more feedback, and stricter deadlines to steer students’ registration behaviour). A good matching process, for example including a full week of study prior to commencement of the programme, is believed to provide students and the programme with a realistic understanding of the chances of success (Wubbels, 2014; interview).

The matching and tutoring process is the policy to boost study success. However, UU implements a number of policies that, by adapting programmes and improving educational quality, are expected to have an indirect effect in study success. These include, inter alia (see also Utrecht University, 2011, 2013a-b; NVAO, 2012; interviews):

There are some exceptions for which the matching procedure can take place in August. These include if the student (See: http://www.uu.nl/Bachelors/veelgestelde-vragen-over-matching):

- Was not selected for a selective study programme,
- Participated in matching for another programme and decides on the basis of that matching advice to register for a different program,
- Can prove force majeure,
- Receives a negative BSA from another programme,
- Lives in in Bonaire, Sint Eustatius, Saba, Aruba, Curacao and Sint Maarten.

On average they evaluate it 4 on a 5-point scale according to UU, See http://matching-uu.wp.hum.uu.nl/
- Increased policy attention for education and additional funding for teaching activities, to organize small-scale education and hire new teachers,

- More flexibility of undergraduate programmes to provide students with a broader view of their discipline and stronger tutoring throughout the programme. The first year of the Bachelor is thus designed to allow students to switch without excessive delay in their further studies,

- Experiments to sustain student motivation and binding with the programme and the HEI, e.g. a greater focus on small-scale education and experiments with blended learning (the introduction of a “peer mentoring mechanism” in the matching is under discussion). Because of its special status within the institution, the University College Utrecht is often deemed the best setting for testing education innovations (such as small scaled orientation),

- Teachers’ continuous professional development, for example by linking promotion with the possession of a BKO of SKO, and the so-called “teaching parade” organized annually by Teaching Fellows to share good practices,

- The establishment, in 2012, of the Teaching Academy Utrecht University (TAUU) by teachers who had followed the Centre of Excellence in University Teaching’s educational leadership programme the prior year. The TAUU enables teachers across UU to connect and network with each other and share ideas, practices and experiences,

- The “Utrecht Education Incentive Fund” (utrechts stimuleringsfonds onderwijs), which supports educational innovation and teachers’ development within the UU. It particularly encourages inter-faculty collaborations and the TAAU can help staff connect with colleagues. Projects may have a budget of up to €250,000 and a maximum term of three years,

- The development (in 2009) of the so-called “education cards” (onderwijskaarten) which provide comparative quantitative information per programme on access, transfer and progression, facilities, personnel, results of internal and external evaluations, etc., benchmarked against a “balanced score card”. The data is input for the annual quality appraisal between the rector and the dean and is prepared annually in January,

- Testing, seen as another key to study success: the faculty of social and behavioural sciences has a system of “course test ambassadors” (leergang toetsambassadeurs) who contribute to developing better testing mechanisms (e.g. in certain cases an oral examination might be preferable to evaluate whether learning outcomes have been reached, while in other cases a written test or essay might be more desirable, i.e. there is no one-size-fits-all approach to testing),

- Follow-up research on students who dropped out and students who after participating in the matching activity did not choose the indicated study programme.

142 The Teaching Fellowship Programme is an initiative of UU to reward excellence in education. The programme was initiated in 2011. Each Teaching Fellow receives a scholarship of €5,000 for professional development and implements a project aimed at improving the quality of education in his/her faculty. See: http://www.uu.nl/onderwijs/topdocenten-en-topstudenten/teaching-fellows

143 See: http://www.uu.nl/onderwijs/onderwijsparade

144 See: http://tauu.uu.nl/ and http://tauu.uu.nl/over-de-tauu/

145 See: http://tauu.uu.nl/2014/10/stimuleringsfonds-onderwijs/

146 See: http://www.nvao.net/page/downloads/rapport_UU_Instellingstoets_kwaliteitszorg.pdf
- Faculty-specific study association’ activities, such as job market related activities, social activities, study marathons (studying under supervision / counselling of senior students), contributing to the sense of community amongst students. Membership is not mandatory, but encouraged.

6.4.2.2.3 Reflection on the Practices

A year after the introduction of compulsory matching procedures at UU, the results are encouraging. However, it is hard to define hard causal relationships because, although it is the prime policy, matching is part of a larger suite of initiatives (Utrecht University, 2015; interviews). On the one hand, there is a general sense within the institution (both from staff and students) that matching is useful to manage prospective students’ expectations and has positive effects because it is representative of the programme. At the same time, it also appears that (a) most prospective students are aware that an advice is both de jure and de facto inconsequential and are unlikely to reconsider their choice, (b) a greater involvement of senior students might make the process more robust (for example, young applicants often consider current students emphasizing the difficulties of the programme more convincing than teachers doing the same), and (c) the sample test/examination following the real-life homework, class or practical is not “strict” enough (which led to reinforcing the testing experience and requiring more preparatory work during the process).

Overall, despite not making deterministic cause-effect relationships, there are indications that matching has had an impact on study success (at least in combination with the other activities). Charts 5 and 6 below show the percentages of drop-outs and negative BSAs after year-1. What can be seen is that while performance has been improving over time, there seems to be a relatively strong reduction in drop-outs for the first cohort that underwent matching. Of course, as study success data for the cohort 2014 are not yet available, this is not a trend but only a possible indication. Moreover, the data is aggregated at institutional level and it conceals some faculty-based differences. For example, at over 5%, the faculty of Geosciences has the strongest decline in drop-outs (and also the lowest drop-outs overall).
The effects of matching might also be seen in the first-year enrolments. As can be seen from the chart below (based on data from UU), in 2013 there has been a decline in first year enrolments, (perhaps explaining the lower rates of abandonment in year-1) which might be related to the introduction of matching and the more realistic view it provides applicants. This seems to contradict the earlier contention that matching does not have a strong impact on study choice. Nonetheless, it could also indicate that given the several study success policies on both national and institutional level, students might be more likely to choose options (such as UAS) they feel they are more likely to complete. Matching involves three steps (students must apply, participate in the matching, and decide whether to start). Matching might have an effect already on Step 1 (before 2014 only UU required applications before May 1st), or on Step 2 (students might have decided not to participate in the matching). However, also in this case the novelty of this policy and the lack of trend data make it hard to propose causal relationships and make long-term predictions.
6.5 Reflection on Policy Mix

The national policies implemented thus far, and especially the most recent developments, are meant to affect student as well as institutional behaviour. As mentioned in other HEDOCE reports, there are three areas of policy that are relevant, i.e. (a) financial
policies such as the new loan system for students and performance agreements between the Ministry and the HEIs, (b) student information and support policies (e.g. the new May 1st deadline for “matching processes”, BSA pilots beyond year-1 or information tools such as www.studiekeuze123.nl), and (c) the organization of higher education, for example including the introduction of teaching qualifications, and the decentralization of selection mechanisms for certain programmes.

On the whole the data gathered for this case study indicate that two areas of policy are particularly salient, namely financial policies and information and support. The organization of higher education, while including important instruments such as teaching qualifications and the decentralization of selection mechanism for certain programmes, seems less prominent in the study success discourse147.

Policies are expected to influence drop-out (especially during the early stages of study) and retention rates, and are part of a broader reform agenda in higher education. The attention for study success at the national level seems to have had an impact on institutional policies. The two cases described in this report are examples of HEIs that have aligned their own study success policies with the national discourse such as the BSA, the “hard cut”, or the May 1st deadline.

Matching (UU) and study success (Rotterdam UAS) initiatives are related to the introduction of the May 1st deadline which should help students make informed choices and the government’s support of information databases. The fact that HEIs endeavour to increase in-time graduation rates is related, inter alia, to performance agreements setting agreed and their specific targets on study success. At the same time, most of these reforms are very recent and it is not yet possible to discern visible effects (except, arguably, an increase in graduations during the one year when a financial sanction for late graduations was implemented148).

On the aggregate, national data reveals relatively little change in students’ study success in the last decade, although the university sector (vis-à-vis the UAS sector) appears to have improved over time. The Dutch UAS sector faces a structural drop-out rate of about 15% after year-1, and graduation rates within five years149 have actually declined slightly, stabilizing at just over 50%. However, Bachelor production within four years at research universities increased from 51% of the 2005 cohort to 62% of the 2008 cohort. The VSNU151 explains this partly as a result of the collective “Long Term Agreements on Study Success and Quality” between the institutions’ Councils and the Ministry that preceded the performance agreements, which suggests that national policies (and particularly financial incentives) have indeed had an effect, albeit still sectorial.

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147 The importance of teaching qualifications is increasingly felt and promoted but is not “sold” as a key to study success

148 See: http://statline.cbs.nl/Statweb/publication/?DM=SLNL&PA=70962NED&D1=1&D2=a&D3=0&D4=a&D5=0&D6=0&D7=10,15-17&HDR=G3,G4,G1,G2,G6&STB=G5,T&VW=T

149 In line with standard practice in the Netherlands, the timeframe chosen is the nominal Bachelor study period plus one year, i.e. 4+1 at UAS and 3+1 at research universities

150 Data refer to full-time students only

151 See: http://www.vsnu.nl/f_c_Bachelorrendement.html
The situation is more difficult for the UAS sector, where a breakdown of the data exposes important cross-group variations. For example, there are rather clear differences in study success among students of differing secondary school background. Students entering from vocational training (MBO)—who may access a UAS but not research universities—are more likely to drop out after year-1 than applicants with a HAVO or VWO (even though they appear slightly more likely than HAVO-holders to obtain their degrees within five years). Moreover, it is apparent that students of non-Western descent (so-called niet-westerse allochtonen) have been performing worse at UAS’s for years and have generally lower retention and graduation rates than their autochtoon peers (i.e. “native Dutch”) (see charts 7 through 10, below).

**Chart 7: Drop-outs and Graduations in the Dutch UAS Sector (Cohorts 2000-2012)**

Source: Vereniging Hogescholen, 2015 (http://cijfers.hbo-raad.nl/index.htm)

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152 Which, to some extent, might be related to the fact that more non-western descent students have an MBO background.
Chart 8: Graduations in the Dutch University Sector (Cohorts 2005-2008)

**Behaalde diploma’s van studenten gestart in...**

Bron: 1cijferH2012 (cohortbestanden), VSNU/CBS

- Diploma gehaald na 3 jaar
- Diploma gehaald na 4 jaar

![Graph showing graduation rates for different years and types of diplomas](chart8.png)

Source: VSNU (http://www.vsnu.nl/f_c_Bachelorrendement.html)

Chart 9: Drop-outs in the Dutch UAS Sector (Cohorts 2000-2012), by Secondary schooling and ethnic background

![Graph showing drop-out rates for different entry years and categories](chart9.png)

Source: Vereniging Hogescholen, 2015
The findings are indicative of two longstanding areas of discussion in Dutch higher education:

- The transition from secondary to tertiary education in relation to accessibility vs. selection,
- Performance differentials among ethnic groups in society.

Accessibility is one of the cornerstones of Dutch higher education—anyone with the necessary secondary diploma has access to tertiary education. With the exception of a minority of programmes, selection (a policy on the organization of higher education) is not part of Dutch access policies nor will it be in the foreseeable future (interview). Matching and similar initiatives may be seen as ways to overcome the absence of selection because they result in an advice to the applicant and at the very least trigger prospective students to (re-)think about their study choices (interview). Yet, the inconsequentiality of pre-enrolment advice means that ultimately students may ignore it. This, in consequence, leaves open questions (i.e. policy gaps) about how to maximize study success while preserving extant entry requirements. Some argue that introducing a binding advice based on thorough matching procedures would be a form of selection well aligned with the basic accessibility principle of Dutch higher education. Still, to date, because it is accompanied by other policies (for example, financial policies such as the new “study advance instalment”) many expect it to be effective over time, as is. In other words, the policy balance (most notably between financial and information/support) rather than an emphasis on one policy area, is likely to shape study success in the Netherlands.
6.6 Annex

6.6.1 Interviews schedule

As agreed in the interviews and focus groups, interviewees and participants remain anonymous.

Rotterdam UAS visit: 5 March 2014, 10:00 am – 5:30 pm

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meeting 1</th>
<th>Studiesucces and Binding programme leaders</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meeting 2</td>
<td>Executive Board</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meeting 3</td>
<td>Directors, programme managers, project leaders study success programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting 4</td>
<td>Students and Alumni</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Utrecht University Visit: 18 March 2014, 9:00 am – 5:00 pm

<table>
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<th>Meeting 1</th>
<th>Executive Board</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meeting 2</td>
<td>Central policymaker—institutional level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting 3</td>
<td>Policymakers—institutional level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting 4</td>
<td>Vice-deans, programme directors, program coordinators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting 5</td>
<td>Students and Alumni</td>
</tr>
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</table>

National Stakeholder Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NVAO</th>
<th>The Hague, 12 March 2014, 1:00 pm – 2:15 pm</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MOCW</td>
<td>The Hague, 12 March 2014, 3:00 pm – 4:15 pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VSNU</td>
<td>Utrecht, 25 March 2014, 4:30 pm – 6:00 pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inspectie van het Onderwijs</td>
<td>Utrecht, 31 March 2014, 10:00 am – 11:15 am</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.6.2 References


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Institute of Race Relations (2010). Alternative Voices on Integration in Austria, France, Germany, the Netherlands and the UK. London: UK. Available at: http://www.irr.org.uk/pdf2/AlternativeVoicesOnIntegration.pdf

LKvV, LSVb and ISO (2014). Studiesucces: een nieuwe definitie


6.6.3 List of abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BaMa</td>
<td>Bachelor-Master</td>
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<tr>
<td>BKO</td>
<td>Basiskwalificatie Onderwijs</td>
<td>Basic Teaching Qualifications</td>
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<tr>
<td>BSA</td>
<td>Bindend studieadvies</td>
<td>Binding Study Advice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek</td>
<td>Central Bureau of Statistics (Statistics Netherlands)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CROHO</td>
<td>Centraal Register Opleidingen Hoger Onderwijs</td>
<td>Central Register of Higher Education Study Programmes</td>
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<tr>
<td>DUO</td>
<td>Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs</td>
<td>Office for the Implementation of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECs</td>
<td>European Credits</td>
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<td>EQF</td>
<td>European Qualifications Framework</td>
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<tr>
<td>HAVO</td>
<td>Hoger Algemeen Voortgezet Onderwijs</td>
<td>Higher General Secondary Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>HBO</td>
<td>Hoger beroepsonderwijs</td>
<td>Higher Professional Education (See: UAS)</td>
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<td>HEI</td>
<td>Higher Education Institution</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>ISO</td>
<td>Interstedelijk Studenten Overleg</td>
<td>Inter-city Student Consultation (Student Union)</td>
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<tr>
<td>LKvV</td>
<td>Landelijke Kamer van Verenigingen</td>
<td>National Chamber of Societies</td>
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<tr>
<td>LSVb</td>
<td>Landelijke Studenten Vakbond</td>
<td>National Student Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>MBO</td>
<td>Middelbaar beroepsonderwijs</td>
<td>vocational education and training</td>
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<tr>
<td>MOCW</td>
<td>Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap</td>
<td>Ministry of Education, Culture and Science</td>
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<tr>
<td>MOOCs</td>
<td>Massive Open Online Courses</td>
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<td>NLQF</td>
<td>Nederlandse Raad voor Training en Opleiding</td>
<td>Council for Training and Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>NRTO</td>
<td>Nationale Studenten Enquête</td>
<td>National Student Survey</td>
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<tr>
<td>NVAO</td>
<td>Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie</td>
<td>Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OU</td>
<td>Open Universiteit</td>
<td>Open University</td>
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<tr>
<td>SCC</td>
<td>Study Career Coach</td>
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<tr>
<td>SKO</td>
<td>Seniorkwalificatie Onderwijs</td>
<td>Senior Teaching Qualifications</td>
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<tr>
<td>TAUU</td>
<td>Teaching Academy Utrecht University</td>
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<tr>
<td>UAS</td>
<td>University of Applied Sciences</td>
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<tr>
<td>UU</td>
<td>Universiteit Utrecht</td>
<td>Utrecht University</td>
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<tr>
<td>VSNU</td>
<td>Vereniging van Universiteiten (Vereniging van Samenwerkende Nederlandse Universiteiten – obsoleet)</td>
<td>Association of Dutch Universities</td>
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<tr>
<td>VWO</td>
<td>Voorbereidend Wetenschappelijk Onderwijs,</td>
<td>Preparatory Scientific Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>WHW</td>
<td>Wet op het hoger onderwijs</td>
<td>Law on Higher Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WO</td>
<td>Wetenschappelijk Onderwijs</td>
<td>Scientific Education</td>
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7 Norway

Elisabeth Hovdhaugen, Bjørn Stensaker, Ingvild Reymert & Sabine Wollscheid (all NIFU)

7.1 Introduction

The Norwegian case study draws on two main data sources, first, available statistics and research on student success that in particular focused on dropout and completion, and second, document analyses of Reports to the Storting (white papers) and official Norwegian reports from the Ministry of Education. We have conducted interviews with different stakeholders at different levels: the Ministry of Education and Research, the Norwegian Quality Assurance Agency (NOKUT), The Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions (UHR) and the National Union of Students in Norway (NSO). We collected data at two institutions: the University Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) and Hedmark University College. At both institutions, we have interviewed leadership representatives, intermediate leadership (at faculty level), institute leaders and study program leaders (both academic and administrative) as well as students at both institution. We conducted most interviews in December 2014, apart from the interviews with NOKUT and UHR, which were conducted early in 2015.

The two institutions were selected for two main reasons: firstly based on expectations of an active institutional strategy to promote study quality, enhance completion and reduce dropout, and secondly because they are quite different from each other as institutions. NTNU is one of the largest universities in Norway (over 23,000 students) in one of the major cities, while Hedmark University College is a medium-sized institution (about 7,700 students) that has campuses in multiple smaller towns in Norway.

The two institutions differ in their subject mix and in their recruitment patterns. NTNU has a good reputation both as an educational institution, especially for masters of engineering, and as a research institution. Most of their students are young and have high average grades from upper secondary education. This implies a high competition in many programmes to be accepted at NTNU. In addition, NTNU recruits students from all over Norway, while Hedmark University College recruits locally, like most other Norwegian HE institutions (Frølich et al 2011). Most students at Hedmark University College are mature students, many with a family and long work experience, aiming for a professional degree (such as teaching or nursing). As many other small and medium sized university colleges, they have to work hard to get enough qualified applicants to fill their study places (Frølich et al 2009).

7.2 Definitions of study success

There is no commonly agreed upon definition of student success in Norway, but in governmental statistics and the yearly published Current state of affairs in HE (Tilstandsrapport for høyere utdanning) completion within estimated time to degree is the most commonly used definition (see latest published version, Ministry of Education and Research 2014). However, research on dropout and completion has been using several definitions of study success, such as completion within estimated time, exceeding estimated time with X years and retention rate in HE (see for example Aamodt & Hovdhaugen 2011, Hovdhaugen et al 2103). In analyses of students’ that leave their programme/ institution before degree completion Hovdhaugen (2012) distinguishes between students who leave their HE institution for another institution, namely student
transfer, and students who leave HE altogether, student dropout. This is an important distinction, as a great share of the students leaving their institution/programme before degree completion in Norway do not dropout of HE in total, but they rather reorient themselves to a different degree. In a HE system with a lot of mobility between institutions is it important to distinguish between these two forms of departure, as they may have different implications and require different policy approaches (Tinto 1993).

Many stakeholders in HE in Norway do not have a clear definition of study success, and there is a wide range of notions used to define this phenomenon. The Ministry of Education and Research states that instead of using a clear definition of study success, they deploy a range of indicators, such as completion, time to degree and if students get at job after degree completion. These indicators are calculated using institutional data and the national graduate survey (for rate of employment). The Norwegian Quality Assurance Agency (NOKUT) has a definition that is similar to the Ministry’s last indicator: students achieving study success can be regarded as students, who have received a quality education, who are well prepared for working life and who hold a degree that is regarded as highly attractive by employers. However, NOKUT does not monitor any indicators regularly, but occasionally when accrediting an institution or a specific type of study programme. Both stakeholders, the Ministry of Education and NOKUT, do address dropout as a problem, as a possible indicator of low quality of education. In addition, both stakeholders argue that preventing dropout should be seen as an institutional responsibility, and not only the student’s responsibility.

The Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions (UHR) does not have specific policy initiatives regarding student success, but as other stakeholders, they consider study success as an important issue, and an issue affecting most of their other topics of concern. Document analyses suggests that debates on the funding system for HE and economic consequences of students not completing have been prevalent for quite a while in UHR. UHR does not view dropout as a problem, since there may be many different reasons for dropout, such as wrong choice of programme, the need to take a year off or getting a job. In a system as open as Norwegian HE in terms as access and few strict entrance criteria one has to accept some dropout, as students are rather young and may change their minds during their studies.

The National Union of Students in Norway (NSO) has a similar approach to dropout; they do not view dropout as a problem in itself, as there may be many valid reasons for a student to leave the programme she or he has started before degree completion, but see it as a concern for the HE-sector (NSO 2014). NSO have a more holistic definition of student success focusing on learning outcomes, students’ social situation while studying and the relationship between studies and the labour market. To improve students’ learning environment NSO’s way of working is to promote different political measures. Examples of such political measures are increasing the student grant, lobbying for more student housing and raising the basic funding for institutions, all to improve students’ learning environment. However, NSO does not monitor any indicators and does not operate with a formal, stated definition of what study success is or should be.

Hence, the interviews with stakeholders and institutions confirm that there is no agreed upon definition of study success in Norway. Statistics Norway publishes rates of completion and dropout yearly, information based on a cohort that started in HE 10 years ago. However, this data is quite old: currently the latest published data build on data on the cohort that started in HE in 2002 (SSB 2014). Hence, this data primarily give...
retrospective information, pointing ten years back in time. This means that Norway still does not have any official data on completion rates after the implementation of the Quality Reform (The first official data on completion rates after implementation of the Quality reform will be available in summer 2015), and the levels of dropout might be outdated. The data published by SSB are, however, the data reported to the OECD. Hence, this means that data published by the OECD do not consider any of the changes that have happened in Norwegian HE within the last 10 years, such as the implementation of the Quality reform. Using OECD-data as a point of departure has two main disadvantages: the use of data that are relatively old, and the problem when comparing countries that use different methods in reporting study success.

7.3 Short description of the higher education system

The HE system in Norway is a binary one, with general and specialized universities on the one hand, and university colleges on the other hand. While universities are more research oriented, providing longer professional education (e.g., medicine, law), in addition to liberal arts education, the university colleges provide shorter professional education, such as nursing, social work and teaching (Kehm et al 2010; Kyvik 2009). Besides their clear labour division, the two types of institutions also differ in their mandate. While universities are national institutions recruiting students from all over the country, university colleges are supposed to be regional HEIs that supply their region with labour at professional level, with a stronger focus on combining theory and practice in teaching (Heggen 2014).

The majority of Norwegian HE institutions is public, with a few exceptions. Among all students enrolled in HE institutions in Norway 15 percent were enrolled in private institutions in 2013. Most private institutions are small, and there is one large institution: Norwegian Business School (BI). Public HE institutions in Norway do not charge tuition fees.

Since 2005, the number of universities in Norway has increased from four to eight, due to a shift in status of four institutions - one specialized university institution and three university colleges – into universities. In addition, there have been mergers among institutions resulting in fewer but larger and more diverse institutions. Hence, in recent years, the binary system has been under pressure and the opportunity for institutions to become universities has created academic drift among university colleges (Kyvik, 2009). This has also changed where different degrees can be pursued. Before the change of the Act relating to universities and university colleges in April 2005 (Ministry of Education and Research 2005), exclusively universities were entitled to provide education at the doctoral level.

Now, both, universities and university colleges, can provide education at the bachelor, master and doctoral level, but university colleges have to have their master programmes and doctoral courses accredited by the Norwegian Quality Assurance Agency. Universities are self-accrediting, which is also a change that came with the new Act in 2005. The changes in the Act, however, have led to an increase in master students also at university colleges, and such institutions aspiring to become university develop PhD-programmes. However, the traditional universities still have the highest output of doctoral degrees, and a third of all doctoral candidates are educated at the University of Oslo, the largest university in Norway.
In 2014, Norway had eight public universities (four traditional research universities and four “new universities”), nine specialized universities (of which three are private institutions) and in total 36 university colleges, half of them public institutions. However, the newly elected government (2013) has started a process of restructuring HE. A white paper launched in March 2015 on the HE structure (Ministry of Education and Research 2015) aims at encouraging institutions to cooperate and/or merge. One of the government’s ambitions is decrease the number of HE institutions in Norway even further. Anyway, that white paper reinforces a process that has been going on since the turn of the millennium: in total, there have been 14 voluntary merger initiatives involving 26 public institutions, both universities and university colleges, in different constellations. Kyvik & Stensaker (2013) found that only four of the merger processes were successful and lead to a merger. In all these four cases there were only two institutions merging. Hence, this has led to a reduction of institutions, but not to a total change of the HE system.

Another important trait of the Norwegian HE-system is that the degree of hierarchy between institutions is relatively low. According to Bleiklie (2005: 35), traditional universities in Scandinavian countries are in general relatively “equal in terms of prestige and quality” compared to other countries, e.g., the US or England. The relatively low hierarchy between institutions can be illustrated e.g., by students transferring from university undergraduate education to professional degrees at university colleges (Hovdhaugen 2009). Further, rather the programme that the particular institution is the most important factor when students determine where to study (Wiers-Jenssen 2012). Further, in comparison with other HE-systems, the general prestige of a Norwegian university degree is only moderately higher than a comparable university college degree (Vabø, 2002).

Norway implemented a comprehensive reform of its HE-system, the Quality Reform, in 2003. The Quality Reform introduced a number of changes in HE: the funding system changed from a system based system depending on the number of students accepted, to a performance-based funding system introducing new teaching and evaluation methods; some fields changes were made to the structure of study programmes. A general aim of this reform was to improve graduation rates and study progression, and the performance-based funding system imposed economic consequences on institutions for having low graduation rates and high rates of students leaving the institution (Ministry of Education and Research 2001).

In terms of access to HE, the Norwegian system provides flexible pathways into and within HE. In general, students need an upper secondary school diploma from an academic programme to be eligible to enter HE. It is also possible to gain access through Accreditation of competences (Opheim & Helland 2006). Based on documented competence achieved through work or practical experience in a particular field, institutions grant this alternative form of access to higher education. However, relatively few students use this way of accessing HE (Orr & Hovdhaugen 2014). In 2013, Norway had over 250 000 students and about a third of the 19-24 years olds were attending HE. According to OECD-report Education at Glance, among 25-64 year olds in Norway the educational attainment is 39 percent, which is above the OECD-average and the EU21-average (OECD 2014, Table A1.1a).

On average, full-time students achieve about 45 credits a year, compared to the norm of 60 credits (SSB 2015). According to Statistics Norway, among the starting cohort in
2002, 59 percent had completed at least a lower level degree by 2012 (SSB 2014). However, calculations using survival analyses and currently published data indicate a dropout rate in university undergraduate education of about 30 percent. This rate, however, has not changed significantly with the reform in 2003 (Hovdhaugen 2011). As earlier mentioned transfer between institutions and programmes is quite common, especially among undergraduate students, and this rate decreased after the reform (Hovdhaugen 2011). The retention rates at universities is far lower than that at university colleges, about 40 percent compared to 75 percent of university college students that started in HE continue at the same institution the second year. However, the rate of students leaving HE after the first year of study is similar in both types of institutions by 15 percent (Aamodt & Hovdhaugen 2011). Many of these students will probably return to higher education at a later stage, as it is very common for students in Norway to go in and out of the HE system, and to take breaks along the way (Aamodt 2001).

For undergraduate degrees, completion rates are generally higher in programmes provided by university colleges, than in programmes provided by universities, while for master degrees completion rates are higher at universities than at university colleges. Lower degree completion at master level at university colleges, might be related to the fact that university colleges often provide master programmes as part-time programmes going along with prolongation of the time to degree (Hovdhaugen et al 2010). Programmes with more selective entrance procedures usually have a lower dropout rate than programmes that are less selective. Retention is lower in university undergraduate programmes in humanities, social science or science, compared to undergraduate professional programmes in nursing, teaching, social work (Aamodt & Hovdhaugen 2011, Hovdhaugen 2009). Further, the reasons for dropping out of HE is different from the reasons for transferring to a different institution or degree, but common for all students is that the learning environment is important in preventing students from leaving before degree completion (Hovdhaugen & Aamodt 2009).

In terms of funding, Norway has a universal scheme, providing students financial support independent of their parents’ economic situation (Opheim 2008). The State Educational Loan Fund (Lånekassen) the governmental organisation administering the funding scheme for students have been in place since 1947, but levels and form of support have shifted over time. Currently, Lånekassen provides financial support in terms of loans and grants, and 97 per cent of students get support during at least part of their degree (Fekjær 2000). In general, the State Educational Loan Fund aims at providing equal opportunities to everyone to enrol in higher education, independent of socio-economic background and life-situation, (Opheim, 2008). Initially, students receive financial support as a loan, but depending on successful completion, they get part of their loan transformed to non-repayable grants. The total annual sum a student would normally get in 2014/15 was about 12 000 euro, of which about 4 800 euro could be turned into a grant (Lånekassen 2015). To receive the grant students also have to live away from home and cannot have earnings or assets above a set ceiling. Students who do not fulfil these requirements only receive the student loan\textsuperscript{153}.

\textsuperscript{153} Rules for who is eligible for support and the requirements for getting support can be found online: www.lanekekassen.no
At the institutional level, in 2002, a performance-based funding model replaced the previous system based on planned enrolments (Frølich & Strøm, 2008), consisting a basic grant (60 per cent of the allocation) and two performance-based components, with 25 per cent based on educational output and 15 per cent on research output. While educational output measured the number of completed credits, the number of graduates and the number of international exchange students, research output measured by the number of academic publications. One major difference between the two performance-based components is that research output has a ceiling dependent of the redistribution of funds, while there is no limitation in earnings related to educational output (Frølich, 2006). Thus, to keep the same level of performance-based funding based on research output institutions have to publish on a par with other institutions, while increasing the average number of credits per student improves institutional funding (Frølich, 2006).

In general the number of places in Norwegian HE is sufficient to match the number of applicants. Hence, there is limited pressure on applicants to get access to higher education, with the exception of the most prestigious or popular programmes at the most popular institutions. Even though there are more applicants than study places, in general, in some less popular programmes not all institutions manage to fill all their places and some institutions have had a reduction in applicants over time (Frølich et al. 2009). Historically, places in HE have partly been driven by student demand, as many applicants in a field or programme may lead to an increase of places. For example did the Ministry of Education and Research increase the number of places in teaching and nursing programmes when the demand for higher education increased heavily in the mid 1990's (Aamodt 1995).

In Norway, there are few alternative educational pathways to HE. Vocational training is mainly provided at the upper secondary level, including apprenticeship leading to work. Students in upper secondary education choose/decide, either to enroll in an education that leads to apprenticeship or to enroll in an academic upper secondary education including the right to enter HE. There are vocational colleges that provide professional training, mainly through shorter courses, but this is not seen as comparable or an alternative to HE. These forms of schooling is to a very low degree an alternative to those that leave higher education prior to degree compeletion.

### 7.4 Description of national and institutional policies

Policies to improve study success and decrease dropout rates at the national level are more oriented towards funding and organization than towards information and student support. At the institutional level, the majority of policies are addressing organization of study programmes, information and student support.

To direct HEIs and to monitor study success and dropout at individual institutions, the Ministry of Education and Research hosts the annual meetings with each institution, in addition to using various financial means incentivize institutions to work with study success and dropout. Similarly, the National Union of Students (NSO) are mainly oriented towards funding, both funding for students and for institutions. They argue that students have to take up part-time work to cover living expenses rather than spending all their time studying, and therefore, they suggest increased student financial support and providing more student housing to improve study success. Institutions on the other hand, concentrate their work on different methods of organizing education and student support as means to increase study success.
An interesting finding is that our informants - including students and staff at the institutions, staff at The Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions (UHR) and the National Union of Students (NSO) - perceive higher education learning outcomes (HELOs) as a way to define study success and at the same time as a tool to increase study success. Since, the national implementation of HELOs was highly criticized (REF) this finding is somehow surprising.

Several of our informants at the institutions mention that they did not see the value of HELOs when introduced. However, when applying it in practice, they realized that this was a good way to restructure or redefine the study program, making both students and staff aware of what student should know and be able to do after finishing the program. The staff’s impression of HELOs as important for the quality of education is also confirmed in a study by Caspersen and Frølich (2014).

The Ministry of Education and Research on the other hand, which was the authority implementing HELOs as a part of the National Qualifications Framework in 2009 to 2011, did not mention HELOs during the interview. When directly asked about their perception of the importance of HELO for study success, our informants at the Ministry replied that they did not consider HELOs as a definition of study success, nor was it important as a tool to increase study success. From their perspective, HELOs cannot be measured in an appropriate way, and in addition to this are there variations in how HELOs were implemented across HE institutions.

7.4.1 Funding

There are several national policies related to funding, both aimed at students as well as performance based funding for institutions, which is partly depending on students completing their credits. This implies that institutions are not getting full funding for teaching students that do not pass the exam.

As mentioned earlier do Norway have a universal financial support scheme, intended to cover student living expenses, as there are no tuition fees in public higher education. Students can receive support for up to eight years of HE. In general, student support is given for a maximum of 10 months per year (not covering the summer semester break of two month). Support is given as a loan, but up to 40 per cent of the loan can be converted into a grant when students complete their exams, which means that the grant is progression dependent. The introduction of progression dependent grants in 2002 aimed at increasing student study progression, and get students to complete faster, but there is little visible evidence of such an effect (Opheim 2008).

Funding for institutions is partly performance-based, contingent on research output and educational output, but as described earlier there is a ceiling to the funding based on research output, while no limitations to how much institutions can get based on educational output (mainly completed credits). The idea behind the performance-based funding for educational output is that it shall stimulate institutions to get students though HE quicker, but the main effect it has had is creativitiy in creating new courses, and accepting more students that the norm given from the Ministry of Education and Research.

Funding arrangements to monitor study success and dropout was important for the Ministry of Education and Research. They mention both monitoring by the means of funding arrangement of the HEIs and their offers of admission to the institutions to alter
study success. NSO also stressed the importance of funding. However, they stressed/highlighted how increased living expenses made it more difficult for the students to use sufficient time on studying, since they had to take part-time job to cover the costs. Further increased living expenses would increase this problem. According to NSO, increased grants and student accommodation would solve this problem. NSO do not have much confidence in individual incentives to improve the quality of the education. NSO also mention that improving the HEIs financial situations, especially increasing the basic grant, was important to increase education quality. If less affected by result funding, HEIs, could make more strategic priorities on education quality. The NSO feared that the increasing number of students could lead to a decrease in the quality of education, since the HEIs today did not have sufficient capacity for increased enrolment. They were also worried whether HEIs were prepared enough to receive a more heterogeneous group of students, which will need different ways of teaching and more teaching personnel.

Both institutions were less concerned with funding in general. However, they mention the importance of setting aside funds to improve buildings and for construction of new teaching facilities to improve student success. Hence, both institutions mentioned the need for an upgrade of teaching facilities as an important factor in creating a physical environment that may promote study success. Geographic distance between two of the campuses at Hedmark University College was mentioned as one factor for the high level of dropout from a specific programme. Another funding related issue mention by the NTNU, was the new arrangement of letting the institutions study programmes apply for funding to improve education quality and new ways of teaching as important to improve student success.

7.4.2 Information and student support
In 2011, the Ministry instructed HEIs to establish formalised cooperation with employers in the public and private sector (Råd for samarbeid med arbeidslivet, RSA), directed by a board, to improve cooperation and relations between HEIs and the labour market. However, the national Audit Office states in 2013 that only 20 percent of the institutions had implemented such a board. The Ministry of Education did not mention RSA in the interview. Both Hedmark University College and NTNU, however have established such boards. Our informants judged them as useful, making the study programme more relevant for work life.

Representatives from UHR, both institutions and NSO all mention improved information to applicants on the different study programmes as important to improve student success and decrease dropout. The point is that improved information might both prevent wrong choices and increase the student's as a factor for study success. The Ministry was also interested in how to monitor student choices, especially since Statistics Norway has shown that Norway will lack health workers and teachers in the coming years. Quality of incoming students was also considered as an important factor for study success, mentioned by UHR, The Ministry and the institutions. The Ministry has been considering increasing the requirements in mathematics needed to be eligible to enter teacher education. Both, the principal and the students at Hedmark University College were sceptical towards rising the required grade in mathematics, since they perceived motivation to become a teacher as much more important for study success. According to Hedmark University College a lack of academic knowledge at the entrance to studies
could be met by special introductory and preparatory courses, provided to students that had the right motivation. Hedmark University College already offered such extra courses in maths to improve the student’s skills.

Hedmark University College experiences challenges in recruiting enough students, and is therefore trying to recruit more motivated and qualified students into their programs. In general, NTNU does not experience the same challenges, only in a few of their study programs. In these engineering programs with the least qualified students, NTNU also has experienced high dropout numbers. This experience has resulted in a holistic effort to strengthen the social and academic integration into the program, accompanied with more effort to strengthen education quality at this certain programme to decrease the drop out numbers. NTNU has not yet published any statistics to show an improvement, but our informants express they are experiencing positive results.

Informants from all institutions and stakeholders, UHR, NSO, the HE institutions as well as NOKUT, mention that it is crucial for students to feel integrated, both socially and academic, when starting at the institution. Hence, integration may be an important factor working to improve study success and decrease dropout.

The representatives of NOKUT mention that the provision of a smooth transition from secondary school to higher education is a responsibility of the institutions themselves. Thus, NOKUT is trying to find out how to design measures leading HEIs to take more responsibility for this. Representatives of NTNU also mention that NTNU as an institution has been putting more attention on the introductory-week, i.e., the first week for the new students, to ensure both social and academic integration, and at the same time to decrease the focus on alcohol within social activities during this week. Informants from Hedmark University College mention that their responsibility for the individual student starts from the time of her or his application at Hedmark University College, and that the institution had already initiated a regular contact with the new student though a special Facebook-group before she or he actually started to study.

Both representatives of the institutions and students interviewed emphasize the importance of a good or positive social environment on campus, specifically as important for study motivation. The institutions tried to improve the social environment through social happenings and gatherings, as well as through buildings and teaching facilities to enable cooperation between students. Hence, campus, and buildings on campus, can be design in ways that promote cooperation and assists in the creation of a positive social environment, or that work against that. For one of the programmes at NTNU, a programme that had been facing high dropout rates, the institution has introduced a special day to gather all the students in the programme during a whole day to take classes together. The underlying aim was both, to reorganise the study programme into a more compressive program, and to improve the social environment among the students. Students, at both NTNU and Hedmark University College, mention the importance of friends, close connection to the academic staff, and a positive social environment as essential for study success. Especially the students of Hedmark University College point to the close relations among students and the academic staff as a positive aspect of the institution and the student experience. According to the students, many members of the academic staff knew the name of the students. According to representatives of NTNU, the branding of the city of Trondheim as the location for NTNU was important besides the creation of a positive social environment at the university campus.
Both HEIs practice individual follow-ups of students at risk of dropping out, while students are still at the institution. Changes in the programme structure, coupled with technical changes in the student register that was introduced about 10 years, makes it possible to monitor student progression and identify students at risk (Hovdhaugen et al 2013). These systems are used at institutions to seek out and offer support to students at risk of dropout. Especially informants from Hedmark University College, with a relatively modest pool of applicants, are concerned about retaining students. However, also informants of NTNU report of a systematic approach of follow-up routines for students at risk.

NTNU offers a broad set of counselling services, both directed at all students and at certain groups of students. As most other institutions in Norway, it monitors student progress during the first semesters. In addition to giving formal notice to students who are not meeting the standards set that they may lose their place in the degree programme, NTNU also uses the information to offer dedicated support to students who are making insufficient progress in their studies. Through this programme it offers counselling and other forms of assistance to students to help them master their studies. Based on the progress monitoring, students may be invited for an appointment with a study counsellor, who helps students to better understand their situation and who may refer them to other offices and professionals in the university, based on the problems experienced. Not all students who are offered help will accept it, but a reasonable share do so. Thanks to this system, many students who encountered problems in the early phases of their studies have received help.

In one of the study programmes, Hedmark University College had introduced a special “sunglass”-ceremony for bachelor students that had finished their thesis within estimated time to degree. The idea was that these students’ future was so bright that they would need sunglasses, and they all therefore received a pair of oversized sunglasses. This ceremony was partly just a stunt to make tribute to those that did their degree within estimated time, but it also made the students feel special. Hence, Hedmark University College experienced that more student finished within estimated time to degree after they introduced the ceremony.

### 7.4.3 Organisation of higher education

One of the main findings from our interviews is the importance of HELOs, in defining student success, to reorganise study programmes, and that it can contribute to improving higher education, which in turn may enhance student success. As previously mentioned, at the institutions, students, the academic and administrative staff at all levels emphasize the importance of HELO descriptions, as a way to create awareness on the goals of a course or programme, both for students and for academic staff teaching it. However, neither the Ministry nor NOKUT mention the importance of HELOs as a factor in creating a framework that promotes study success. This is surprising as the Ministry initiated the introduction of HELOs in 2009 (among other things) as a tool to improve student information about study programs, and to help them make more conscious choices. However, the Ministry argue that HELOs are not possible to monitor, and they are therefore no use to the Ministry in their attempts to monitor study success.

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154 “The Future’s So Bright, I Gotta Wear Shades” – a 1986 song by the group Timbuk3.
The implementation of HELOs varies between the HEIs, however both institutions, NTNU and Hedmark University College, have actively implemented HELOs at two levels, namely at central administration level and programme level. Consistent for both HEIs is that implementation of HELO did transform the approach to study quality. HELOs has moved to the very centre of assessing most aspects of quality and study success. Of particular importance is the change from a teacher-oriented approach to a student-centred approach. As such, the implementation of HELOs was undertaken as an academic approach to redefine curricula in a new context at both HEIs. During the interviews, the academic staff expressed very positive sentiments, arguing that HELOs had helped them to improve the programmes, by focusing on learning outcome the students are informed about what they should know when they complete the course/programme. The leadership at both institutions seem to be very involved in the processes of improving the quality of education. The leaders of the Hedmark University Colleges have had a continuous dialogue/ongoing dialogue with representatives of the organization at different levels during the last 7 years, with focus on particular aspects of study success. These discussions have focused on the bachelor degree, the quality of studies and the quality of education respectively. The leadership of NTNU also have had a regular dialogue, however, not a dialogue with such designated themes.

Further, the Ministry of Education was concerned about the organisation of HE. A white paper launched in spring 2015 by the Ministry, suggests a new structure and organisation of HEs to strengthen academic quality in general, and the academic groups/research groups in HEIs in particular with the goal to improve education and research quality. Both informants of the Ministry and of NOKUT stated that structures of the HEIs were important to improve study success and dropout. The Ministry also used their annual meetings with the institutions to monitor dropout as dropout rates were a central part of the discussion at these meetings.

Our representatives of UHR, the institutions and the NSO all mention a stronger focus on the quality of education. They all regard research-based education, closer contact between students and teachers, and different teaching methods as important for improving student’s success. According to UHR, too much focus on progression and dropout rates might reduce the focus on education quality. The students were sceptical towards the way their knowledge was assessed by exams. Exams were not necessary a good way of evaluating their knowledge. The Ministry on the other hand, was worried about differences in use of the grading scale between the institutions. NOKUT and the institutions mention the importance of comprehensive study programs as crucial for study success. Both HEIs have been engaged in restructuring existing study programs into more comprehensive programs.

Both informants of the institutions and the NSO mention the tension of juggling of time for research and teaching for academic staff as a potential challenge for the quality of education. Members of the academic staff experienced that they were primarily assessed by their research results, and not by their work spent on teaching. Hence, both the leadership and the students experienced that the academic staff spent most of their time on research, and put too little effort on teaching. NTNU was very aware of this challenge and had therefore started a process of creating new regulations and rules for recruitment and selection of academic staff, as well as for admission of students. These new

regulations will put a stronger focus on the education of students, to increase the effort and engagement of the academic staff in teaching. NSO also mentioned improved financial situation for the HEIs as a possible answer to this problem.

Both the Ministry, UHR and NSO stressed that, additionally, the students had to spend sufficient time on their studies. There is no straight-forward definition of what is sufficient time, but recent measures of how much time students’ spend on studies indicate that Norwegian students spend less time studying than their peers in other European countries (Einarsen 2014). As mentioned previously, NSO regarded the financial situation for students as the main explanation to why they did not study longer hours. Hence, their political argument is that students have to work to support themselves, while research indicate that most students work because they wish to, not because they are forced to (Hovdhaugen 2014).

Though they do not directly disagree with NSO on the importance of students’ financial situation, UHR further argued that students have to be made more aware of what is expected of them in a study programme, how much effort a study actually take. The Ministry further raised the problem that many students spend less than 30 hours on their studies, while at the same time many receive relative good grades. However, representatives of the Ministry did not mention improved financial situation for the student as an answer for this problem.

Equal right to higher education is one of the fundamental values of the Norwegian higher education system. In consequence, Norway has a high enrolment rate in HE. All three stakeholders, the Ministry, NSO and UHR pointed out that a relatively open access to higher education results in a very heterogeneous student population, with very different needs and motivations. It was further argued that open access to higher education going along with a heterogeneous student population m result in higher dropout rates and lower degree of study success than if just the best students had been accepted. However, no one expressed that restricted access to higher education is a viable alternative.

### 7.5 Reflection of policy mix

As described in the previous sections, in Norway, there is relatively high attention on study success: political authorities and the higher education sector both have placed study success high on the policy agenda. Further, Norway has launched a number of initiatives to promote study success including financial incentives, student support initiatives, and, more recently, organizational measures (HELOs in particular). On the other hand, there have been fewer initiatives addressing improved information to students, to guide their choices.

In general, the funding scheme is addressing both institutions and students, providing institutions with incentives for students to succeed on their way through the study system. Here, one should note, that the funding for the number of credit points obtained by students is of particular importance, in explaining the capacity of the system to handle the increasing number of students, and the development of new courses and study programs. However, we argue that rewarding institutions for credit points taken by students might not be the same as providing an incentive for getting students through the system. Currently, institutions receive no rewards for graduated students, although the latest white paper suggests the introduction of such an incentive in the reformed funding system.
However, the current funding system might also be regarded as one of the drivers behind the academic drift in the system. Because the incentive to reward institutions for the number of credit points taken is un-restricted, for many institutions this has been a very important way to fund academic expansion – both in scope and in depth. At university colleges, a number of new study programs have been launched, especially at master and PhD level. At the same time, as described above, so far relatively few students have graduated from these programs. Also regarding scope, the credit point funding has represented an incentive for institutions to develop attractive new courses that not always lead to a particular degree.

One could argue that the opportunity for university colleges to become universities in the early 2000s represented a form of de-regulation of state steering of higher education. In this way, the responsibility for system diversity was transferred from the governmental level to the individual institutions. Combined with the tradition that student’s own choice should be an important factor to determine the dimensioning of the system, this has led to a somewhat chaotic expansion of study programs and study options throughout the country. The expansion of the system in student numbers combined with a funding system that reward academic expansion, and a de-regulated higher education sector, can be one example of policies that are not aligned to secure study success. While national funding policies fuelled the expansion of the system, no national policies existed that could regulate the institutional behaviour with respect to the way this expansion took place in the number and type of study programs offered. Although the national quality assurance agency, NOKUT, has catered for obtaining minimum standards through the existing accreditation system, it has not been mandated to address issues related to what sort of program offers that has appeared.

One might raise concerns that the expansion in the number of courses established and the number of new study programs offered, make the higher education landscape less transparent and harder to navigate. Further, this do not match the attempts to provide students with information on how make an “informed choice” about what to study. While Norway have databases providing key statistics and key indicators regarding study programs (student/staff ratios, dropout statistics, etc.), these database are not very accessible to the general public, including potential students.

Though, during the last couple of years Norway there have been several attempts to stimulate better alignment of policies in the area of study success. One such initiative is a new national student survey asking students at bachelor and master level about their experiences in the program enrolled, to provide more easily accessible information to prospective students. Partially based on this survey, the recent white paper suggests the development of a separate public “quality portal” to provide students with good and updated information on study programs, to assist students in their choice of education.

As indicated, the recent white paper further suggests a new incentive for institutions rewarding them for graduated students. Combined with the existing incentive for credit points taken, the funding scheme should be better equipped to both address flexibility and efficiency. If these measures were introduced, Norway could then be characterized by a high variety of policies targeting study success.

Hence, study success policies in Norway have largely been driven by various forms of financial incentives, coupled with changes in how higher education is organised. Until
recently there have been less focus on information to students at the governmental level, while institutions to a greater extent have been focusing on providing students with accurate and good information on their programmes. Institutions argue that it is in their best interest to provide correct information about programmes, as incorrect information may have implications for retention. Further, institutions have to a great extent focused on developing different forms of support systems for students, both to address academic challenges and as a social measure. They also actively use the student register to monitor students and identify students at risk, and these measures have been in place for quite a while (Hovdhaugen et al 2013).

The existing policy mix addressing study success might have led to some unintended effects. In the white paper that led to the Quality Reform in the early 2000s, one of the key objectives was that “the student should succeed”. Also at that time, dropout of study programs and long time to degree were considered as one of the key areas of the reform. More than a decade later, key indicators still show quite high dropout rates, and time to degree is still an issue in the Norwegian higher education system.

As discussed in the previous section, one could identify some flaws in the previous and current policy mix. The funding scheme at the national level did not match well with the organization of higher education, and at the same time, there was a lack of relevant and detailed information to students. The current reform initiative of 2015 appears to address these shortcomings, and provide a more balanced policy mix for the future.

A question that remains is, whether these factors alone can explain the lack of intended outcomes. As suggested with respect to how HELOs seems to change attitudes, cultures and behavior in the two institutions investigated in the current study, the issue of organization – and especially at program level – have not been particularly high on the agenda within the higher education institutions. This may have resulted in the creation of study programs where most attention might has been given to the establishment of “attractive” courses rather than integrated and well-designed study programs. The recent interest in HELOs at institutional level can be seen as a much needed development to drive further improvement in this area.

In a critical discussion on study success in Norway, one might note that the general economic situation and a very well-functioning labour market during the last decade may have reduced the effect of policy initiatives on study success. First, in some academic areas private sector firms have been recruiting students into the job-market before formal completion of their studies. Second, a well-functioning labour market may also lead to an understanding that there is no urgency in completing a higher education degree, as there seems to be a surplus of jobs available. Third, a well-functioning labour market may, especially relating to the relatively high living costs for Norwegian students, force part of the student population into part-time jobs delaying their completion and creating more messy paths through the higher education system.

However, the disorderly study patterns that are common in Norwegian HE (Aamodt 2001) can be seen as a trait of the higher education system and may be hard to change with policy. These patterns generally prolongs time to degree, but they do not seem to increase dropout. Students moving around in the HE-system is rather an expression of the relative low cost of changing one’s mind, coupled with the search for the ideal HE for that individual. The upside of this is that students do not leave HE because they made a bad choice of programme (Thomas & Hovdhaugen 2014), but the downside is the cost of spending more time than necessary in HE. This cost can be attributed to both the student
and the government. Few of the policy initiatives taken to address completion on time have been successful, as neither the institutional performance-based funding for education output nor the progression dependent grant have had significant impact on time to degree (see Aamodt & Hovdhaugen 2011, Opheim 2008). However, prior to the Quality reform, during a short period in the 1990’s there was a policy that gave students who completed on time a financial incentive, about 2100€ (equal to 34% of an annual student loan) was deducted from their loan after they complete on time. This policy was only in effect from 1990 until 1995, and was debated throughout the time it existed. However, analyses comparing students that were under this regime to students that could not get the financial incentive indicate that it did have an effect, raising completion by 3.8 percentage points per year (Gunnes, Kirkebøen & Rønning 2012). However, the introduction of this type of financial incentive have not been discussed again.

7.6 Annex

7.6.1 List of interviewees

Interviews with stakeholders conducted in the project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder</th>
<th>Number of interviewees</th>
<th>Date of interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Education and Science</td>
<td>3 people</td>
<td>December 16th, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norwegian Quality Assurance Agency (NOKUT)</td>
<td>2 people</td>
<td>February 19th, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions (UHR)</td>
<td>2 people</td>
<td>January 7th, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Union of Students in Norway (NSO)</td>
<td>4 people</td>
<td>December 18th, 2014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interviews with institutions conducted in the project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Number of interviewees</th>
<th>Date of interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hedmark University College</td>
<td>Rectorate/leadership</td>
<td>3 people</td>
<td>December 4th, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hedmark University College</td>
<td>Head of study programmes at the following Faculties:</td>
<td>8 people</td>
<td>December 4th, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hedmark University College</td>
<td>- Faculty of Education and Natural Science</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hedmark University College</td>
<td>- Faculty of Public Health</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hedmark University College</td>
<td>- Faculty of Business Administration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NTNU</td>
<td>Rectorate/leadership</td>
<td>6 people</td>
<td>December 11th, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NTNU</td>
<td>Faculty of Humanities, heads of</td>
<td>3 people</td>
<td>December 11th, 2014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
various study programmes

| Faculty of Social Science and Technology Management, heads of various study programmes | 2 people | December 11th, 2014 |
| Faculty of Information Technology, Mathematics and Electrical Engineering, head of various study programmes | 3 people | December 11th, 2014 |
| Students from study programmes at the three Faculties mentioned above | 6 people | December 11th, 2014 |

### 7.6.2 References


### 7.6.3 Electronic resources (only available online):

Lånekassen (2015): *Støtte til høyere utdanning*. [Student support]
http://www.lanekassen.no/nb-NO/Stipend-og-Ian/Hoyere-utdanning/Hvor-mye-kan-du-fa/


https://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dokumenter/tilstandsrapport-uh-2014/id758598/

Ministry of Education and Research (2005): *Universitets- og høgskoleloven* [Act relating to universities and university colleges]
https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/upload/kd/vedlegg/uh/uhloven_engelsk.pdf

NSO (2014): *Frafall i høyere utdanning*. Politisk dokument. [Dropout in HE]
http://student.no/content/uploads/2014/05/Poltisk-dokument-om-frafall-i-h%C3%B8yre-utdanning-2014.pdf


http://www.ssb.no/en/utdanning/artikler-og-publikasjoner/_attachment/211355?_ts=14a393592e0
8 Poland

Dominic Antonowicz (Nicolaus Copernicus University Torun), Marek Kwiek (Poznan University), Renze Kolster (CHEPS)

8.1 Introduction

The selection of interviewees aimed to cover a wide range of viewpoints on student dropout and retention rates. The list of interviewees includes representatives of major political stakeholders in Polish higher education (see Annex). With regard to the selection of interviewees, it needs to be underlined that a number of individuals refused to participate in the research as they find the problem of student retention artificial and insignificant for higher education policy in Poland. The others also found study success at as least unusual (in the Polish context) but agreed to share their views on the subject. Finally, some of the policy stakeholder representatives are also active academics (or students in the case the Students’ Parliament); they often illustrate their views by alluding to the experience they acquired in their academic institutions.

For the purpose of this analysis, two higher education institutions were selected: Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń (NCU) and The School of Humanities and Journalism in Poznań (SHJ). Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń is a well-established Polish public university with around 30,000 students studying a wide range (109) of programmes at the Bachelor, Master and PhD levels. It is a research intense HEI that—in regards to funding—relied heavily on full-time students who do not pay tuition fees. The School of Humanities and Journalism in Poznań is a private, teaching-oriented higher education institution established in 1996. Since then, it has enjoyed a stable position in the regional higher education market, offering only fee-based programs. It has approximately 6,000 students and seven programs (of which two at Master level).

The selection was purposive, as the institutions represent two fundamentally different sectors of higher education, namely public and private, which develop very distinctive features in regards to mission, governance and funding. The selection of the two HEIs aims to illustrate (a) various understandings of the analysed problem; (b) attitudes and policy measures that these two HE institutions have developed to address student retention; and (c) further, practices that prevent students from dropping out will be evaluated. Both of the selected HEIs are rather representative of their types.

8.2 Definition of study success

At the policy level, the issue of student retention is not seen a problem for public policy in higher education. Whilst aware that not all students manage to complete their studies, the experts interviewed for this report did not appear very concerned about the matter. On the contrary, they identified a bigger problem in the insufficient (or lack) of selectivity during education in higher education institutions

“To complete any program at a tertiary level is not a problem at all. The challenge arrives when one wants to accomplish education that opens her/him opportunities in the labour market.”

“Still more than 50% of young people decide not to continue education at a tertiary level; therefore, the selection takes place much earlier and it takes
the form of auto-selection.” (Senior Officer, Ministry of Science and Higher Education)

In their view, higher education institutions do not reject students who clearly fail to meet meritocratic criteria, although they should do so. This lack of selectivity undermines the meritocratic foundation of higher education.

The policy papers (KRASP, 2009; Ernst&Young & IBnGR, 2009) do not recognise study success as a social or political problem. The prevailing opinion is that the system fails to perform its selective role. In other words, policy stakeholders do not see the lack of selectivity as a major political problem, nor do they see it as a problem that needs to be addressed on the policy level. Their views on the subject indicate that Polish higher education is unselective, which leads to lowering quality of education.

A commonly shared belief among the experts and policy stakeholders is that if the social phenomenon of dropout can be seen as a problem, it would be only because it destabilises the normal functioning of higher education institutions. If “dropout” were a problem needing attention at the policy level, the issue would rather be that of declining demand for education services.

"Dropout is a problem for us only because it reduces the number of our students (...). It causes enormous problems with planning, managing all these programs.” (Administrator, Nicolaus Copernicus University)

One must bear in mind that Polish higher education, after fifteen years of system expansion, has entered a period of contraction due to a demographic low. As the data shows (Antonowicz & Gorlewski 2011), from 2007 until 2025 the number of secondary school leavers will be declining, which will heavily affect higher education. The number of students will drop by at least 30%. First and foremost, this demographic low will affect the private sector, which relies heavily on students’ tuition fees. Having fewer students translates into shrinking revenues. However, a number of public HEIs will be affected too. During the system expansion from 1990 to 2005, the public higher education sector invested in modernisation of its infrastructure and also employed new academic staff to absorb the growing demand for higher learning. The demographic decline puts them in a difficult financial situation and most universities are struggling to balance their books.

In sum, it must be emphasised that turning students away based on selection criteria raises some concern in higher education policy only to the extent that it affects higher education institutions (funding) and academics (who need students to teach).

This illustrates an approach to higher education that still locates academics at the centre and gives their interests top priority. This viewpoint emerges clearly from the interviews and in public discourse around higher education in Poland.

8.3 Short description of higher education system

In Poland, higher education has a long tradition. The university in Cracow opened in 1364. However, since the end of communism in 1989, the country has undergone rapid changes in the HE-system. Since 1990, there has been an unprecedented increase in the number of private institutions; at the same time, public institutions have started to charge tuition fees. In addition, changes in the HE-system include “severe fiscal constraints limiting further tax-based growth of higher education, and the gradual
denigration of the research mission of universities” caused by underfunding of university research and too strong focus on teaching (Kwiek 2012:127).

In Poland there are 310 private universities and 132 state schools of higher learning. Among the 132 state HE-institutions, there are 17 universities, 18 polytechnics, 5 business schools, 13 medical universities, 19 academies for art, drama and music and 36 universities of applied science (http://www.daad.pl/de/09198/index.html).

As in other Central European countries (and contrary to other European countries with a state-subsidized ‘government-dependent private sector’), in Poland there is a clear divide between public and private HE-institutions. This means that private HEIs are funded and owned by private individuals, associations or companies. Public and private HEIs differ clearly in their management and governance models. Public providers are still running traditional collegial models, while private ones are characterized by managerial, business-like models (Kwiek 2012:131). However, in terms of privatization, two types can be distinguished, namely (a) external privatization, i.e., the new boom of privately run institutions, and (b) internal privatization, i.e., fee-paying courses provided in the free public sector (Kwiek 2012:133).

From 1997 until 2010 the number of private HEIs has more than doubled, from 146 to 328 (Kwiek 2012: 135). In 2010, 31.5% of students were enrolled in the private sector (Kwiek 2012: 127).

Between 1990 and 2005, Polish higher education underwent a massive expansion in which the number of students increased by five times, from 380,000 to almost 2,000,000 (GUS 2012, 2013).

The system transformed from serving an élite to serving a mass population. Therefore, during the 1990-2005 system expansion, the issue of student retention did not arise and the only concern was related to the lack of selectivity. In the 1990s, the number of students rose sharply, so issues such as “study success” or “retention of students” played a very marginal role at both the policy and the institutional level. The question of dropout was absent. Further, between 1990 and 2005 the government did not play a key role in higher education policy. A policy stakeholder mentioned:

"The education system is not developing in any direction; rather, it is drifting. And there are always new unexpected and unplanned consequences in the early days of a transformation.” (Expert, The Committee of Scientific Policy)

"I have had the impression, which has been fully proved during my work in the Committee of Scientific Policy (advisory body), that the Polish reforms are very much about technicalities, a number of little bureaucratic things. Higher education policy lacks ideas and strategic thinking.” (Expert, The Committee of Scientific Policy)
However, due to demographical change, the number of students in HEIs is expected to fall to around 1.2-1.3 million in 2022 (Kwiek 2012: 140).

The median student age is 22, and 78% of the student population is 24 years old or younger. On average 57% of students are female, and the male-female ratio is similar at Bachelor and Master level (58% of bachelor students and 56% percent of master students are female) (Eurostudent, Poland country report, 2011). According to Orr, Gwosc and Netz (2011) the share of Polish HE students who have at least one parent with higher education is, at 35%, low, and only 2 percent, have parents with only compulsory education.

There is no central administration for admissions. Each institution handles admission separately. Entry is open to all based on secondary school diplomas and the number of points in a given set of subjects depending on an institution and programme. There are no alternative paths into HE – only formal diploma from upper secondary education grants admission. Selection based on diplomas and points is applied in all institutions. Their selectivity depends on the number of points required (i.e. the more selective a given study programme is, the more points are needed). Moreover, each programme has its own selection and there are no entry criteria nor selection at an institutional level. The existence of the private sector is a powerful access-increasing mechanism as it is open, accessible, and affordable.

It must be mentioned that entrance selection is, in fact, a façade as a vast majority of programmes at both public and private HEIs have low or no admission criteria, and accept all applications. The only exceptions are medical programmes because the number of medical schools is very limited and the number of candidates (for the first year) is defined centrally by the Ministry of Health. In general, the low criteria for admission show the determination of HEIs to enrol as many students as possible.
77.5% of the revenues of public higher education are from teaching while 15% from research. Therefore, the former is particularly significant for university budgets. In the private sector the differences between education and research revenues is even more pronounced (GUS 2014).

The policy experts interviewed argued that some form of selection is required in Polish higher education. However, LK from the Polish Accreditation Committee (PKA) demonstrated a distinctive view on the subject, emphasising that the system should not be selective, should recognise various types of students, and be flexible enough to provide a wide selection of educational paths to satisfy the various needs of a diverse student population. The present system of higher education in Poland is bureaucratic and inflexible as it does not provide students with a wide range of opportunities but rather puts students in a sort of “take it or leave it” situation. Instead, the expert stressed that

"(...) the most important is to provide an opportunity for lifelong learning and therefore the system should not be selective and should offer everyone the chance for an educational opportunity.” (Expert, The Polish Accreditation Committee)

Those who identified the lack of selection as a problem for higher education policy tended to suggest that the lower level education fails to prepare candidates who are both intellectually and academically suited for higher learning. The interviews show that there are three major factors in study success: (a) cultural capital that one brings from the family home. It largely affects future choices, including educational paths; (b) selection of a secondary school that provides opportunities for intellectual development; (c) higher education institutions (or academics, to be precise) that inspire and support students.

Therefore, there is a widespread opinion that in fact little can be done on a policy level.

"There is no institution on the national level that could be responsible for student retention. The impact of national legislation is low in regards to successful study; it only provides a framework. In fact, higher education consists of autonomous higher education institutions that should take responsibility for it.” (Senior Policymaker, The Ministry of Science and Higher Education)

The governmental policy aims at the opposite direction and wants HEIs (in particular universities) to be more selective. It focuses on re-structuring mass higher education and creating élite institutions. There are mixed feelings about the size of the expansion and, as has been mentioned, the experts generally would rather see a small number of students in the system using resources that are already in the system to prevent student dropout. However, the experts and the representatives of policy stakeholders tend to agree on one point, i.e. that the government should provide additional financial support for those students who decide to study unpopular but economically important programs. The government had initiated such a programme (Kierunki Zamawiane 2008–2013) using the EU structural funds but it subsequently suspended it156.

It is commonly argued that students who, in the present Polish higher education system, fail to fulfil basic academic requirements have made the wrong decision to continue education at the tertiary level. From the policy level, HEIs are seen as neither sufficiently

156 The reason for stopping this programme are not clear
demanding nor selective. However, turning students away and becoming more selective would be welcomed by policy stakeholders.

“For the system of higher education, it is good that students drop out, since the role of higher education institutions is not to support or protect students from unemployment. It is a place to obtain qualifications.”

The prevailing opinion is that the system fails to perform its selective role. In other words, policy stakeholders do not see lack of selectivity as a major political problem, nor do they see it as a problem that needs to be addressed on the policy level. Their views on the subject indicate that Polish higher education is unselective, which leads to lowering quality of education.

8.4 Description of national and institutional policies

8.4.1 National policies

Poland has some policies directly related to enhancing study success: there are financial incentives for students to complete, but completion or dropout financially inconsequential for institutions (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2014:34-35). In addition, there are some measures related to information and support but these are mainly directed at graduates.

Polish policymakers see the highest potential for change in the study programme/labour market needs mismatch in graduate surveys. They are expected to lead to lower students' frustrations, more informed students' choice of study areas and hence to lower dropout rates (see table).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy area</th>
<th>Name of policy</th>
<th>Description of policy</th>
<th>(Expected) effects of policy</th>
<th>Policy monitored?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>Introduction of state-funded &quot;contracted studies&quot; in the study areas that have too few students (engineering, chemistry, computing, mathematics etc.)</td>
<td>Stipend to students enrolled in specific programmes (selected number of institutions): 50% of top performing students each year receive 1000 PLN (approx. 250 EUR) in stipend per month. Study areas may vary from year to year but STEM areas are always included</td>
<td>Recruit more student in selected areas (where there is a need), and lower dropout rates. Stipends substantially increase the willingness to study, and especially to finish studies in time.</td>
<td>No research evidence, but the number of graduates in the areas selected have increased – may be an indication of success.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased tuition fee for studies beyond 11 semesters in the second degree at</td>
<td>From Oct. 1, 2013 students who prolong studies beyond 11</td>
<td>Students are to complete quicker and enter the labour market</td>
<td>Unclear what consequence fees will bring about related to dropout</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information and support for students</td>
<td>Career offices</td>
<td>Graduate surveys</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public institutions</td>
<td>Semesters (BA+MA+1 extra semester), or take up a second study programme have to pay tuition fee also at public institutions (their first BA/MA in the public sector is free of charge) This is regulated in law (Revised Law on Higher Education, March 18, 2011)</td>
<td>Rates and the length of studies. But, in 2014 the practice of fees charged for prolonged studies have been said to be not compatible with the Polish constitution according to the Constitution Tribunal, and will therefore probably be abandoned.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information and support for students</td>
<td>Career offices</td>
<td>Graduate surveys</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New HE regulations require the strengthening of career office in every institution, including their involvement in institutional-wide graduate surveys.</td>
<td>Better fit between areas of studies and labour market positions, leading to better knowledge of labour market options among students, and this increases motivation to study (and dropout out rates).</td>
<td>Still in progress, at the moment career offices are increasingly monitored by institutions themselves.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information and support for students</td>
<td>Career offices</td>
<td>Graduate surveys</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New HE regulations require each institution to start graduate surveys, either at faculty levels or at an individual level. No national survey is expected although, in the future, institutional-level surveys are expected to be integrated.</td>
<td>Better fit between the choice of studies and labour market needs, leading to lower frustration and higher motivation of students (and hence lower dropout rates).</td>
<td>Still in progress, at the moment graduate surveys are closely monitored by institutions themselves.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Institutional policies

Institutions report that the highest dropout takes place during the first year of study (or even during the first semester). This period is critical. The major factor of successful study is intellectual capacity, but the interviewees also pointed to other important factors, such as cultural capital, economic status or distance from one’s hometown.

“"The student himself/herself resigns – this is a clear example of auto-selection. She/he either fails to meet demanding academic criteria or does not want to do so. Nevertheless, the outcome is the same: she/he drops out. During the first semester, students resign even before the exam session. It is not the system that drops them out, they do it themselves. Based on my experience, I can say that the major reason for dropout both is failing to comply with academic requirements. But I know it is very difficult to study math at Warsaw University.” (Policy Expert, Academic employed at Warsaw University)

“In my institute, we send academics who are highly demanding to teach in first and second year because they set certain standards. They do not need to fail students who feel that the criteria are too demanding; these students resign themselves. Ironically, they do not drop out from the system, they choose less selective (demanding) programs.” (Policy Expert, The Committee of Scientific Policy)

Although it was not mentioned explicitly, a prevailing view on what factors influence study success the most is that these may include individual motivation, hard work and individual intellectual capacity. By and large, the responsibility for study success rests upon individuals, their families and prior educational choices. Higher education institutions exercise limited influence on individual choices regarding completion of their education.

“"The prevailing reason for dropping out comes with a misunderstanding and misconception of higher learning. For example, students think that they can study IT without knowing math.” (Vice-rector, SHJ)

“"These days, students are very demanding and their expectations are unrealistic. They do not like hard work during the education process, but they expect to be offered top managerial positions right after they graduate.” (Academic, SHJ)

The research shows that due to lack of actual (strong) admissions criteria, there is no selection at entrance. This means that both HEIs represented in this report (in the majority of their programs) tend to admit everyone who applies because of financial considerations. Nevertheless, they also both seem to struggle to fill all the empty seats in their classrooms.

“"There are always students who resign. Both SHJ and its academics do their best to keep students in the system.” (Academic, SHJ)

Both HEIs are aware that there are a number of abandonments, and some measures have already been introduced to address this problem. As a private HEI that relies heavily on tuition fees, the School of Humanities and Journalism is more engaged in preventing dropouts because it sees them as a form of institutional failure.
“There is no selection. The only selection is student satisfaction. If they are satisfied, they continue their education; if not, they resign.” (Student, SHJ).

During the course of study, there is little or no selection based on educational achievement.

“There is no selection, there is auto-selection. If the student’s expectation is not met, he/she gives up. This is the only selection during the process of higher education.” (Student, SHJ).

To prevent problems with dropout, SHJ introduced an entrance exam for candidates who wish to study computer graphics at the Bachelor level (since the dropout rate in this program has become a problem for school management). They wanted to evaluate candidates before entrance in order to eliminate those with no basic knowledge and skills. As a result, there are fewer candidates, but also a low dropout rate during the programme and an increase in the quality of education.

“The dropout rate at SHJ is low. It is not a big problem for the organisation. They have learned to handle this in a way that does not affect students.” (Academic, SHJ)

Overall, the completion of education has been always an important issue for private HEIs. The School of Humanities and Journalism already has positive experiences in dealing with such cases individually. Since this private HEI is an entrepreneurial organisation, SHJ cares very much about dropout and tries to investigate every single case. Any abandonment from studies is taken as a warning signal either about the educational programme or about the way it has been conducted. The School of Humanities and Journalism is flexible and “user-friendly” in regards to payments, but also about breaks in studying. There is always an individual decision that needs to be taken into account.

“SHJ reports different levels of dropout in different programs. It ranges from 30% in IT programs to 10% in humanities. For SHJ, this is purely a managerial problem and a financial problem, as it reduces the level of revenues.” (Vice-Rector, SHJ)

Private higher education institutions are entrepreneurial organisations with strong management, a higher degree of flexibility and a top-down decision-making process. Therefore, the response of SHJ, or more generally private HEIs, is quicker than in well-established public universities in which the decision-making process is more complex and more cumbersome. Nicolaus Copernicus University embodies all the typical characteristics of a big public university. The university consists of largely autonomous departments (17 in total), and various departments have developed different strategies to prevent student dropout. The dropout issue is not regulated on an institutional level and, so far, there are no official institutional guidelines. Unofficially, dropout cases are expected to be scrutinised – particularly during the first year of studies as it is believed that some first-year students might find hard to adapt to the new learning environment. This is a new practice that has been developed recently.

Nevertheless, there is a widespread feeling that NCU should become more selective. Remarkably, students expressed the most radical opinions in regards to selection/dropout.

“I am angry because there is no selection (dropout) during study.” (Student, NCU)
Overall, there is a demand for a greater selectivity in the early stages of education. Because secondary level schools do not perform their selective functions (as much as expected), higher education institutions are left in a difficult situation in this regard.

"Higher education institutions should not perform selective functions; it should have been done earlier and the university should admit only people who have the intellectual capacity and determination to do so. Resignation from studying is a phenomenon that indicates that secondary education has failed to perform its selective functions." (Vice-Rector, NCU)

If this lack of intellectual capacity is responsible for dropout, we need to think about whether we really want to have these people in the system. (Vice-Rector, NCU)

Hence, the university admits a number of people who should have terminated their education in the early stages. But the key issue is the combination of non-selective secondary education and the above-mentioned university funding system which is based on quantitative indicators so that more students means more funding for the university.

"The problem is the lack of selection, since public money follows a student regardless of his/her educational attainments. Such logic for funding higher education supports no selection whatsoever." (Vice-Dean, Philology Department, NCU)

The university departments have their own budgets and those that struggle to attract students have already introduced institutional mechanisms (such as extra classes). For example, in the Math or Chemistry Department, there are remedial courses for those students who want to study but need to make up for their lack of knowledge.

"In the Mathematics Department, more and more students give up every year. Students drop out due to lack of basic knowledge and skills. But if there are too many dropouts, it becomes a problem for the university, as there are not enough ‘teaching hours’ for the academics." (Student, NCU)

Undertaking such measures helps reduce the scope of dropout, but only among those who are determined to catch up. However, the efficacy of these initiatives varies significantly and depends on individuals.

"There are also less successful practices, such as allowing students to continue their education conditionally in spite of failing to pass exams. If you do not have basic knowledge, you cannot obtain more advanced knowledge." (Student, NCU)

The dropout rate ranges between 10% and 50% and it varies among departments. For example, the dropout rate in the Philology Department is estimated at around 50%, which stems from the fact that if students do not work hard systematically they will never learn foreign languages. Introducing an entrance exam could help, but it might also have a side-effect of scaring off some candidates who would then opt for other HEIs. However, the most important issue is that introducing an entrance exam in public HEIs needs to be approved by the Minister of Science and Higher Education. Both of these factors make it very difficult.

The interviewed vice-deans and vice-rector admitted that organisational attitudes towards students dropping out are gradually changing, which causes little enthusiasm.
among academics. As a part of the quality assurance mechanism, the NCU university management plans to launch a survey at the beginning of their studies, which can identify students’ expectations and help address them. As a part of this package, they also want to encourage deans to scrutinise each case of student dropout in order to learn more about them and possibly prevent them both now and in the future. The university is gradually recognising dropout as an institutional problem but only because the university cannot afford (financially) to lose students.

*Challenge for Polish higher education institutions: From ’every student counts’ to ’every student passes’*

Overall, representatives of both higher education institutions do have complaints about the lack of selection in the early stages of education. Therefore, both students and academics seem to be in favour of introducing more selectivity during the course of the studies. The assumption is that if the system is not selective, it brings down the quality of education. In other words, dropout is not the problem; the lack of dropout becomes the problem. Too often, academics turn a blind eye to underperformance and give students unmerited positive marks.

The introduction of selection during studies might be problematic, but both HEIs are expected be more selective in admitting students. There are conflicting organisational forces in higher education institutions, in particular in the private HEIs, since it relies on tuition fees from students. On the one hand, SHJ cares about every student, and academics must (and do) do their best to keep students in the system. Metaphorically speaking, every student counts in both sectors. On the other hand, there is a big concern about going too far with caring about students and harming the reputation of the HEI and the quality of education, since “every student counts” can easily transform into “every student passes”.

### 8.5 Reflection of the policy mix

Five major conclusions can be identified:

1. At the policy level, there is little concern about dropout as a problem and when there is concern, it is focussed on the destabilization of higher education institutions that might get into financial difficulties when loosing students;

2. Polish higher education is generally seen as non-selective (admission criteria are seen as a façade) and any political measures undertaken to prevent dropout might undermine any remaining trust in the meritocratic foundation of the system;

3. The term *study success* generally refers to success in the labour market. This shows that the problem is not completing higher education but finding meaningful employment afterwards.

4. Being a private institution, the School of Humanities and Journalism is more concerned about dropout than public universities because it sees dropout as an institutional failure to recognise its students’ needs. Student dropout has direct financial consequences for private HEIs that rely on tuition fees. Nicolaus Copernicus University HEI has introduced a wide range of different practices to students completing their education at a higher level (on time). These are largely uncoordinated grass-roots initiatives;
5. The reason behind the growing concern demonstrated by both NHJ and NCU stems from demographic pressure. The declining number of students translates into a decline in revenues, but also destabilises the normal functioning of these organisations.

8.6 Annex

8.6.1 List of interviewees

National stakeholders:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Institution and position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andrzej Kurkiewicz</td>
<td>Deputy Director, Department of Innovation and Development in the Ministry of Science and Higher Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tadeusz Kufel, prof.</td>
<td>Expert of Polish Accreditation Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mateusz Mrozek</td>
<td>At the moment of interview: Head of the Committee of Teaching and Quality of Education in Student Parliament, now: President of Student Parliament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magdalena Kula</td>
<td>Director of Cabinet of Minister of Science and Higher Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zbigniew Marciniak, prof.</td>
<td>former Deputy Minister of Science and Higher Education, former President of Polish Accreditation Committee, Professor of Mathematics at Warsaw University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomasz Szlendak, prof.</td>
<td>Science Policy Committee (the interview will take place 24th of November)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Institution and position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beata Przyborowska, prof.</td>
<td>Vice-Rector of Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bogumiła Sąsiada</td>
<td>Head of Department of Recruitment and Student Affairs of NCU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urszula Kielkowska, dr hab.</td>
<td>Deputy Dean Responsible for Student Affairs, Faculty of Chemistry at NCU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Przemysław Nehring, prof.</td>
<td>Deputy Dean Responsible for Organization and Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maciej Wróblewski, dr hab.</td>
<td>Deputy Dean Responsible for Student Affairs, Both are from Faculty of Languages, NCU.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piotr Durtan</td>
<td>Head of Student Self-Government at NCU</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Focus interview – Nicolaus Copernicus University Torun

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Department/function:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Patryk Tomaszewski, dr</td>
<td>Faculty of Politology and International Studies, lecturer in politology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Małgorzata Lisecka, dr</td>
<td>Faculty of Languages, lecturer in cultural studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalia Soja-Kukiela, mgr</td>
<td>Faculty of Mathematics and Computer Science, lecturer in mathematics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Michał Wróblewski, dr  |  Faculty of Humanities, lecturer in philosophy
Grzegorz Jończyk   |  Self-government of NCU
Angelina Milewska  |  Self-government of NCU
Weronika Wiśniewska|  Self-government of NCU
Agata Gabizdalska  |  Self-government of NCU

School of Humanities and Journalism in Poznan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Institution and position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Łukasz Fojutowski, dr</td>
<td>Vice-Rector of The School of Humanities and Journalism in Poznań</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paweł Jasiński</td>
<td>Head of Careers' Office of SHJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karolina Szukudarek</td>
<td>Recruitment Office and Career's Office of SHJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kozłowski Tomasz, dr</td>
<td>Dean of Faculty of Educational Studies of SHJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michał Pawlak</td>
<td>Head of Student Self-Government at SHJ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Focus interview at School of Humanities and Journalism Poznan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Department/function</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barbara Jankowiak, dr</td>
<td>Faculty of Educational Studies, Lecturer in educational theory, psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marta Holeksa, dr</td>
<td>Faculty of Educational Studies, Lecturer in educational theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam Zemełka, dr</td>
<td>Faculty of Educational Studies, Lecturer in health sciences, coaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iwona Werner, dr</td>
<td>Faculty of Educational Studies, Lecturer in psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ola Sip</td>
<td>Student of Graphics, Candidate for Student Self-Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam Maliński</td>
<td>Student of Cauncelling and Coaching, Student Self-Government Presidium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karolina Kaczmarek</td>
<td>Student of Graphics, Former President of Student Self-Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adrianna Matuszczak</td>
<td>Student of Graphics, Student Self-Government Presidium</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8.6.2 References
Ernst&Young, & IBnGR. 2009. Strategia rozwoju szkolnictwa wyższego w Polsce do 2020 roku. Warszawa: E&Y
GUS. 2013. Szkoły wyższe i ich finanse. Warszawa: GUS.
II. Policy briefings
1 Australia

Hamish Coates and Paula Kelly (Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Melbourne)

1.1 Introduction

This national briefing discusses policy and practice regarding higher education study success in Australia. It is designed to inform a broad audience about the most important policies, definitions and monitoring instruments regarding study success.

Broadly, the briefing responds to these questions:

- What do governments and higher education institutions (HEI) do to improve study success?
- Are study success policies monitored and evaluated? What can be said about the effectiveness of such policies?
- What good practice examples exist—either well-working policies or institutional initiatives that boost study success?

In terms of structure, the briefing:

- describes the most important characteristics of the higher education landscape;
- presents the current situation of drop out and completion;
- summarises policies and policy instruments implemented at state and institutional levels to address study success in higher education;
- describes good practices in addressing study success at national and institutional levels; and
- considers ‘what works’ through review of effective measures addressing study success in higher education.

Clearly this is a broad topic which goes beyond statistics to reference deep cultural and social contexts, and it is necessary to cast broad boundaries around the scope of the analysis. The policy briefing focuses on the most typical national and institutional policies. The term ‘national policies’ refers to instruments and regulations that are implemented at the national level. The term ‘institutional policies’ refers to typical instruments designed to address study success at the institutional level. In certain instances a small sample of case-study institutions has been selected.

1.2 Higher education landscape

1.2.1 Overview

This section provides a broad description of the higher education landscape in Australia, including the type and characteristics of institutions operating within the Australian system, and an overview of student participation. It is important to note at the outset that the Australian higher education system is currently in transition, with significant funding, regulatory and technological changes occurring at a time of increased participation and a growing international market.

The Australian Government through the Department of Education and Training (DOET) is responsible for the policy environment in which higher education institutions operate in Australia. Over the last five years the system has become more centralised as many policy functions have shifted from states to the Australian Government. A review of the overall system architecture is currently underway (DPMC, 2015).
The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) is the national policy instrument for regulated qualifications in the Australian education system. The AQF was introduced in 1995 to provide a consistent framework that specifies the knowledge, skills, and graduate attributes to be attained by students at the completion of a higher education qualification. The AQF sets out the nomenclature and broad learning outcomes of all higher education qualifications which are classified as set out in Table 1.

Table 1: Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nomenclature</th>
<th>Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diploma (Higher Education)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Diploma; Associate Degree</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor Degree honours; Graduate Diploma; Graduate Certificate</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters by Coursework or Research</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: AQF (2015)

All qualifications are classified by the Australian Government by Field of Education (FOE) such that a Bachelor of Arts would be classified in the broad field of education (BFOE) called ‘Society and Culture’. These FOE’s align with the ISCED (UNESCO, 2015) classification.

Funding of higher education in Australia is a complex mix of federal funding including student loan schemes, scholarships and deferred payments, state funding, and private or commercial revenue. Funding eligibility is not contingent on regulatory outcomes and is determined by the institutional category as defined under the Higher Education Support Act 2003 (HESA) (Australian Government, 2003). In 2014 major changes in funding and the economics of the system have been proposed, which are detailed below. These carry enormous potential to shape how people participate and succeed in higher education.

Australia’s higher education system is regulated by an independent agency of the Australian Government: the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA). Established in 2011, TEQSA is a statutory body with the broad remit to protect and enhance the Australian higher education system. Recent legislation has reduced the TEQSA’s scope and funding, directing it to function more as a regulator.

All institutions offering and conferring higher education qualifications under the AQF are organised by type under HESA and require registration and cyclical review by TEQSA against a legislative framework. TEQSA maintains a National Register of all institutions by category. Table 2 shows institution numbers by category. Figure 1 shows that the majority of institutions are registered in New South Wales and Victoria.

Table 2: Registered higher education institutions by category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provider category</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Higher Education Provider</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian University</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian University of Specialisation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overseas University</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.2.2 Institutions

This section provides a broad outline of the central characteristics that define and differentiate the two main groups of higher education institutions operating in Australia: Australian Universities and Higher Education Providers (or non-university higher education institutions).

1.2.2.1 Australian Universities

Of the 40 Australian Universities registered by TEQSA to offer and confer higher education qualifications in Australia, 37 were established by state legislation, and three have been established as private universities.

All universities in Australia have self-accrediting authority (SAA), which means they are responsible for accrediting higher education courses through internal academic boards, and responsible for ensuring the quality of the higher education operations including the integrity of every qualification conferred. This authority is reviewed cyclically within the context of a registration or re-registration process undertaken by the regulator up to every seven years against a standards-based framework.

Universities in Australia are required to offer courses in more than three broad fields of education (BFOE) and to undertake research. As such, universities offer a combination of higher education qualifications up to and including doctoral level, and across multiple disciplines. Typically universities have multiple campuses across the one or more states and deliver through a range of face-to-face, online and blended modes including the option to study full-time or part-time for domestic students. Over 30 universities in Australia have offshore operations for the delivery of higher education overseas.
All Australian Universities are required to submit annual data sets to the Australian Government’s Department of Education and Training, including information relating the provision of courses, the numbers and characteristics of students, research activity, income, staff information and completion of units of study and courses. This information is provided to TEQSA for the formulation of an annual risk assessment to indicate potential risks to financial viability or student experience. Ratings of student experience are based on a combination of student metrics and indicators, including progression, completion and attrition data.

The Australian Government currently provides subsidized student funding for bachelor degrees at Australian Universities which allows domestic students to defer payment of their qualification upon completion and only when they have reached a threshold earning capacity.

A similar funding arrangement, including the provision of student loans, is provided by the government for domestic students studying post-graduate qualifications.

1.2.2.2 Non-university higher education institutions

Of the 130 higher education institutions registered by TEQSA to offer and confer Australian higher education qualifications, over 100 are privately owned and operated. The rest are either state funded Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutions, traditionally established to offer training qualifications, or publicly funded or not-for-profit organisations that offer higher education qualifications in specialist disciplinary areas.

The profile of non-university higher education institutions is diverse. Over 100 of these institutions have an equivalent full time student load (EFTSL) of fewer than 500, and 50 have fewer than 100 EFTSL (TEQSA, 2014). Over 80 of the 130 non-university higher education institutions are eligible to offer students places through a government funded student loan scheme (FEE-HELP).

TEQSA is responsible for registering any new entrant to the system, requiring compliance with a range of standards including academic quality, and on the proviso that at least one higher education qualification is delivered.

Most (125 of the 130) non-university institutions do not have the authority to accredit their own courses, resulting in the application of greater regulatory scrutiny in relation to the quality of teaching and learning and positive student outcomes. Institutional capacity and the quality of courses, is tested through cyclical re-registration processes and through initial and re-accreditation applications to TEQSA.

While some of the non-university providers are required to submit a selection of annual data to the Australian Government, others have no such requirement. To supplement the government’s information collection primarily relating to Australian Universities TEQSA makes annual data requests to relevant providers. All data is used to formulate an annual risk assessment by TEQSA.

1.2.3 Key developments 2005-2015

1.2.3.1 System and institution change

This section provides a descriptive summary of changes in Australian higher education over the last decade, and a prelude to the analytical review presented further in the
document. Over the last decade the Australian higher education system has seen growth in the number of non-university higher education institutions, and in student numbers. The major factor influencing the growth in higher education in Australia over the preceding decade has been changing government policy and its effects. In broad terms, the system and those participating in it has expanded (see Table 3) not only in response to global market forces, but due to national policies designed to facilitate growth. As the system has grown, funding a large and accessible system while ensuring quality in a market environment, has emerged as a key issue for policy makers.

Table 3: 2005-2014 snapshot

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provider type</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australian Universities</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other HEI</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total HEI</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students (headcount)</td>
<td>844,051</td>
<td>1,279,359</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: DEST(2005); TEQSA (2014)

In 2005, Australian Universities were unregulated entities, but did report financial and other information to the relevant state or territory to fulfil legislative obligations and funding agreements. The Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) was established in 2000 to conduct cyclical audits of universities and make recommendations for improvement. The states and territories were responsible for the regulation of non-university higher education institutions in each jurisdiction against a national set of ‘protocols’.

In 2005, there were 40 Australian Universities delivering higher education to 97 per cent of over 840,000 enrolled students, with only 30 non-university higher education institutions registered across the nation.

In 2008, the Review of Australian Higher Education (the ‘Bradley Review’) led to significant change including:

- a demand-driven system of funding: the removal of restrictions on the capped numbers of government subsidized places (CSPs) for domestic bachelor students enrolled in an Australian University (except medical students) to increase higher education participation and achieve greater attainment of bachelor level qualification within the Australian population, and to address predicted skills shortages;
- regulation: in 2012 the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) replaced both the previous state and territory based authorities and AUQA, and with regulatory authority for the national system, the introduction of TEQSA was perceived as an essential feature of an expanded and diversified system; and
- national legislative framework: the introduction of a nationally consistent legislative framework for the regulation of all higher education institutions, including Australian Universities.

In 2014, the Australian Government introduced legislation to deregulate student fees for all higher education qualifications, and to extend government subsidized student places to all non-university higher education institutions and to sub-bachelor qualifications (AQF level 5 and 6). The legislation has been blocked by the Australian Senate and its fate is uncertain.
1.2.3.2 Pathways

Increased participation in higher education has characterised the policy setting of Australian higher education system over the last decade. This priority has influenced the application of flexible admission processes across the system, the development of partnerships between institutions to facilitate articulation into higher education and the increase of codified policies to recognize prior learning.

Flexible admission processes have led to a de-emphasis on individual secondary school performance or ATARs (Australian Tertiary Admission Ranks), towards admission procedures based on interviews, recognition of prior learning (RPL) and credit, or through articulation agreements. In a common scenario, a non-university higher education institution will licence the curriculum from a university to develop and deliver a one year diploma (AQF level 5) qualification, which upon completion allows students to articulate into the second year of the cognate three year bachelor (AQF level 7) qualification at the partnering university.

In 2012, 46 per cent of commencing bachelor-level students enrolled across all institutions in Australia were admitted on the basis of secondary education results including 24 per cent by completing other higher education qualifications and 16 per cent through ‘other’ basis (TEQSA, 2014).

This shift towards flexible admission practices is offset by the legislative framework applied to all higher education institutions which requires that admission criteria ‘ensures that students have adequate prior knowledge and skills to undertake the course of study successfully’ (TEQSA, 2011) and that staff making admission decisions including assessing credit applications, are appropriately qualified.

Further, the regulatory framework for Australian higher education emphasises the role of student support as essential to manage the risks associated with flexible admission practices in a demand driven system. For example, all higher education institutions are required to have ‘effective mechanisms to identify and support students who are at risk of not progressing academically’ (TEQSA, 2011).

1.2.3.3 Efficiency

While it is too early to provide conclusions about the effects of the ‘demand-driven system’ on student success, concerns have been registered about attrition rates of students who are admitted to bachelor level study who are in the lower half of the national cohort of those completing a senior secondary certificate in a given year. Although only a small percent of commencements at the bachelor level, this group sees only 45-50 percent of students completing their bachelor degree within six years (DoE, 2014c).

Institutional progression, attrition and completion rates are submitted to the Australian Government through annual data collections, and assessed by TEQSA to formulate a ‘risk to students’ risk rating. High attrition rates indicate a potential risk to student success and further investigation will be triggered. The regulatory framework that all Australian higher education institutions operate within requires the ability ‘to demonstrate appropriate progression and completion rates and that students who complete the course of study have attained key graduate attributes including an appropriate level of English language proficiency’ (Higher Education Standards Framework, 2011). While TEQSA does
not disclose the threshold levels of attrition that may trigger a negative risk rating, underlying factors influencing attrition and mechanisms to address it, are likely outcomes.

In the context of a demand driven system the Australian Government’s Department of Education and Training has initiatives designed to support institutions and students achieve positive outcomes. These include:

- the Office of Learning and Teaching (OLT), which funds grants, fellowships and awards under the Promotion of Excellence in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education Programme;
- the Indigenous Support Programme, which provides additional funding to help institutions meet the specific needs of Indigenous Australian students;
- the Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching (QILT) and other surveying tools currently and previously used are being re-designed (2015) to provide student and graduate data to: be used for supporting institutional improvement in teaching practices, learner engagement and student support; to facilitate benchmarking activities; to ensure that students entering through flexible admission processes are taken into account; and to assist prospective students to make informed decisions about study choices; and
- the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Programme (HEPPP), designed to support higher education participation and success for Australians from disadvantaged backgrounds, and in particular to fund universities to undertake activities and implement strategies that improve access to undergraduate courses for people from disadvantaged backgrounds, as well as improving the retention and completion rates of those students (DOET, 2015).

1.2.4 Students
This section provides the central characteristics of the student population studying within Australian higher education.

Based on statistical data relating to student demographics (Norton, 2014; TEQSA, 2014) the majority of Australian students display the following characteristics:

- domestic (Australian citizen or permanent resident) (75% of students);
- 17-19 years of age (27% of domestic population enrolled);
- female (56% of all students);
- studying at an Australian University (93% of all students);
- undergraduate (enrolled in a bachelor degree) (73% of all students);
- enrolled full-time (74% of domestic/bachelor/enrolled in university);
- studying in face to face mode (internal) (90% of domestic/bachelor/enrolled in university); and
- studying in the Society and Culture FOE (26% of domestic/bachelor/enrolled in University).

Full time study is defined by the Australian Government as 75 percent of face-to-face teaching and learning, usually referred to as ‘on campus’ or ‘internal’ study. International students studying higher education in Australia are required to study in full-time mode, as a condition of their student visa.

While new forms or modes of delivery have emerged in response to technological factors, Australia has always enrolled students externally, whether by distance or ‘off-campus’
and ‘externally’. Multi-modal or flexible modes of delivery are offered to incorporate a combination of online/off-campus study with face-to-face learning. By 2013, nine per cent of students were enrolled on a multi-modal basis. Combined with purely external enrolments, more than a quarter of students study externally (Norton, 2014).

Postgraduate students (defined as AQF level 8 and higher) numbers have increased steadily over the last decade and in 2012 constituted 21 per cent of all student enrolments (TEQSA, 2014). Typically postgraduate students are less likely to study full-time or ‘internally’ due to other work-life commitments, however the numbers of full-time postgraduate students are increasing (36 per cent in 2013) (Norton, 2014). As Table 4 demonstrates, the rise of non-university higher education institutions since 2005 has influenced a downward trend in the share of total student enrolment figures for universities. This table has been developed from a variety of published sources including Australian Government statistics which have not traditionally included information about students enrolled at non-university higher education institutions. Therefore student percentiles are indicative of those students enrolled in Australian Universities and should be considered close approximates.

Table 4: 2005-2012 student snapshot

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% Students</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overseas</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students enrolled in a University</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students studying a Bachelor degree</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full time</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attrition (bachelor level)</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>13**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: TEQSA (2014); DEST (2005), DOET (2014a); Norton (2014); AUIDF (2013)

While 26 per cent of domestic students enrolled in a bachelor qualification at an Australian University are enrolled in courses classified under the broad field of society and culture, the highest proportion of all students (including international and postgraduate students studying at both universities and non-universities) study a course within the broad field of management and commerce. Table 5 provides for the most popular fields of education over the period 2005-2012, which remain management and commerce, society and culture and health respectively. Other fields, including engineering, creative arts and education and sciences attract less than ten percent of the student share, and have remained relatively stable over the period shown.

Table 5: 2005-2012 Highest proportion of students enrolled by field of education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field of Education</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Management and Commerce</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society and Culture</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: DEST (2005), DOET (2014a), TEQSA (2014)

Since 2005 international student numbers studying onshore in Australia higher education institutions have grown from over 240,000 to over 328,000 in 2013. Peak numbers of international students were recorded in 2010, but declined in 2011 due to a complex mix of factors including migration policies, exchange rates, international competition and...
negative publicity in some countries. However, figures from 2013 indicate an upward trend in international student numbers.

The largest growth in international markets has been in China. Chinese students now represent the largest proportion of international students in Australia. The rapid growth of the Chinese market from 2001 until 2013 is demonstrated in Table 6.

Table 6: 2001-2013 international student figures by home country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2001</th>
<th></th>
<th>2013</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>18,277</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>94,085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>16,344</td>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>35,157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>15,719</td>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>29,698</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>9,618</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>19,237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>8,018</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>17,003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>5,485</td>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>14,075</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>3,548</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>11,497</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>3,259</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>7,245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>2,687</td>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>6,967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>2,572</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>6,844</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Norton (2014)

Of particular relevance to this briefing on study success, under-represented students in higher education in Australia are classified into the following ‘equity groups’:

- low socio-economic status (‘low SES’) students (SES based on economic profile of student postcode);
- students with disabilities;
- indigenous students;
- regional and remote students (based on national geographic classifications), and
- non-english speaking background (NESB) students (also referred to as students from ‘culturally and linguistically diverse’ backgrounds or ‘CALD students’).

A study of domestic enrolments for bachelor students at Australian Universities shows growth in representation of student numbers across all equity groups from 2007 until 2012. In the context of a growing national system, the growth in share of total enrolments across these equity groups for the period 2007-2012 is shown in Table 7 below.

Table 7: Growth in share (2007-2012) by equity group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Equity group</th>
<th>Growth (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low SES</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with Disabilities</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remote</td>
<td>-10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NESB</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.3 Descriptive overview of ‘study success’

1.3.1 Defining study success in Australia

The term ‘study success’ means different things to different stakeholders. It is a broad term nuanced by different technical, substantive and practical considerations. This section reviews definitions used by government, selected stakeholders and higher education institutions. In doing this it considers the significance/relevance of the phenomenon, and looks at how it plays out in policies, projects, programs and research activities.

The term ‘study success’ is not used in a formal or singular sense in Australia. Potential denotations and interpretations are summarised in Table 8. Each of these indicators is defined in national higher education data, collected either from institution management systems or national student or graduate censuses (DoE, 2014a,b,c).

The notion of ‘study success’ would appear to be rising on the national and institutional policy agenda. Between 2008 and 2012 national policy in Australian higher education was pointed in various ways towards ‘social inclusion’, which was taken to mean expanding higher education to embrace people from a wider breadth of socioeconomic backgrounds. During this time energy was focused on broadening access rather than ensuring the quality of outcomes. A change of government in late 2012 shifted rhetoric and attention towards ‘excellence’ and ‘outcomes’. Expansion targets for institutions and target ‘equity groups’ have been dropped and a direct push (hitherto unsuccessful) has been made to deregulate tuition pricing entirely, inducing institutions to demonstrate the educational value they deliver in a far more commercial way. This has not explicitly put ‘study success’ on the policy radar, but it has and continued to shift attention from access and admission, to the achievement of various forms of outcome.
Table 8: Facets of study success

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>National priority</th>
<th>Institutional priority</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access / commencement</td>
<td>Declining emphasis in national policy</td>
<td>Increasing emphasis to attract students in new ‘more competitive market’</td>
<td>Gaining admission to a higher education institution/qualification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic / social engagement</td>
<td>Concern from quality monitoring perspective only</td>
<td>Increasing interest in retention given that priced-up tuition follows students</td>
<td>Quality of student engagement in academic and social dimensions of higher education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject completion</td>
<td>Concern regarding quality/productivity monitoring</td>
<td>Increasing interest in retention given that priced-up tuition follows students</td>
<td>Successful completion of enrolled subjects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualification completion</td>
<td>Concern regarding quality/productivity monitoring</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sufficient satisfactory completion of subjects to achieve qualification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality academic / social outcomes</td>
<td>Low concern</td>
<td>Increasing interest among institutions to find ways to demonstrate unique attributes of their graduates</td>
<td>Quality of disciplinary/generic academic and social outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional outcomes</td>
<td>Growing concern, responding to concerns expressed by business and industry on graduate preparedness</td>
<td>Growing concern, responding to concerns expressed by business and industry on graduate preparedness</td>
<td>Participation in full- or part-time work outcomes six months after graduation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further study outcomes</td>
<td>Slowing concern, with attempts made to charge doctoral students tuition</td>
<td>Growing concern, particularly related to high-performance research training and graduate coursework training (already commercial market)</td>
<td>Participation in full- or part-time further study six months after graduation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is worth noting several conceptualisations of study success in other systems or countries which are not as prominent in Australia. Following a major 2008 review of Australia’s higher education systems (Bradley et al., 2008) there has been no fixed time for completion in Australia. As well, Australia does not have a measure of ‘value added’ or ‘return on investment’. As well, aside from a single study (Coates & Edwards, 2010), work and further study outcomes are limited to six-month timeframes, though a new
three-year-out perspective has been embedded in the revised national data system. A 2013-14 review removed national attainment targets for bachelor degrees and target equity groups. Alignment between field of education studied and employment outcome is not taken into account in work on study success.

1.4 Factors that impact study success

This section draws on existing research to highlight key factors which would appear to impact study success. The review is organised in a multilevel fashion to take stock of individual (Table 9), institutional (Table 6) and national (Table 11) factors. These summaries are necessarily very general given the varied potential interpretations of ‘study success’ and the equally varied range of relevant work. For current purposes, in each instance insight is provided regarding the evidence base for the factor (none, weak, strong), and the identified significance/strength for study success (low, medium, high).

The research affirms that individual factors do play an important role in study success. Cognitive, motivational/affective and practical factors play a particularly important role. Indeed, in Australia, it appears that at the individual level it is the intellectual and dispositional factors which play a role in study success (Coates, 2014). Drawing from a review of the literature, Lobo (2012) summarises these factors as including (in no particular order): student expectations and perceptions of university life and study; social and academic student integration; students’ living arrangements; financial concerns; preparation for university life and study; family responsibilities and obligations; health and personal reasons; learning anxiety (in particular, foreign language learning anxiety).

It is important to keep in mind that few factors have a straight impact but rather function in a more dynamic and networked and often highly individualised sense.

Table 9: Individual factors and study success

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
<th>Relevance</th>
<th>Example study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Foster (2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Coates (2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Foster (2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational pathway</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Foster (2010)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Available evidence suggests that institutional structural factors appear to play a limited role in individual student success, though selectivity and field of education matter. What counts more are experiential and sociocultural factors driven by administrative and support services, learning environments, and the nature and number of teachers. The extent of individually focused rather than generalised support counts for study success. More recent institutional research is exploring links between data-driven management and retention and broader outcomes.

Overall, the evidence base regarding links between institutional factors and study success is weaker than for individual factors. As well, Australia lacks the tradition of conducting major national research-driven evaluations of higher education policy and practice. Outside of system reviews, studies have tended to focus on particular cohorts or enhancement issues rather than broader multi-institutional investigations.

Table 10: Institutional factors and study success

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
<th>Relevance</th>
<th>Example study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type of institution (e.g. university, UAS, etc.)</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Coates (2014) Coates &amp; Edwards (2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of institution (measured by student numbers)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of study programme (measured by student numbers)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composition of student population at institutional level (heterogeneous or homogenous student populations as regards socio-economic, ethnic background and gender)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composition of student population at the classroom/study programme</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The evidence on links between system settings and student performance comes mainly from national reviews rather than research studies. These reviews typically draw on commissioned work and available research, yet they are framed for political rather than broader social rationales. Combined, insights on national settings suggest that study success would be improved by greater diversification of institutions, both through changing existing institutions and through creation and inclusion in national funding and regulatory systems of new and different types of providers. Links between the finance of higher education and student success have been widely debated over the last year given policy intentions to cut subsidies and deregulate tuition prices. While this development
has not been driven or informed by a suitable body of independent research, analysis has converged towards the view that Australia’s income-contingent student loans scheme provides a buffer between tuition fees and debt and people’s successful access, progression and departure from the system. Aside from fee-paying international students, funding for Australian institutions is not linked in direct ways with study success, and though various national and more targeted performance-funding schemes have been implemented in recent decades these have not spurred substantial change. The most studied facet of the nature system of relevance to study success is pathway and transition programs which many studies have shown as having a positive impact on study outcomes by enabling a more diverse range of students to prepare for the challenges of higher education.

Table 11: National factors and study success

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
<th>Relevance</th>
<th>Example study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diversity of providers (variety in profiles: e.g. large vs. small; academic vs. vocational, comprehensive vs. specialised, etc.)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bradley et al. (2008) DoE, 2014a,b,c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding incentives (e.g. performance funding; tuition fees; student financial support)</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>DoE, 2014a,b,c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selectivity at entrance to higher education</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>DoE, 2014a,b,c, Coates, Edwards &amp; Friedman (2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility of pathways within higher education</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Kemp &amp; Norton (2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations to study duration</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring of study success</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>DoE, 2014a,b,c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other characteristics of the national higher education system</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School sector background (government, private)</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Li &amp; Dockery (2014)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By way of a general summary, therefore, it would appear from the research available that individual, institutional and national factors all play a role in shaping study success. Funding enabling pathways into challenging yet supportive higher education experiences which are nuanced to individual contexts and aspirations is, of course, increasingly hard
to achieve in a growing and more diverse system. Broadly, however, the relevance and interaction of pertinent factors remains uncertain, and there remains no scientific approach to understanding hence managing student success in Australian higher education. The need to build a greater evidence base both at the policy and practice levels has been noted by many.

1.5 Development of study success in recent 10 years

This section takes stock of the above insights and reports descriptively on patterns and trends regarding study success in the last decade. It considers how completion rates, retention rates and success rates have developed, drawing on the national statistics used to inform policy.

Table 12, Table 13 and Table 14 present award course completions for all students by institution, attrition rates for all commencing bachelor students by institution, and success rates for all commencing bachelor students by institution. Rates vary by institution, but in general: over more than a decade completion numbers have grown at around 5% per year; and attrition and success rates have remained stable over this period, despite growth and diversification in the system. Such outcomes have been sustained during a period of marked expansion of the system (Kemp & Norton, 2014).

An analysis of comparative retention rates (RAND, 2007) showed that Australia tracks on par in terms of retention with Ireland, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States. A recent review of funding in Australia (Lomax-Smith et al., 2011: 7) summarises this national picture concisely, noting that:

> Australian universities have reasonable rates of student retention, success and completion that are all better than or equal to earlier levels. Graduates today are more satisfied and have better graduate outcomes than 10 years ago. The percentage of students who were satisfied by their course experience increased from 38 per cent in 1994 to 51 per cent in 2009.

As might be expected there are differences between subgroups. Analysis of these dates (Go8, 2014) has identified that academic preparedness explains more variation in retention and success than socio-economic status. In a recent analysis of national statistics, the Department of Education (2014c: 4) concluded that as at the end of 2012:

- 72.3% of domestic bachelor students in the 2005 cohort had completed their studies.
- Completion rates are consistent with the estimate attained in earlier studies of the 1992 and 1993 cohorts, where the undergraduate completion rates were estimated at 71.6% and 70.8% respectively using an extended approach.
- Also consistent with earlier findings, the cohorts with the highest completion rates are:
  - females (74.3%);
  - full-time students (77.7%);
  - students 19 years and under (79.1%);
  - students with high (95-100) school entrance scores (93.8%);
  - non-English Speaking Background students (77.7%);
  - non-Indigenous students (72.6%);
  - metropolitan students (73.7%);
  - high socio-economic status (SES) students (76.5%).

As noted above, particular energy is focused on understanding and developing the success of students from target equity groups. Australia has had a national student equity framework for many decades (DEET, 1990), which has defined specific groups and
indicators of interest. Recent work has sought to expand this framework and the evidence-based used by institutions and policymakers for improving the participation of students from disadvantaged groups (AIHW, 2014; NCSEHE, 2014; Naylor, Baik & James, 2013). Broadly, as in most systems, study success lags the general population for people with disabilities or are from indigenous, poor and underprepared backgrounds.
Table 12: Award course completions for all students by institution
Institution
Charles Sturt University
Macquarie University
Southern Cross University
The University of Sydney
University of New England
University of New South Wales
University of Newcastle
University of Technology, Sydney
University of Western Sydney
University of Wollongong
Non-table A/B providers
Deakin University
La Trobe University
MCD University of Divinity
Monash University
RMIT University
Swinburne University of Technology
The University of Melbourne
University of Ballarat
Victoria University
Bond University
Central Queensland University
Griffith University
James Cook University
Queensland University of Technology
The University of Queensland
University of Southern Queensland
University of the Sunshine Coast
Curtin University of Technology
Edith Cowan University
Murdoch University
The University of Notre Dame Australia
The University of Western Australia
Flinders University of South Australia
The University of Adelaide
University of South Australia
University of Tasmania(b)
Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education(c)
Charles Darwin University(c)
The Australian National University
University of Canberra
Australian Catholic University
Total

1999
5,421
4,287
1,878
8,265
3,156
7,620
4,045
6,690
7,250
3,259
282
5,779
5,924
0
9,108
6,508
2,435
9,572
1,344
3,972
0
2,353
5,598
1,664
7,869
6,797
2,940
284
6,020
4,068
2,573
9
3,513
2,753
3,246
5,409
3,296
43
909
2,767
2,603
2,874
164,423

2000
6,172
5,339
1,486
8,307
2,812
8,051
3,968
6,977
7,508
3,453
308
7,250
5,709
22
10,059
6,854
2,455
9,840
1,303
3,753
4
2,894
5,638
1,740
7,584
7,158
2,989
343
7,026
4,002
2,586
36
3,508
2,928
2,958
5,850
3,121
47
799
2,575
2,561
2,876
170,894

2001
7,496
6,335
2,042
8,165
2,662
8,868
4,114
7,536
7,766
3,866
342
7,457
6,199
37
13,128
6,974
2,661
10,525
1,475
3,986
8
4,164
5,681
1,810
8,070
7,563
3,241
538
7,407
4,283
2,909
37
3,698
2,988
3,233
6,551
3,835
49
773
2,842
2,759
2,953
187,089

2002
7,433
5,946
2,657
8,777
2,858
9,468
4,533
7,613
9,607
4,063
317
6,697
6,189
54
13,166
7,827
2,944
11,259
2,104
4,099
7
5,802
6,278
2,016
8,819
8,301
3,637
634
8,084
4,950
2,875
503
3,957
3,439
4,126
6,377
4,027
73
933
2,655
2,822
2,797
200,744

2003
8,190
7,122
2,847
10,383
3,377
10,376
5,039
9,617
9,246
4,504
332
7,045
7,295
53
13,524
7,008
2,949
12,340
1,292
4,514
59
5,400
6,945
2,198
9,175
8,644
4,186
543
8,775
5,325
2,820
475
4,162
3,299
4,594
7,644
3,726
51
955
3,252
3,018
2,743
215,115

2004
8,740
6,904
2,808
12,747
3,345
10,101
5,187
8,095
8,937
4,575
327
7,224
7,581
81
14,473
7,511
3,103
12,589
2,071
5,293
1,380
4,817
7,474
2,295
9,669
9,010
4,000
664
8,840
5,613
2,768
579
4,061
3,772
4,519
8,363
4,275
73
796
4,079
3,410
3,157
225,441

2005
7,415
7,581
2,578
13,067
3,825
9,832
5,406
10,433
8,657
5,698
1,004
8,041
7,553
113
14,362
7,780
3,068
12,851
2,461
5,080
1,040
5,366
7,809
2,586
9,760
8,843
4,172
1,027
8,697
5,840
2,702
672
4,425
3,792
4,575
7,961
3,618
70
717
3,996
3,463
3,480
232,188

2006
7,454
7,804
2,822
12,314
3,588
9,175
5,628
9,216
8,033
5,615
3,271
7,788
7,617
143
15,433
8,026
3,609
13,153
2,940
4,048
1,251
6,292
8,274
3,135
9,857
8,747
4,557
1,061
9,644
5,888
2,798
904
4,165
3,858
5,298
8,262
4,455
54
823
3,942
3,249
3,881
239,460

2007
7,727
8,156
2,589
12,269
3,681
9,271
5,616
8,329
8,180
5,914
5,258
7,617
7,676
252
15,438
8,410
3,629
13,199
3,242
4,037
1,116
6,595
8,717
2,898
9,492
8,681
5,160
1,226
9,842
5,679
2,913
917
4,209
4,141
5,245
8,450
4,463
69
873
4,284
2,932
3,844
247,526

2008
7,454
8,373
2,939
13,084
3,474
9,408
5,581
8,954
7,960
6,265
6,681
8,056
6,839
173
16,533
11,990
3,799
13,276
3,200
4,762
1,177
5,429
9,371
2,405
9,768
9,025
4,906
1,295
10,114
5,913
2,387
1,182
4,463
4,135
5,336
9,067
4,057
34
1,034
4,188
2,926
3,925
258,802

2009
7,229
8,419
3,318
13,445
3,453
9,787
5,895
8,804
7,953
6,068
8,985
8,489
8,324
313
16,546
12,909
4,573
13,969
3,036
4,762
1,379
4,637
9,860
3,894
9,987
9,005
5,331
1,277
10,622
6,239
2,931
1,569
4,714
4,514
5,224
9,575
4,336
23
850
4,701
2,878
4,194
272,230

2010
8,041
9,998
3,562
13,669
3,340
11,106
6,391
9,293
8,609
7,026
7,764
9,102
8,669
320
16,100
13,762
5,140
12,894
3,426
5,244
1,472
4,934
10,635
3,355
10,285
9,922
4,787
1,432
10,842
6,284
4,484
1,746
4,910
4,776
6,004
9,239
4,833
49
1,088
5,024
3,475
4,303
286,629

2011
8,675
10,771
2,853
14,216
3,298
10,887
6,471
9,662
8,503
7,365
9,660
9,768
9,419
281
16,633
14,894
5,114
15,495
2,480
6,477
1,574
5,024
10,888
4,122
10,214
10,408
4,273
1,485
12,652
6,227
4,742
1,927
5,282
4,849
6,191
9,143
4,942
74
1,293
5,957
3,638
4,954
301,560

2012
7,408
8,910
3,216
13,568
3,210
11,670
6,850
9,330
8,322
7,009
10,394
9,801
8,989
262
17,150
15,775
5,407
16,588
2,243
5,430
1,761
4,532
10,988
3,906
10,411
10,785
4,787
1,488
10,562
6,113
4,481
2,080
5,522
5,191
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8,605
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1.6 Review of study success policies

1.6.1 National policies

Like many countries, higher education in Australia has changed substantially over recent decades as a result of a mix of government, industry and broader economic and international forces. Key forces have been summarized in a suite of national reviews (see: DEET, 1988; DEST, 2002; Bradley et al., 2008; Lomax-Smith et al., 2011; DoE, 2014a) and policy analyses (Marginson, 2013; Norton, 2014). The current analysis concentrates on a sample of what would appear to be the factors of most relevance to study success. It summarises and reviews implications of national policy developments over the last decade.

Around thirty years ago the Dawkins Reform (DEET, 1988) sought to consolidate and expand Australian higher education. While several national reviews were convened after Dawkins (e.g. the ‘Crossroads Review’ (DEST, 2002)), the Bradley Review (Bradley et al., 2008) and consequent Bradley Reforms (AG, 2009) are widely regarded as the next most significant step along the path of system deregulation. Of most current relevance, the Bradley Reforms deregulated the quantity of students that a university could admit. It also set expansion targets for the population, and for specific disadvantaged groups. The income-contingent loan scheme initiated as part of the Dawkins Reforms was extended, with no major changes, as the means by which additional students would be funded.

The Bradley Reforms appear to have been broadly successful, with many institutions seeking to admit as many students as feasible given supply and admissions parameters. Indeed, certain institutions pre-empted the formal start date and a few nearly doubled in size. Overall, there has been around 15 per cent growth in numbers since 2012 (DoE, 2014b), feeding new money into the system. At the same time, there has been marked increase in debt associated with financing this increased participation, creating repayment risks for the Australian Government as well as for individuals who, particularly in the formative post-study years, are often burdened with contingent graduate employment and other forms of personal and family debt (Norton & Cherastidtham, 2014). While difficult to untangle from other environmental factors, the expansion fuelled concerns about the quality of provision and graduates in certain fields as well as graduate employment outcomes (Kemp & Norton, 2014). As with the Dawkins Reform, the Bradley Reform prompted increased student contribution to the system, not just in terms of numbers and time, but also by enhancing competition among institutions for students hence shifting the dynamics in the market. As a counterpoint to the further deregulation, the Bradley Reforms recommended a new national standard-based regulator, and as noted above TEQSA was established in 2011. Though a national Base Funding Review (Lomax-Smith et al., 2011) was conducted and provided much insight on the sector, it had little impact.

In May 2014 the Australian Government tabled a package of reforms in its Federal Budget (DoE, 2014a) with a view to further spurring the system on a path of sustainable quality and growth. The policy intent was to further expand and diversify the system by reducing regulation and increasing competition among institutions. Coupled with additional legislation to scale-down the relatively young TEQSA, these
new reforms proposed the adjustment of various existing parameters such as reducing government subsidies (by 20% on average), increasing the interest rate on the existing income contingent deferred student loan scheme (from the Consumer Price Index (CPI) to the Government bond rate (Sharrock, 2014), expanding the types of institutions able to access government subsidies (including non-university providers), and introducing a new means of funding the participation of students from disadvantaged backgrounds (via new scholarship arrangements). Importantly, these reforms also put a provocative compensating parameter on the table for the first time in over thirty years—the price of tuition—unlocking a fresh world of economic and education opportunity, complexity and challenge.

There was no open consultation prior to the announcement of these reforms and while prior policy and reviews (e.g. Kemp & Norton, 2014; NCoA, 2014) hinted at this direction the industry and stakeholders received them with alarm. The reforms were much debated throughout 2014, and various modifications were made such as to the interest and repayment rates, price monitoring, and repayment thresholds. These modifications exacerbated a key inconsistency in the package, notably economic and moral risks associated with institutions having freedom to set prices with the government carrying the debt via HECS without an adjusted commercial rate of return. There were debates about the theory and practice of pricing in emerging higher education economies (Go8, 2014; Knott & Gilmore, 2014). Interestingly, the general debate focused on ameliorating facets of the package rather than advancing viable alternatives for funding the costly and expanding system (e.g. Norrie & Lennon, 2011). The tenets of the package were sustained, and the modified package of reforms received support from most higher education institutions and many key agencies, though in late 2014 failed by a slim margin to pass the Australian Senate. The search continues for options which are sustainable nationally, institutionally and individually.

Over time, the pattern of these reforms has been to transform the system from one being largely dominated by governmental/institutional ‘supply-side planning’, to one being increasingly devolved to ‘market/student demand’. Such reform carries substantial implications for study success. As considered above, to service greater student numbers more online approaches to provision are required as are great numbers of dedicated (typically sessional) teaching staff. Regardless of the income-contingent deferred loans scheme, it is reasonable to assume that greater tuition costs may deter more disadvantaged students, but at the same time students are likely to engage more deeply with study in which they have made a greater individual investment. The expansion of funding to new providers has the potential to make the system more heterogeneous and spur the creation of enabling pathways and partnerships that research has linked with study success. Moving towards any kind of more market-based system requires the supply of better information to student, institutional and industry/employer markets. It will be necessary to further advance transparency and reporting initiatives to help inform people’s awareness of options and decisions. Overall, national and institutional policy and practice must become more nimble to sustain and enhance success in Australian higher education.
1.6.2 Institutional policies

This section summarises a small selection of recent institutional policy developments of relevance to study success. As in other areas of this briefing it concentrates on developments over the last decade. The remarks take note of whether the policies are evaluated with regard to their efficiency, and the expected and the realized effect of the instruments.

As noted earlier, Australia’s regulatory framework for higher education includes requirements to ensure that all higher education institutions ensure that prospective students have the appropriate skills to succeed in the qualification; that there are adequate student support services to assist student success; that mechanisms to identify students at risk of failing are implemented and effective; and that comparative data including completion and progression rates of students by cohort are acted upon (Higher Education Standards Framework, 2011).

While the methods and means by which institutions may execute these requirements will vary according to size and scale, typically institutional policies situated within a framework of academic and organizational governance reporting structures demonstrate how risks to students are managed, as seen in the case studies below.

1.6.2.1 The University of Melbourne

The University, located in metropolitan Melbourne has high student success rates, with 93 per cent student success for 2013.

The University’s Academic Performance Policy is the governing policy for the management of students ‘at risk’ or making ‘unsatisfactory progress. The policy applies to all higher education course-work courses to manage student progression ‘towards the timely completion of their course and maintain a satisfactory academic standard to be allowed to continue their studies’. The policy is approved by the Academic Board and reviewed annually. The policy attributes responsibility for the implementation and effectiveness of the policy at the local (teaching departments, faculties, faculty examination boards) and global (the Academic Registrar and ultimately the Academic Board) level. The Academic Performance Policy provides a definition for the identification of students ‘at risk’ and students making ‘unsatisfactory academic progress’ under the University’s Statues and Regulations. The Policy also defines academic disadvantage as ‘defined, ongoing, unpreventable circumstances that hamper a student’s ability to participate in academic activities and demonstrate their academic merit. The policy governs the application of the Academic Progress Review Procedure and sets out the operational practices for faculties to notify, warn and provide support for relevant students primarily through an initial meeting with student advisors; and to identify the rights and obligations of both the student and the University.

The University hosts an extensive suite of policies addressing student support services and the identification of students in need of support by teaching staff, including language, academic or personal support. Additionally, the University’s Equity and
Student Engagement agenda includes a range of partnerships, funds, awards and scholarships.

While the University has high student success rates, a link between the policy frameworks and initiatives to support student success, is untested.

Table 15: Key policies influencing the management of student success at The University of Melbourne

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<tr>
<th>Policy/Initiative</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Accountability</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic Performance Policy</strong></td>
<td>Overall policy steering the governance, administration and application of assessment frameworks from Academic Board through to teaching staff.</td>
<td>Academic Board Teaching Faculty Departments</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Academic Progress Review Procedure</strong></td>
<td>Sets out the conditions and criteria for teaching staff to proceed with interventions and reporting to Board level for consideration of underperforming students.</td>
<td>Academic Board Unsatisfactory Progress Committees Faculty Teaching Departments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Support and Engagement Policy</strong></td>
<td>Whole of University policy outlining the governance and application of support mechanisms available to students identified as ‘at risk’ of underperforming.</td>
<td>Pro-Vice Chancellor of Equity and Student Engagement Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) Manager, Policy and Projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Support Procedure</strong></td>
<td>Outlines the procedures for identifying students requiring support, and the management of support mechanisms.</td>
<td>Pro-Vice Chancellor of Equity and Student Engagement Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) Teaching Staff, Subject Coordinators, Faculty, Support Staff</td>
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1.6.2.2 Charles Sturt University (CSU)

CSU is a regional university with multiple campuses in New South Wales. The University’s success rate was 84 per cent in 2013. While CSU has a policy framework to identify and manage student underperformance, the University has recently developed targeted approaches to respond to student attrition. With a student population that includes significant numbers of equity groups, including regional, low SES and Indigenous, CSU has introduced a suite of programs within its Academic Support Team and Planning and Audit division to address student success (Table 16).

With Australian Government funding through HEPPP, CSU introduced STAR (Student Transition and Retention) in 2011. The course has been implemented across faculties to prepare students for higher education study.

Additionally, a CSU Student Success Team has been established to reduce attrition in
first year, domestic, undergraduate students from low SES backgrounds and STAR students through a range of direct actions including phoning each student during the first weeks, and exit interviews for students who drop-out. The University’s Office of Students is comprised of teams with oversight for Academic Success (including pre-entry preparedness); Engagement (including orientation and academic support); Inclusion (support for students with specific needs); and Finance.

CSU undertook an extensive evaluation of the STAR project from 2011-2013 within one Faculty. The findings of the report were inconclusive in relation to the overall impact of the STAR initiatives and attrition, retention and progress (CSU 2014). However, the report did note that interventions were more likely to be successful if student contact was made by academic staff rather than support teams (CSU 2014).

Table 16: New developments introduced by CSU to influence student success

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<tr>
<th>Relevant Policy/Initiative</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Future Moves</td>
<td>Partnership programs with secondary schools for high percentage of low SES students to raise awareness and aspirations for higher education study.</td>
<td>Office of Students (Academic Success Team)</td>
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<tr>
<td>STAR</td>
<td>Student Transition and Retention. Suite of initiatives including orientation, communication and identification of at risk students through triggers.</td>
<td>DVC Academic STAR Academic in Faculties STAR Support Staff in Faculties</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Success Team</td>
<td>Responsible for the implementation of strategies targeted for students at risk including interventions and support.</td>
<td>Office of Students Academic Support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Outreach Programs</td>
<td>Based on a CSU’s former ‘Students at risk project’, provides orientation and support programs for students identified in equity groups.</td>
<td>Office of Students Engagement Team (Outreach)</td>
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1.6.2.3 Central Institute of Technology (Central)

Central is a state funded registered higher education provider located in Western Australia. Central began offering higher education in 2014 with a history of vocational education and training (VET) delivery. Although CIT has only one higher education course, CIT has a discrete policy and procedure to identify students at risk, as required under the legislative framework applicable to all higher education institutions in Australia. The policy and the implementation of it, is assessed by TEQSA at the
point of registration and through subsequent applications for course accreditations (as a non-self accrediting institution).

Central’s Student Progress and Exclusion Policy and Procedure defines ‘satisfactory progress’ and conditions for students to be considered ‘at risk’. These involve failing a subject, non-submission or other factors and self-identification. The procedure indicates that once a student is identified within the parameters of the policy, the student is referred to a Student Advisor within the Student Services Division. In consultation with academic staff and relevant support staff, the student advisor will devise a strategy to enable successful outcomes for the student.

Central has a range of student support services including a Centre for Aboriginal Students, Disability Services, and language support.

As a new entrant to the higher education sector in Australia with limited course offerings, Central’s approach to students at risk represents a standardized policy framework for governing and managing underperformance. While the success or not of this framework is unknown, this example illustrates the ‘threshold’ for institutional policy in relation to the management of students at risk.

1.7 Conclusions and good practices addressing study success

With a focus on the last decade, this briefing has discussed policies and practices relevant to study success in Australian higher education. As the analysis has conveyed, defining, planning and researching such success is complex and difficult. A diverse range of work has been conducted which, like much education research, has not been cumulative in nature, thus challenging the process of drawing any kind of neat summary. Nonetheless, it is helpful to extract a handful of major messages by way of conclusion.

This concluding section summarises the above review by considering what national and institutional policies and practices turned out to address study success in the most successful/effective ways, the extent to which study success policies account for a potential improvement of study success, and the kind of factors that contributed to the performance of study success policies, and the factors that appeared to hinder the success of study success policies. From the review of study success in Australian higher education across recent years it may be concluded that:

- Despite substantial growth and change in almost every facet of the system over a period of thirty years basic success metrics have remained relatively constant. Various national and institutional approaches to monitoring and improvement appear to have worked. Australia tracks well compared with other benchmark systems.
- The national equity system introduced into Australia almost three decades ago has stood Australia well in a policy sense, providing a systematic context for analysing how disadvantaged by academically able people are participating in higher education.
- It would appear that a host of broad sociological demographic or context factors (e.g. gender, age, socioeconomic background) do not play a major role in study success. Rather, it is individual factors like ethnicity, disability, motivation, ability, the student experience and financial circumstances that make a difference.
- The expanding introduction of individualised forms of student support by institutions (given more sophisticated technological and managerial infrastructure) is likely to play a key role in enhancing student success. Individually focussed student support that is provided by advisors or learning management systems is key, which goes to the need to engineer a stimulating and challenging higher education experience.
- There is a need for greater information to prospective students and other stakeholders about how to engage and succeed in higher education. As the system and institutions become more privatised, the need for impartial and timely information on activity and performance will increase.
- Pathways opened by aligning qualifications and providers have played a key role in moving students through the education system into higher forms of qualification. Such pathways have been clarified through the creation of institution/qualification taxonomies and introducing incentives for system actors to forge better alignment.
- The income-contingent loan scheme which allows for consumption smoothing appears not to have deterred people from participating in the system, though the rate of participation of people from target equity groups has not increased. These settings may change with price deregulation, although higher education appears quite inelastic and it is likely that households will absorb great (deferred) costs of participation regardless.
- As data systems improve, the regulatory approaches have become more geared towards tracking nuanced individual/cohort performance, and deploying quantitative metrics in risk-based proportionate forms of accreditation and regulation. There is scope for improvement—for instance, data on student/graduate learning outcomes is yet to be included in any national collections—yet the general trend towards reviewing institution/program performance rather than espoused aspiration bodes well for enhancing system, institution, academic and student management.
- Looking more broadly, the general concept driving this briefing ‘study success’ would benefit from being formally defined in Australian higher education. Currently, Australia lacks a basic and clear narrative around what people should aspire to receive and achieve from higher education. As community participation increases, stakeholders who are ‘outsiders’ to the system will demand parsimonious and insightful indices of success.
- There is a need for a better evidence base. While Australia has a very good set of national statistics on higher education, these are broad and in certain areas (such as the definition of equity groups) are dated. The lack of any longitudinal data specifically focused on higher education also hampers analysis. There has been a lack of systematic and independent research-driven review about ‘what works’ in Australia, with preference being given to national political reviews, institutional research activities, and cross-institutional enhancement activities.

As in many areas of higher education, Australia provides an interesting case study for examining study success. By way of conclusion, it is helpful to offer insights into national and institutional policies that might be useful for other countries or institutions to consider:
- While it has not spurred the radical increase in numbers that might have driven its initial formulation, the existence of a national equity framework has put sustained
focus on the success of students who might otherwise have been seriously and increasingly disadvantaged. Though the framework is in need of revision a few decades down the track, it continues to focus attention on the access, participation and success of students. Systems without such a systematic policy might consider its introduction.

- Across nearly thirty years, Australia has led internationally in the field of ‘student experience’ policy, practice and research. Since the mid 1990s sustained energy has been focused on the first-year and graduate experience. The introduction in the early 1990s of a national course experience survey, followed by monitoring of student engagement over the last decade as well as internal surveys of teaching quality, have provided important evidence for national and institutional stakeholders alike. Systems without such explicit concern for student experience and associated evidence might consider appropriate reform.

- The income-contingent loans scheme would appear to have played a major role in helping students access and succeed in higher education without affordability considerations getting in the way. The need for such a financial instrument depends entirely, of course, on the broader structures the shape higher education funding. It would appear to be an important approach that other countries (and even institutions, as relevant) might consider adopting.

1.8 References


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2 United States of America
Watson Scott Swail, Educational Policy Institute

2.1 Introduction
The United States is often heralded as the pinnacle of global higher education in terms of quality and equality on an international scale. And while it is currently the largest system of higher education in the world, and while it also posts the highest number of top-tier institutions in the world, the reality is that it is a very diverse system that exemplifies all ends of the quality and equity distributions.

During the past several years, international philanthropies, the federal government, and politicians have exalted the importance of higher education. The Lumina Foundation is committed to a goal of reaching a 60 percent graduation rate of “high-quality postsecondary degree or credential” by the year 2025.157 According to Lumina, only 40 percent of adults have achieved this level and there is a need to reach higher in order to compete on an international level. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has provided support to increase graduation rates for all students, especially those who are from minority and low-income backgrounds. The Gates strategies include middle and high school plus postsecondary education.158

The push for more higher education comes from the economic realities that more higher education equates to higher lifetime earnings for graduates (See Exhibit 1). As is clear, those individuals who complete higher levels of education earn more over a lifetime than those who hold lower qualifications.

157 http://www.luminafoundation.org/goal_2025.
To be fair, the data mask the realities of the workforce. The above data are averages, meaning that some graduates do better and some do lesser. While it is certainly true that more people do better with higher education, it is not necessarily because of their higher education, but rather, because of the filtering of the employers who use bachelor’s degrees as the initial filters for hiring, regardless of skill sets. This is a significant issue with education on a global scale, in a workplace that is dedicated on skillsets but still superimposes arbitrary filters by degrees that do not necessarily connote those skillsets.

Regardless, the ultimate thermometer of the utility of the postsecondary sector is how youth and adults alike are able to access, succeed, and enter the workforce. This

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159 U.S. Census Bureau, 2011 American Community Survey. Data developed by author.
policy briefing will provide background, data, and analysis on the US system of higher education as it relates to workforce development and student success.

2.2 Overview of Higher Education System in The United States

Understanding how the higher education system in the United States serves students and society requires a keen understanding of the evolution of the American system. The higher education system in the United States (US) is arguably the most expansive and diverse system in the world. All told, there are over 7,000 postsecondary institutions in the United States. These institutions are categorized by type (e.g., less-than-two-year; two-year; four-year) and sector (e.g., public; private non-profit; private for profit). In 2010-11, 2,951 (41 percent) of the nation’s institutions of higher education were four-year universities, including graduate level; 2,301 (32 percent) were classified as two-year institutions; and 1,926 (27 percent) were less-than-two-year institutions. By sector, 2,043 (28 percent) were publically controlled (i.e., government sponsored); 1,869 (26 percent) private non-profit institutions; and 3,266 (46 percent) private for profit institutions.

Relatively speaking, the US system of higher education is youthful. The first institution, the private, non-profit Harvard University, was created in 1636, followed by the public College of William and Mary in 1693. By the end of the American Civil War (1860s), there were 563 institutions of higher education. In 1862, at the height of the Civil War, the US Congress passed the Morrill Land-Grant Act, which created universities in all states to emphasize military tactics, engineering, and agriculture. Sixty-nine institutions were created via the Morrill Act. In 1890, follow-up to the Morrill Act was passed by Congress, now referred to as the Second Morrill Act. This legislative piece established additional land-grant colleges, and established many of the nation’s Historically Black Colleges and Universities, or HBCUs. By the end of the 19th century, 977 institutions of higher education were in operation. This number doubled by the end of World War II. The establishment of the GI Bill in 1944 increased both the number of institutions and enrollment in higher education.

Enrollment similarly grew in higher education during this time. In 1869-70, there were 63,000 postsecondary students in the US, representing approximately 1.3 percent of

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160 In academic year 2010-11, there were 7,178 Title IV compliant institutions in the US. “Title IV” institutions as defined from Title IV of the federal Higher Education Act (HEA) which provides structure, policy, and regulations for institutions across the US. Institutions need to be Title IV compliant in order to receive federal funds for operation, most importantly of which are student loan and grant funds. If institutions are not compliant, they are unable to offer federal funds to students, thus, cannot function in reality. Data Source: US Department of Education. https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=84; http://nces.ed.gov/datalab/tableslibrary/viewtable.aspx?tableid=8459.


162 http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/Morrill.html.

the 18-24-year-old population at the time.\textsuperscript{164} By the end of the century, this number quadrupled to 264,000 (2.3 percent of the 18-24-year-old population) and by 1950 reached 2.3 million students, or 14.3 percent of the 18-24-year-old population. In 2013, there were 20.4 million students enrolled in higher education in the United States,\textsuperscript{165} or 39.9 percent of the 18-24-year-old population.\textsuperscript{166}

Much of the development of the US higher education system focused on increasing access to higher education for Americans. The Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890 were designed to not only provide higher levels of education for a broader audience, but to ensure an educated citizenry and expand the technological and agricultural sciences. Certainly the second Morrill Act targeted Black students to encourage equity via segregated learning opportunities.

The GI Bill was designed to provide those who fought in the World War to have easy access to higher education in order to learn new skills. As well, it was a policy designed to ease the number of soldiers returning to the work force, which would have pushed the US into another depression.

Other actions also increased access to and enrollments in US higher education. The success of Sputnik in 1957 pushed the US into the space race, resulting in the creation by Congress of the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) in 1958. The NDEA provided student loans, grants, and graduate fellowships to encourage technical studies to strengthen STEM education (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) and increase the overall number of STEM professionals and educators across the country.\textsuperscript{167} In addition, the NDEA provided a massive injection of research funds to institutions of higher education to leverage new technological innovations in space exploration and beyond.

The 1960s were critical to higher education. In 1964, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which included, among other things, desegregation of public schools and language to prohibit discrimination from federally-funded programs or activities, including institutions of higher education. In 1965, Congress also passed the Higher Education Act of 1965. Together, the two acts of legislation ensured more equity in higher education, provided more funds to cover the costs of college, and encouraged new programs supporting college access and success endeavors, including Upward Bound, Talent Search, and the Student Success Services, known more formally as the TRIO programs.

In 1972, the Nixon Administration worked with Congress to reauthorize the Higher Education Act. An important part of the reauthorization was the development of a voucher program that provided funds to students for higher education, reducing the burden of tuition, fees, and cost of living charges. This Basic Educational Opportunity Grant (BEOG) was later renamed the Pell Grant after Rhode Island Senator Claiborne

\textsuperscript{164} http://nces.ed.gov/pubs93/93442.pdf, Table 24, p. 76.
\textsuperscript{165} https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d14/tables/dt14_306.10.asp.
\textsuperscript{166} https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d14/tables/dt14_302.60.asp. Table 302.60. Percentage of 18- to 24-year-olds enrolled in degree-granting institutions, by level of institution and sex and race/ethnicity of student: 1967 through 2013.
Pell, one of the creators of the BEOG.\textsuperscript{168} Although the Pell Grant has lost much of its purchasing power for students, it is still considered the foundation of the federal student aid system.

Up to the 1980s and 90s, much of public policy focused on expanding higher education and encouraging more equitable access to higher education. Even so, data clearly shows that enrollments in higher education were not equitable by income or by race/ethnicity. In 1980, 25.7 percent of 18-to-24-year-olds were enrolled in a degree-granting institution of higher education.\textsuperscript{169} Although there was general equity by gender, students of color had much lower rates of participation than their White peers. Although the percentage of 18-to-24-year-old white students was 27.3 percent, only 19.4 percent of Black students and 16.1 of Hispanic students enrolled in higher education.\textsuperscript{170} And while almost half (49.3 percent) of recent high school completers matriculated to college after graduation, two thirds (65.2 percent) of those from high-income families enrolled in college compared to one third (32.5 percent) of low-income students.\textsuperscript{171}

Flash forward to 2013, and the participation rates showed significant increases for all groups. Approximately 41.6 percent of white students participated in postsecondary education in 2013, compared to 34.2 percent of Black students and 33.8 percent of Hispanic students, 62.3 percent of Asian students, and 31.8 percent of American Indian/Alaskan natives. In 2012, while 66.2 percent of recent high school graduates enrolled in higher education, 80.7 percent of high-income, 64.7 percent of middle-income, and 50.9 percent of low-income students similarly enrolled. While enrollments for all groups increased, the gaps by race/ethnic group and income remain large.

Equity, of course, is not just about who goes to college, but who goes to what level and type of college. Other data, not showcased here, illustrate that low-income students, as well as Blacks, Hispanics, and first-generation students who do go to college are much more likely to attend two-year colleges rather than four-year universities and publics more than private, not-for-profit institutions. Additionally, they are more likely to attend part-time rather than full-time. These and other factors, to be discussed later, impact ability to complete a postsecondary degree, as well as an individual’s job placement and lifetime earnings.

2.3 Moving from Access to Success

None of the current discussion references student outcomes. Rather, only student entry into higher education. As noted, the gaps in access are certainly significant. However, the gaps in educational attainment of those who manage to matriculate to postsecondary education in the United States are stark at best. Of students who enroll in some type of postsecondary education, 49 percent attain a credential within six


\textsuperscript{169} https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d14/tables/dt14_302.60.asp. Table 302.60.

\textsuperscript{170} No data were available at that time for American Indians/Alaskan Natives.

years of matriculation, regardless of type or sector of institution. Alternatively, 51 percent—or half—of students who start college in the US do not finish with a degree within six years of beginning their studies. Fifteen percent of students are still enrolled at that time, but only a small percentage of that group end up completing their program.

For students who initiate their programs at a four-year public institution, 60 percent earn a bachelor’s degree and an additional five percent earn a lower level credential after six years (See Exhibit 2). The graduation rate at private, non-profit four-year institutions is 69 percent and 34 percent at two-year public institutions.

Exhibit 2. Highest degree attained anywhere by 2009 for all 2003-04 beginning postsecondary students, by first institution attended (Six-year completion rates).

As with enrollments, completion is also impacted by a variety of factors, including race/ethnic and income backgrounds. While 54 percent of all white students earn a credential at any institution within six years, only 37 percent of Black students complete and 41 percent of Hispanic students. And while 65 percent of upper quartile income students earn a degree, only 44 percent of low-income students do the same. Gaps persist throughout the system at every point.

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172 Analysis by W. S. Swail using BPS 04/09 data and Powerstats. US Department of Education.
173 Analysis by W. S. Swail using BPS 04/09 data and Powerstats. US Department of Education.
174 Based on family income for dependent students only.
Of course, postsecondary graduation, for those that make it that far, is only a prerequisite to a career opportunity.

2.4 From Graduate to Workforce

For some, the graduation of a “higher education” is meaningful in itself. For others, it is another litmus test in terms of how well those who persevere through additional, postsecondary years, fare in workforce and society.

Exhibit 1 showcased the lifetime income for individuals by educational attainment. However, income is not the only valuation of a postsecondary degree. As illustrated in Exhibit 3, unemployment rates are also lower by education attainment. In 2014, individuals with professional degrees had a low of 1.9 percent compared 3.5 percent of BA grads and 6.0 percent of those with high school diplomas.\(^{175}\)

Exhibit 3. Earnings and unemployment rates by educational attainment, 2014.\(^{176}\)

Another sources of outcomes involves long-term employment by a variety of variables. Exhibit 4 illustrates the employment rates of BA graduates four years after their graduation. One of five graduates (20 percent) are not working and an additional 11 percent are employed and going to school, leaving 69 percent of graduates that are fully employed. Students who attend public four-year institutions, are younger, white, and male are more likely to be employed than their peers.

\(^{175}\) http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep_chart_001.htm.

Individuals with an earned Ph.D. fare no better than the average BA illustrated above. According to data from the National Science Foundation’s Survey of Earned  


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**Exhibit 4. Employment of BA graduates four years later, 2012.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment Sector</th>
<th>Employed only</th>
<th>Both employed and enrolled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For-profit 4-year</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private nonprofit 4-year</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public 4-year</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Employed only</th>
<th>Both employed and enrolled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-STEM major</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEM major</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age at Award</th>
<th>Employed only</th>
<th>Both employed and enrolled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30 or older</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24-29</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 or younger</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Employed only</th>
<th>Both employed and enrolled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Employed only</th>
<th>Both employed and enrolled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Employed only</th>
<th>Both employed and enrolled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>69</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Doctorates, less than two-thirds of recent doctoral degree completers had a firm job commitment (62.7 percent) in 2013, the lowest rate over two decades.

Exhibit 5. Percentage of recent Ph.D.s who have a job commitment upon their degree completion, 1993 to 2013.\textsuperscript{178}

And finally, data from PayScale\textsuperscript{179} based on 68,000 participants chart illustrates majors where respondents felt they were either most underemployed or least underemployed. Those who felt the least underemployed were almost exclusively STEM occupations, including Engineering (6 of the top 10 positions), physics, geology, and mathematics. Law was the only non-STEM category on the list. Individuals who felt the most underemployed included criminal justice, business management, health care, and "general studies" graduates, among others.

\textsuperscript{178} Source: June, Audrey Williams (2014, December 5). Doctoral Degrees Increased Last Year, but Career Opportunities Remained Bleak. The Chronicle of Higher Education. Data from the National Science Foundation's Survey of Earned Doctorates.

\textsuperscript{179} \url{http://www.payscale.com/}. 
While those with bachelor’s and other postsecondary degrees are more and perhaps better employed than others, these data beg the question of how much higher education is necessary or required.

2.5 Barriers to College and Career Success

There are a number of known barriers to college access, success, and employment in the workforce. This section will briefly identify and discuss some of the more important barriers that limit future success for youth and students.

2.5.1 College Affordability

If the United States is the most diverse system of higher education in the world, it is also the costliest in terms of taxpayer funds and private, student/parent costs or prices. In 2014-15, tuition and fee charges at public four-year universities averaged $9,139 (See Exhibit 7). Charges at two-year colleges was $3,347 and four-year privates was $32,231. Understand that these figures do not include room, board,

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Exhibit 6. Underemployment of college majors.\textsuperscript{180}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most underemployed majors</th>
<th>Least underemployed majors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CRIMINAL JUSTICE</td>
<td>CIVIL &amp; ENVIRONMENTAL ENGINEERING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BUSINESS MANAGEMENT &amp; ADMINISTRATION</td>
<td>AEROSPACE ENGINEERING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEALTH CARE ADMINISTRATION</td>
<td>COMPUTER ENGINEERING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GENERAL STUDIES</td>
<td>CHEMICAL ENGINEERING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOCIOLOGY</td>
<td>LAW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENGLISH LANGUAGE &amp; LITERATURE</td>
<td>PHYSICS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRAPHIC DESIGN</td>
<td>MECHANICAL ENGINEERING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIBERAL ARTS</td>
<td>ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDUCATION</td>
<td>GEOLGY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSYCHOLOGY</td>
<td>MATHEMATICS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


books, and other sundries related to attending postsecondary education residentially or as a commuter student. For residential students, another $10-12,000/year is necessary to pay for rent plus room and board.

The sticker price of higher education is likely to increase dramatically over the next several years. As Exhibit 7 illustrates, tuition and fee charges at four-year public institutions will double, in real dollars, within 17 years to $18,586. Two-year public institutions will double to $6,660 in 23 years, or by 2037-38, and four-year private institutions will increase at the slowest rate, doubling in 27 years to $62,039.

Exhibit 7. Tuition and Fee History and Forecast, 1978-79 to 2044-45, by Sector (in 2014 constant dollars)\(^\text{182}\)

This high pricing of college results in an increasing level of debt burden on students. The average debt for students attending four-year public institutions in 2012 was $25,550. At four-year private, non-profit institutions the averages was $32,300 and at four-year, private for-profit institutions $39,950\(^\text{183}\). This debt load on students and families has increased steadily over time. As illustrated in Exhibit 8, 2012 posted an average debt load of $29,400 for four-year college students. This is an increase of 25 percent from four years previous (2008), 57 percent from 2004.

\(^{182}\) Analysis by W. S. Swail using data from the College Board’s Trends in College Pricing 2014.
\(^{183}\) Quick Facts About Student Debt (March 2014). The Institute for College Access & Success.
2.5.2 Higher Education Funding

Funding for public higher education comes through several avenues, including direct state subsidies, federal research and support grants and student financial aid, tuition and fee charges paid for by students and parents, and other private funds secured directly by institutions and used via institutional aid to students as well as for direct costs to the institution. Private, non-profit institutions are privy to all of the above with the exception of state subsidies, which are targeted, in almost all cases, toward public institutions. For-profit institutions acquire student aid funds, but do not receive other subsidies or taxpayer funds.

In 2011-12, total postsecondary revenues were $317 billion at public institutions of higher education, an increase of 29 percent since 2005-06. 21 percent of this funding came from tuition and fee charges, up from 17 percent in 2005-06. Federal funds also increased from 14 to 17 percent during that period. However, state funding fell five percent from 27 to 22 percent. This diminishing support from state governments has been a significant issue for institutions, with a negative correlation between the decrease in state funding to the increase in tuition and fees passed on to individuals.

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184 Quick Facts About Student Debt (March 2014). The Institute for College Access & Success.
185 U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Spring 2006 through Spring 2013, Finance and Enrollment components. (This table was prepared January 2014.). Table 333.10.
Some states, like Colorado and Arizona, have implemented performance-based funding models.

Just this spring, the Arizona legislature cut higher education funding by 14 percent and completely eliminated funding to several community colleges. Wisconsin, Illinois, and several other states are also awaiting large reductions in public higher education funding, forcing public colleges and universities to act more like their private, non-profit counterparts. In addition, most states are now using performance-based funding models, which look at completion rates, degrees awarded, and other institutional quality measure to determine funding to institutions.

There is expectation that tuition and fee charges will continue to rise significantly as state support declines precipitously.

### 2.5.3 College Preparation

Several organizations and researchers point to the lack of preparation of students for college-level course work, reducing their ability to complete. According to ACT, one third (35 percent) of recent high school graduates did not meet the ACT College Readiness Benchmark in English in 2013, nor did 56 percent of students in reading, 46 percent in mathematics, and 64 percent in science.

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186 U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Spring 2006 through Spring 2013, Finance and Enrollment components. (This table was prepared January 2014.). Table 333.10.


One third (36.1 percent) of all students who started their postsecondary education in 2007-08 were required to take at least one remediation course during their first year, up from 34.7 in 2003-04. Students who started at a two-year public institution were more likely to take a remedial course (41.8 percent) compared to those at four-year public institutions (38.9 percent at non-doctoral schools and 25.0 at doctoral-granting institutions). The estimated cost associated with remedial education exceeds $7 billion each year. Of those who take required remedial courses, only 22.3 percent at the two-year level and 36.8 percent at the four-year level complete the associated college-level course requirement.

2.6 Public Policies Supporting Student Success

The federal government and the Administration, largely through the US Department of Education, provide leadership on a variety of issues that impact college access, success, and workforce placement.

2.6.1 Common Core State Standards

The National Governors Association (NGA), in partnership with the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), launched a standards movement with the aim of ensuring that high school graduates are both workforce ready and college ready by creating standardized educational requirements on a national level. The standards

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192 See http://www.corestandards.org/.
were adopted by 44 of the 50 US states, plus the District of Columbia (DC). The hope is that these standards will provide more transparency in what students need to know and have achieved by high school graduation, ensuring that they are prepared for future educational and workforce options.

There have been critics to the standards, on educational and political lines. Alaska, Indiana, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Texas, and Virginia did not adopt the standards, all of which were governed by Republican Administrations who suggest that these “national standards” impede on states rights in education. Although the standards are not federally-developed or controlled, the US Department of Education did use the standards as a measure in their Race for the Top Program which provides special funds to school districts around the country for developing cutting-edge educational reforms. Still, many people perceive the standards as being part of the federal government, and, perhaps, as part of the Obama Administration. Neither is true, but the perceptions are palpable.

2.6.2 Tax Credits

In 1997, The Clinton Administration led the passage of the Taxpayers Relief Act (TRA) of 1997. In addition to the introduction of a child tax credit of $400, the bill also created the Hope credit (now called the American Opportunity Tax Credit, which provides a credit of up to $2,500 per student per year for “qualified tuition and related expenses” to be deducted from an individual’s tax liability. Up to 40 percent of the credit is refundable, meaning that even if the taxpayer had no tax liability, they would receive that amount of money in the form of a cheque. The original bill did not have a refundable component. The credit does phase out for individuals with incomes above $60,000 or $120,000 for those filing jointly. A “Lifetime Learning Credit” provided in the legislation allows for a 20 percent credit on the first $10,000 of “qualified tuition and expenses” to be deducted from a taxpayers tax liability. These two tax credits were aimed primarily at middle-income families who have tax liability. Critics to the tax credits complain that the tax code is already too complicated and many individuals who could take advantage of the education tax credits would not do so because they will miss the deduction. Others complain that the credit would act like a subsidy for colleges and encourage tuition increases at two-year institutions. California, a state with notoriously low tuition charges (at the time $300/year for community college) argued that this is unfair for their state policy, and other states were essentially being subsidized for having public policies that made tuition more costly for students and families.

Other tax-related provisions support for college, including employer tuition assistance, where the first $5,250 in tuition assistance from an employer is tax-free for individuals, as opposed to being taxed as income. Students can also deduct student loan interest up to $2,500 each year.

2.6.3 Free Community College

In his State of the Union Address in January 2015, President Obama took a page from former President Bill Clinton’s book and announced his desire to make two-year public community college free to students. However, President Obama’s tactic did not use the tax code, as discussed above, to reduce the cost of a higher education. The America’s College Promise proposal would provide vouchers to students to attend public institutions at a cost of approximately $60 billion over the next decade. The White House estimates that over 9 million students could benefit and save an average of $3,800 in tuition and fee charges per year.\(^{195}\)

While there is widespread support at the notion of free tuition, there is also criticism about whether this type of policy is regressive in nature by providing taxpayer funds to subsidize tuition and fee charges for those who can afford it, rather than just those at the lower end of the income distribution.\(^{196}\) Given that the 2016 Presidential race has now begun in earnest, there is little chance that the President’s goal will become law.

2.6.4 College Quality Control

Institutions of higher education are governed, in part by accreditation agencies, which, on a regular basis, require institutions to conduct peer reviews and self-evaluation studies to ensure that the institution is of significant quality. Although the federal government is not actively involved in the accreditation process, it does mandate that institutions must be reviewed by an accredited organization. In total, there are 52 national accreditors.\(^{197}\)

Quality control is also governed through college rating systems. Although there are several college rating systems in use around the world, including US News and World Report (US), MacLean’s (Canada), Times Higher Education Rankings, the QS World University Rankings, and the Shanghai Jiao Tong University’s Academic Ranking, the US Department of Education announced in 2014 that it would create a college-rating system for approximately 5,000 colleges and universities in the US. The ratings will be based, at least in part, on graduation and retention rates, student loan debt, and enrollment and graduation of low-income and first-generation students.\(^{198}\) Specially, the Department says that their rankings will use:

- **Access**, such as percentage of students receiving Pell grants
- **Affordability**, such as net price and loan debt


Outcomes, such as graduation and transfer rates, earnings of graduates, and completion of advanced degrees.\(^{199}\)

The purpose of the system is to provide systematic and transparent details on postsecondary institutions for consumers. As well, the Administration hopes that the system will encourage colleges and universities to improve their equity and affordability records. Regardless, the Obama Administration is calling the effort a work in progress and emphasizes that it is not intended to be “a comprehensive rating system.”\(^{200}\) The first draft of the rating system is expected in summer 2015.

2.6.5 Gainful Employment

The issue of “gainful employment” has raised significant discussion and legislative action by the Obama Administration over the last several years. The issue is based on poor employment rates of graduates from colleges and universities as well as high debt levels for these students. The actions of the Obama Administration are targeted primarily at for-profit institutions, which use a large proportion of federal Pell Grant and student loan funds to help students pay very high tuition and fee charges.

Rules were first put in place in 2011, requiring for-profit or “career colleges” to better prepare students for gainful employment. The rules are as follows:

1. At least 35 percent of former students must be repaying their loans and not be in default
2. The estimated annual loan payment of a typical graduate cannot exceed 30 percent of his or her discretionary incomes;
3. Or the estimated annual loan payment of a typical graduate does not exceed 12 percent of his or her total earnings.\(^{201}\)

In October 2014, the Department issues new draft regulations to strengthen gainful employment.\(^{202}\) The new regulations would require institutions to ensure that average debt-to-earnings ratios for completers is 8 percent of their total income or 20 percent or less of their discretionary income on student debt payments, and that no more than 30 percent of students who completed a program would default on their loan payments. If institutions or programs fail to meet these requirements, they risk losing their Title IV eligibility, meaning students cannot use federal grants and loans at those institutions.

The implementation of gainful employment rules in 2011 has had a large impact on the for-profit college industry, resulting in the closing of hundreds of schools, most notable being Corinthian Colleges, which closed 30 campuses plus their online division, displacing over 16,000 students effective April 27, 2015.\(^{203}\)


Although the legislation is aimed at for-profit colleges and is designed to curb “bad actors” in the industry, ensure that students have realistic job and career options, and also have reasonable student debt loads, there is expectation that public and private non-profit institutions will also be impacted in the future by similarly designed legislation. With total student debt now exceeding $1 trillion—surpassing US credit card debt—and a majority of BA holders with debts averaging $29,400, there is mounting pressure on bringing some type of gainful employment provision to the rest of the higher education arena. A recent analysis by the American Enterprise Institute found that one quarter of Texas bachelor’s programs fall would be considered at risk using the gainful employment rules focused on for-profit schools.  

2.6.6 Pre-Paid Tuition and College Savings Plans
Almost all US states have what are referred to as 529 plans: special tuition purchasing and savings plans with tax incentives and benefits. The first type of 529 is a pre-paid tuition program, which allows individuals, typically parents, to pre-pay their child’s tuition fees in advance, locking in the current price as opposed to the price that it would become with inflation and other adjustments. Only 11 states still offer these programs and, of those, only 5 still guarantee their prepaid plans. This is because most states found out that the program was a negative loss due to the inflationary pressures on tuition and fees due to many of the issues discussed previously in this chapter, including declining state support for higher education.

The second type of 529 program focuses on college savings plans, treating these plans much like Roth Individual Retirement Accounts (IRAs). These allow parents and other to put after tax funds into a specialty account that can be used for qualified education expenses. These funds are usually managed like a mutual fund and have earnings that rise above the rise of tuition and fee increases.

2.7 Institutional Practices Supporting Student Success

2.7.1 Academic and Career Advising and Job Placement
Institutions of higher education provide academic and career advising to students in order to ensure students are on track. According to the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA), advisors are there to “strengthen the importance, dignity, potential, and unique nature of each individual within the academic setting.” This includes helping students develop a realistic self-perception and create realistic goals. Strong academic advising at campus is linked to higher student persistence and graduation rates, and students who undertake structured academic advising on a 

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204 https://studentaid.ed.gov/about/announcements/corinthian/faq.
regular basis are more likely to persist than students who do not. Large variation in academic advising reduces the efficacy of programs, and some institutions are not known for effective advising programs.

More colleges are developing career service centers (CSCs) for graduating students, providing such services as mock interviews, resume critique, employer databases, career counseling, internship/externship placement, assessment testing, resume posting, job listings, and job search training.

Effective CSCs should do the following for and with students:
- Develop a career path based on their skills and interests.
- Obtain educational and occupational information to aid in developing this path.
- Select appropriate academic programs and other opportunities that maximize future educational and career options.
- Prepare to find an internship or occupation after college by developing job search and presentational skills.
- Gain experience through extracurricular activities, community service, research projects, employment and other aspects of the college experience.
- Network with alumni, employers, organizations, and other groups that offer potential professional opportunities.
- Utilize technology to enhance career development.
- Find employment or a graduate opportunity that fits their goals.
- Prepare to manage their careers after college.

Exhibit 11 below illustrates the evolution of career service centers from the 1990s to today. To note is the importance in a global vision and use of web-based technologies to bring career information to students in a more efficient model.

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209 Ibid.
### Exhibit 11. Trends in Career Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>1990s</th>
<th>2000s</th>
<th>2010-2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dimension</td>
<td>Networking Proactive/Interactive</td>
<td>Social Networking Interactive/Superactive</td>
<td>Global Networking Hyperactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Purpose</td>
<td>Information Networking</td>
<td>Educate &amp; Prepare</td>
<td>Educate for a Global Marketplace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Delivery</td>
<td>Self-Help (Physical Library)</td>
<td>Counseling and Networking Web-Based</td>
<td>Web-Based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typical Name</td>
<td>Career Center</td>
<td>Career Services</td>
<td>Career Cyber Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constituents Served</td>
<td>Students/Alumni, Employers and Faculty/Staff</td>
<td>Students/Alumni, Parents, Employers and Faculty/Staff</td>
<td>Students/Alumni, Parents, Employers, Faculty/Staff and the Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Orientation</td>
<td>Information Management</td>
<td>Typology and Eclectic</td>
<td>Typology and Planned Happenstance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff Identity</td>
<td>Organizer</td>
<td>Counselor/Advisor</td>
<td>Educator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer Relations</td>
<td>Strategic</td>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>Experiential Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment Focus</td>
<td>Program Participation and Revenues</td>
<td>Integrated Technology, Satisfaction Surveys, Demographic Data and Revenues</td>
<td>Post Graduate Tracking, Global Competency and Revenues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Of course, the more efforts that occur before postsecondary education, the more likely that success can take shape early. The National office for School Counselor Advocacy (NOSCA)\(^{211}\) suggest that schools provide these eight components of college and career readiness counseling in elementary, middle, and high schools:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Elementary</th>
<th>Middle</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>College Aspirations</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Planning for College and Career Readiness</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrichment and Extracurricular Engagement</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College and Career Exploration and Selection Processes</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College and Career Assessments</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Affordability Planning</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College and Career Admission Processes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition from High School to College Enrollment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.7.2 Remediation/Developmental Course Work

Remediation has been a growing concern for colleges and universities. As noted earlier, one third of all college students are required to take remedial course work before starting their actual college-level requisite courses at a significant cost. While state public policy focused on ways to ameliorate the need for remediation through higher standards and better teaching in K-12 schools, institutions of higher education are looking at ways to improve their remedial courses so that students can succeed and move on to college level course work. The National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) encourages legislators to implement preventative strategies at the K12 level to better prepare students for higher education. As well, they suggest using better assessments early for high school students so that they understand where their strengths and weaknesses are.\(^{212}\)

The NCSL also encourages the development of innovative remedial education by using accelerating remedial courses, utilizing learning communities, providing extra student supports, and combining remedial course work with job training.


2.7.3 Better and More Flexible Teaching/Learning

US institutions of higher education have moved from teaching toward research over the years, creating a philosophical debate about the purpose of higher education. In the end, students only succeed with better teaching and better facilities. Supporting great teaching is an important strategy for colleges and universities, but not all provide support for the professional development of their instructional staff. More institutions are building teacher centers. Chickering and Gamson (1987) suggest that good practice in undergraduate education should include the following:

- encourages contact between students and faculty,
- develops reciprocity and cooperation among students,
- encourages active learning,
- gives prompt feedback,
- emphasizes time on task,
- communicates high expectations, and
- respects diverse talents and ways of learning.

There is an increasing push towards competency-based education (CBE) programs, courses, and systems, pushed in part by the importance of CBE for online and other distributed educational formats. Competency-based education programs require all components of a program to be broken down into clearly-defined learning outcomes that are measurable and demonstrable. Employers value this type of education because there is a transparency of what is learning and what students can actually do. A bachelor’s degree says much about a student’s ability to complete a course framework, but it does not necessarily showcase what the student can actually do or think. It only says that they took a certainly number of courses in a variety of areas that formulate a college degree. It does not valuate how well, beyond grade point average (GPA), a student actually can do in practice.

Competency-based education has also given rise to the ideas of stackable credentials and badges. For several years, people have been able to get certificates in a variety of areas. Perhaps the best example of certifications is in the computer science industry, where workers need to earn a variety of certifications, such as IT management, Microsoft Developer or SQL, .NET, Cisco Certifications, A+, Linus, and hundreds of other certifications that matter greatly in the IT business. These certification can be short- or medium-term courses that, when the student masters the content, is provided the certificate and then notes that on his or her resume.

Recent discussion of stackable credentials results in a system that is less like a formal degree program and more like an arrangement of precise skillsets and knowledge that build up to form an expertise that is notable in the industry. The idea of stackable credentials allows students to build up their expertise. For some, the idea of a full two- or four-years toward a degree is either implausible, unaffordable, or just too...
unmanageable. Stackable credentials allows short-term goals to be met that, when put together, build a longer-term, more manageable approach to an education. Another advantage of a stackable credential is that the various credentials, themselves, can evolve and change quickly with a volatile economy and technological change. Whereas it is unlike a four-year bachelor's program to change much during the course of study, it is more likely, especially in both technological and health care fields, that changes will definitively change within a few years. A more fluid, evolving, and flexible approach through stackable credentials may provide more opportunities for people and also reward industry and society with quicker evolution in parallel with societal needs.

The push back against stackable credentials is the belief that degrees and "letters" matter greatly to business and industry. However, people are taking a more serious look at other learning opportunities.

2.7.4 Change in Programs — Time to Degree

There has been discussion about shortening the Bachelor’s degree to three years from four. Trachtenberg and Kauvar, in their 2010 New York Times Op-Ed, suggest that the college experience “may be idyllic, but it’s also wasteful and expensive, both for students and institutions.” The argument, in this case, isn’t about lessening the number of credits earned, but compacting them in a year-round basis. Rather than taking summers off, students would enroll in three semesters per year. Over the course of a typical four-year degree, where students take courses in eight semesters, two semesters would be taken in the summers of the first two years. Thus, students could graduate by April/May/June of their third year, the traditional “junior” year in American higher education. Some individuals and organizations have come out against the plan, including the American Association of Colleges & Universities (AAC&U), saying that only “27 percent of students at public institutions and 48 percent at private institutions finish in four years,” thus the focus should be on improving those numbers, not focusing on reducing time to degree below the norm. The issue isn’t necessarily either/or colleges could provide accelerated programs while also providing traditional four-year experiences for students.

At the time of the Op-Ed piece, three year programs were already in place at many four-year institutions, including Arcadia University, Ball State University, Judson College, Lake Forest College, Mount Olive College, Seattle University, Southern New Hampshire University, University of Houston at Victoria, Waldorf College, Bates College, Florida State University, Hartwick College, Lipscomb University, Manchester College, Southern Oregon University, the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and Western Illinois University. One year later, additional programs were installed at Grace College and Seminary, Baldwin-Wallace College, Lesley University, and St. John’s University.

Additional conversations about shoring graduate programs, including law and medicine, are also being discussed.\(^{219}\)

### 2.7.5 P-20 Models

As noted in the introduction, the US system of higher education has evolved over almost 400 years. It has not, however, evolved in very much congruence with the K12 system. During the past 20 years, there has been great effort to align the two “systems” such that there is more coordination, alignment, and coherence. One of the features of the Common Core State Standards described previously is that they are designed to align the outcomes of high school with the entry requirements of college. While one might think that this alignment is a natural outcome of the two systems, it is surely not and has been a difficult issue for many years.

P-20 systems, also known as P-16 systems or pathways, are an attempt to create a seamless systemic vision from pre-kindergarten to and through postsecondary education, inclusive of two-year, four-year, and graduate/professional education. With greater alignment comes more efficiencies and, arguably, much better education delivery and student achievement and satisfaction.

Many states have effective P-20 systems. The Education Commission of the States (ECS) conducted a 50-state analysis of P-20 systems across the country, documenting the when the system was established by law, the title of the authority (e.g., P-20 Board of Education; Education Task Force; P-16 Council; etc.), and a description and link to additional information.\(^{220}\)

### 2.8 Conclusions

The system of education in the United States is large and diverse. The essence of the system is to provide a level playing field for all students, regardless of age, race/ethnic group, socio-economic status, or other status that are often used to segregate rather than bring together. Regardless of the efforts of federal, state, and local governments, as well as schools and institutions, success in doing so is limited. There are still large gaps in access to and success through higher education and the workforce. While the US is still seen as the land of opportunity, opportunities are difficult and equity is not always available.

There are many barriers to better education and better jobs. A strong educational background and upbringing are highly desired but sometimes difficult to achieve. People from low-income or first-generation backgrounds are much less likely to have an equal chance of attending high-achieving schools, matriculation to decent colleges, completing their studies, and finding rewarding, well-paying jobs.

The cost of higher education remains a particularly distributing barrier to higher education for a wider swath of America every year. More students are taking on more

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\(^{219}\) [http://www.physiciansweekly.com/shorten-medical-school-3-years/](http://www.physiciansweekly.com/shorten-medical-school-3-years/);

\(^{220}\) [http://b5.caspio.com/dp.asp?AppKey=b7f93000695b3d0d5abb4b68bd14&id=a0y70000000CbqOAAS](http://b5.caspio.com/dp.asp?AppKey=b7f93000695b3d0d5abb4b68bd14&id=a0y70000000CbqOAAS).
debt, with less of them completing than ever before. In truth, that combination of more debt and less graduates is particularly damaging because they are the ones, in the end, that will not have the capacity to pay back their student loans.

As noted, there are several things that the various levels of government have either done or are in the process of doing in an attempt to reduce these barriers, including reducing the ultimate price either through the President’s desire to eliminate tuition at community colleges, providing additional tax credits to decrease the overall effort from families, and encouraging colleges and universities to either reduce or at least limit their increases in tuition and fee charges. This is difficult, of course, in light of the decreases in state funds to support higher education, which have resulted in large increases in tuition and fee charges paid by students and parents.

Providing programs to encourage college savings for parents is important, as, in the end, their efforts will be essential to whether their child can go to college and gain a successful career.

A continuation on improving institutional quality and the ability of institutions to not only graduate, but help place graduates in the workforce is an important strategy for policymakers and institutions. The further alignment of high school, postsecondary education, and the workforce based on clear and transparent expectations is also critical to helping students work toward their goals.

At the institutional level, it is imperative that institutions work to improve their content delivery through more professional development and a keener eye on how students learn. Further investigation and use of cutting-edge technologies, a review of how long education programs are or need to be, and a look at competency-based programming and stackable credentials will certainly be important as the global community and economy continue to make the world not only a little smaller, but a whole lot more competitive.
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