

Globalization Broadens Higher Education

An interview with Ellen Hazelkorn

ELLEN HAZELKORN HOLDS A JOINT APPOINTMENT as policy adviser to the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and director of the Higher Education Policy Research Unit (HEPRU) at the Dublin Institute of Technology in Ireland. She is also president of EAIR (European Higher Education Society) and chairperson of the EU Expert Group on Science Education (2014), and on the Management Board of the ESRC/HEFCE Centre for Global Higher Education (CGHE), at the Institute of Education, UCL.

Hazelkorn has worked as higher education policy consultant and specialist with international organizations and governments for over 15 years, and regularly undertakes strategic and research evaluations and peer review assessments for European and national research/scientific councils and universities. She has more than 20 years senior experience in higher education, holding positions as vice president of research and enterprise, and dean of the Graduate Research School (2008–2014), and vice president and founding dean of the Faculty of Applied Arts, Dublin Institute of Technology (1995–2008).

She has authored/co-authored over 80 peer-reviewed articles, policy briefs, books and book chapters e.g., on higher education policy in addition to Irish politics and society; digital technologies, gender, work practices and the cultural industries; relations between the media and the state. She has written several books, including *Developing Research in New Institutions and Rankings and The Reshaping of Higher Education: The Battle for World-Class Excellence*. She edited *Global Rankings and the Geo-Politics of Higher Education*, and co-authored *The Civic University: Meeting the Leadership and Management Challenges* and *The Impact and Future of Arts and Humanities Research*; she also has numerous forthcoming publications.

IE: You look at higher education through multiple lenses—from the perspective of a policy adviser to the Irish Higher Education Authority, a former university leader, and a researcher. What do you see as the major effects of globalization on higher education?

HAZELKORN: No matter which lens I look through and where I look, there is little doubt that globalization has broadened the educational mission, has simultaneously diversified and stratified the landscape, and transformed individual universities and colleges. Policymakers, and institutions, ignore this dimension at their peril.

Traditionally seen as a local or national institution, higher education today has global reach and significance; its success is intricately tied to its nation-state and vice versa. At its simplest, higher education requires public investment to succeed, usually measured in terms of GDP but evidenced also through genuine political and societal commitment. In return, as a producer of graduates and new knowledge, higher education acts as a major contributor to/for social and economic development and prosperity as well as being a magnet for mobile capital and talent. The latter is increasingly important as countries seek to strengthen their knowledge-intensive economies



Ellen Hazelkorn

at a time of demographic decline.

At the same time, the demand for higher education is escalating. There are currently 196 million higher education students worldwide, likely to rise to nearly 430 million by 2030. Developed economies are rapidly moving beyond traditional definitions of “mass” and “universal” systems—whereby 50 percent of the population were enrolled—to a situation where, in my view, nearly 70 percent will be enrolled in postsecondary education.

Yet, this growth is ambiguous. In 2005 young people were 13.7 percent of the population in developed countries, but their share is expected to fall to 10.5 percent by 2050. This presents another set of challenges.

For Ireland, a small open economy now emerging from a disastrous economic policy that plunged the country into one of the world’s worst recessions, its ability to navigate the choppy waters of global competition necessitates higher education engaging purposively with business and meeting societal demands. The financial room for maneuver, however, is extremely limited. Europe faces similar pressures. As a consequence of the global economic crisis, Europe 2020, the European Commission strategic plan proposed in 2010, has deliberately sought to harness higher education to the needs of economic growth and recovery. Other countries have taken similar action, with implications for education and research.

These issues can be theorized as a researcher, but they have very practical meaning and application requiring hard decisions. Given the importance of higher education and public investment in it, increasing interest in assessing and measuring its performance, pro-

ductivity, impact, and relevance is not surprising.

IE: In your new book, *Rankings and the Reshaping of Higher Education: The Battle for World-Class Excellence*, you address several limitations of international ranking systems of higher education institutions. What are some of the positive and negative ramifications for individuals, institutions, nations, and the future of

“internationalization” when rankings are used to drive change?

HAZELKORN: Global university rankings have made global competition more visible through publication of a world-order league table. A whole language has been devised, and national and institutional strategies have been revised, with the goal of achieving world-class status. Some governments are able to invest heavily while others are more restrained.

At the institutional level, the gap is widening between well-funded elite (highly) selective research universities and public mass recruiting higher edu-

cation institutions, with implications for their countries, regions, and societies. Two noticeable outcomes are 1) the consolidation of historic European and private U.S. universities among the top 20, and 2) the rise of Asian, mostly Chinese, universities that now appear among the top 500 universities. This is leading to both greater global stratification and growing multipolarity; in other words, more national players in the global landscape.

At the level of nation, developed countries usually regard global rankings as a visible challenge to their hitherto dominant geopoliti-



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cal position. In contrast, middle-income and developing countries view them more benignly. They can be a useful accountability tool, especially in societies and for institutions where such culture and practices are weak or immature, and a management instrument.

At the level of the individual, students are major users of rankings, with 80 percent of undergraduate and postgraduate students having a high interest in rankings. Other research shows a complex and strengthening dialectic between academic reputation, quality, and ranking. In other words, perceptions of institutional reputation are increasingly mediated through rankings.

At the level of internationalization, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) suggests a strong correlation between countries that perform strongly in global rankings and market share of international students.¹

Research also shows that rankings drive and influence institutional strategies—with some institutions deliberately realigning performance indicators and other metrics to meet those promoted by rankings. This includes international recruitment but not internationalization when it is understood as “global learning.” Whether we like them or not, rankings are likely to continue to influence decisionmaking because of their impact on key stakeholder groups: students and governments, and employers.

IE: What factors outside of the university might influence the success of internationalization? Does the university have a responsibility to address any of these factors?

HAZELKORN: Nowadays what were once considered issues or problems have been elevated to the status of global societal challenges. Recent politico-religious movements (e.g., jihadi extremism), health (e.g., Ebola), and migration (e.g., Mediterranean migration) illustrate the extent to which local or regional issues easily and quickly acquire global implications while climate change shows, conversely, how global issues carry significant local effects; e.g., global warming with knock-on effects for food, health, water, and the ecosystem. Because few issues can be considered in an isolated form, higher education has a duty to adopt a holistic approach to internationalizing the campus and the student experience.

The real challenge comes with operationalizing this in a meaningful way—appropriate to growing institutional diversity and diversity

among the student cohort. It is unrealistic to suggest all students should have an international experience, when in the United States, for example, 40 percent of students are “new-traditional” (e.g., over 25 years and worker-learners). A concern is that cultural exchange will remain socioeconomically determined.

Yet, because resolving societal challenges is complex and often trumps parochial concerns, it necessitates a well-informed citizenry. Ultimately, the challenges of feeding our population, controlling disease, generating sufficient energy, supplying adequate water, and limiting (if not reversing) the dangers of global climate change do not stop at national boundaries—or at our garden gate. They require deep understanding and collaborative actions for enduring change, at local, regional, national, European, and international levels. This is the proper role for internationalization.



Quality and excellence are now key drivers impacting on and affecting higher education, nationally and globally. While higher education has always been competitive, globalization and the emergence of global rankings have placed consideration of higher education quality within a wider comparative and international framework.



IE: The world of global rankings and global learning may soon collide in the OECD AHELO (Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes) project, which aims to compare the learning outcomes of students of higher educational institutions worldwide. What is your impression of the project?

HAZELKORN: Quality and excellence are now key drivers impacting on and affecting higher education, nationally and globally. While higher education has always been competitive, globalization and the emergence of global rankings have placed consideration of higher education quality within a wider comparative and international framework.

But quality is a complex concept. There are probably two key dimensions or purposes underlying national and institutional concern about quality: the first is to show that qualifications are of high quality and are internationally comparable and transferable, while the other is ensuring that government or students (or other stakeholders) are getting value for money.

AHELO is interesting on several fronts. First, it is arguably a counter-weight to global rankings that focus exclusively on elite universities and research. So it is unashamedly about teaching and learning. Whether we like AHELO or not is almost immaterial—the horse has bolted, and some form of international tool will emerge. Several governments are working on localized teaching and learning initiatives, e.g., the UK Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF).

Second, AHELO demonstrates the importance of quality at the global level. As we learned in 2008, the world economy is so interconnected that flaws in one part of the system can have devastating impacts elsewhere. We rely on mobility of smart ambitious students, graduates, and professionals to fuel and sustain economic growth. This requires academic accreditation, and quality can be guaranteed around the world. This has transformed quality from something previously led by the academy and operated through peer review into something driven and regulated by government—and increasingly international organizations.

IE: What do you think are the likely trends and challenges affecting higher education?

HAZELKORN: Recent developments suggest we are likely to witness changes in the model of mass higher education that has predominated in most developed countries. Such changes may include:

- Greater emphasis on diversified postsecondary systems but with stronger hierarchical and stratified institutional differentiation driven by cost, demand, and competitive factors;
- Shift from higher education as promoter of critical thinking and unbounded curiosity to stronger emphasis on employability, vocational-oriented programming, and application-focused and relevant research;

- Increasing focus on talent, and recruitment of domestic and international high achievers, aligned with increasing status and reputation of some universities;
- Move toward greater government steering of higher education and research system, including aligning higher education more closely to the national objectives as part of a new societal contract; and
- As public funding for higher education and research comes under further pressure, students, employers and other private/corporates are likely to take on a greater share of the costs. This also includes a growing role for private/for-profit higher education and other models.

These developments have positive and negative implications. The more I travel, and talk and work with higher education institutions, governments, and international organizations, the more evident it is that we face the same challenges even though the context may differ. This presents plenty of opportunity for sharing experiences and lessons, and for undertaking research—and assessment and evaluation of intended and unintended consequences. Policy matters—because the choices we make can and do make an impact. **IE**

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