International comparisons in postgraduate education: access and widening participation

Report for HEFCE: International comparisons in postgraduate education: quality, access and employment outcomes
Gillian Clarke and Ingrid Lunt    Published online 09.09.14 at: 
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Report summary

• Context for PG education in each country, focusing on HE environment and geo-political situation
• Three themes: quality; access; employment outcomes
• Case studies on seven countries
• Main report: how England performs compared with the other countries
• Conclusions and strengths and challenges by country
Numbers of PGT and PGR students by country, compared with total population and numbers of universities, showing PG as % of all HE awards (Table 1, p.8)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Number of Universities</th>
<th>Annual number of HE awards</th>
<th>Annual number of PG awards (as proportion of total HE awards)</th>
<th>Proportion of total number of PG awards (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>20,000,000</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>299,474</td>
<td>94,456 (31.5%)</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>54,000,000</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>660,925</td>
<td>217,915 (33.0%)</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>82,300,000</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>307,244</td>
<td>85,367 (27.7%)</td>
<td>31.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>1,270,000,000</td>
<td>659</td>
<td>20,706,755</td>
<td>2,653,344 (12.8%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>5,000,000</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>40,568</td>
<td>13,344 (32.9%)</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>5,200,000</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>68,305</td>
<td>25,350 (37.1%)</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>46,500,000</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>220,583</td>
<td>54,663 (24.8%)</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>317,000,000</td>
<td>1,361</td>
<td>3,065,479</td>
<td>926,788 (30.2%)</td>
<td>18.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Today’s focus

• Summary and definitions:

• Examples of fair access and WP initiatives in PG education

• Quotations from respondents on access at PG level

• Conclusion and discussion: some of the challenges
Summary: fair access

- All countries appear committed to fair access
- Strategies are highly context-specific, barriers continue to exist and progress is slow
- PG entrants selected on basis of academic achievement
- Some countries demonstrate commitment to access through flexible and lifelong learning schemes and use of credit
- Others focus on widening participation to achieve fair access
Fair access or widening participation?

Our definitions for the purpose of the report are:

• **Fair access**: initiatives taken to remove financial and other barriers to provide opportunities to students who have the academic potential to succeed in PG programmes.

• **Widening participation**: may involve adjusting entry requirements to facilitate the participation of under-represented groups (and can also include financial support).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Historical commitment</th>
<th>Australia</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government WP targets</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expansion linked with social justice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caution re ‘deficit’ model</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary Admission Ranks correlate with socio-economic status</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

| Poverty and debt key factors |
| Status of UG institution affects PG entry |
| Gender issues |
| Fair access: major government objective |
| Affirmative action |
| Very low tuition fees for home students |
| University interns |
| UK PG scholarships |

| Historical commitment |
| Role of community colleges and credit |
| Opportunities for part-time study and TAs |
| McNair Post-Bacc Program |
| Federal repayment loans |

**Australia**

**India**

**United States**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Financial Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>National aim to ensure equal opportunities to HE for all students; No tuition fees; Loans for living costs; Grants for students with children and for parental leave.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Federal Training Assistance Act (state grant + loan); Research assistantships; Germany scholarships for gifted students (public/private); Wide range of private scholarships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>National and university grants including fee waivers; Regional university access; Low tuition fees; Grants for low-income students; Some part-time study.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Fair access by country: Scotland and England

Scotland

Action on Access
Lifelong learning initiatives
PG tuition fee loans
‘Easy pathways’ to facilitate access
Domination of students with ability to pay?

England

Lack of funding a barrier to access?
Decrease in applicants for part-time study
Early encouragement for PG study needed
PGT loans introduced
Plans for income-contingent PhD loans
Subject differences?
Quotations from respondents 1: funding

“[Financial] Postgraduate support for widening participation might happen at institution level” (A)

“Students may not want to accrue more debt...some can avoid debt by working while studying...” (A)

“[There are] financial barriers; [students] can’t work full-time and be full-time students” (A)

“As soon as you talk about research [degrees], funding...affects fair access” (A)

“It’s too soon to say whether debt will affect PGR entry” (E)
A PhD is a good investment; you are more likely to get a job, and a better job, with a doctorate” (E)

“Some universities use Research Council funding to support strategic access initiatives for PhDs (E)

“Centres for doctoral training can help drive quality and diversity of students” (E)

“At doctoral level funding agency and private foundation support is for 3 years only so PhDs have to work part-time...” (G)

“Mid to late career PhD candidates tend to do their PhD part-time because they don’t want to live on a stipend” (A)
US doctorate full- and part-time graduate enrolments by subject, 2012

Source: Council of Graduate Schools, 2012
“In the US more than in other countries, [there are] more opportunities at different times in your life...to go to graduate school and get a doctorate” (US)

“There are issues...that need to be addressed: class system, culture, social structures, expectations...”(E)

“[Another issue is] family self-image...it is not just about the quality of schools” (US)

“People from lower socio-economic backgrounds are at a disadvantage even if they enter [PG programmes] because they lack the skills of richer students” (US)

“Higher education qualifications are a leveller”(US)

“PGR is less sensitive to access issues” (E)

“WP [status] doesn’t stay with the person as they progress through UG and master’s; illness, stress and sometimes visa status are more important” (E)

“Access is a big issue for undergraduates; not so much for postgraduates” (A)
Impact of funding choices on access

STUDENTS:
• Fewer or smaller studentships?
• Combining work and study: impact on completions?
• Perceptions of p/t degrees
• International student emphasis?

GOVERNMENT:
• Funding choices based on research excellence?
• Effect on UK’s international research impact?
• Unlikely to target funds for under-represented groups?

UNIVERSITIES:
• Hard decisions re prioritisation of funding?
• Need for more flexible study patterns to accommodate work and study?
• Reliance on income from international postgraduates
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Entry route</th>
<th>Training model</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BA</td>
<td>1+3 AHRC funded PhD in a collaborative doctoral training partnership of 4 universities (multi-site DTC). Intensive master’s training in research methods supported by online materials; some travel to partner institutions.; formal ‘upgrade’ from master’s to doctoral degree at end of first year or leave with MPhil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M Soc Sci</td>
<td>3.5-year self-funded PhD, enrolled in institutional Doctoral College and part of faculty Graduate School. Shared research methods modules with master’s students. Switch to part-time mode beginning of year 3 to combine study with part-time work for financial reasons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Int. M physical sci</td>
<td>4-year EPSRC funded Industrial PhD; research topic generated by industrial partner; candidate concurrently PhD candidate and company employee; training split between university (research methods and professional development) and industry (approved modules, e.g. industrial relations); one institutional and one industrial supervisor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSc biol sci</td>
<td>4-year BBSRC funded PhD in single institution DTP; part of faculty graduate school; shared research methods modules with PhD candidates from five strategic research areas; programme includes 3-month ‘PIPS’ professional internship, working in an area unrelated to PhD topic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion and discussion

• Is lack of fair access compromising postgraduate student recruitment?
• What is the impact of funding strategies on doctoral degrees?
• How do we encourage students from underrepresented groups to aspire to postgraduate study?
• Does background remain an issue for PGR entrants?
• Can we learn from strategies in other countries?
References 1


References 2


Tilak, J. (2013) Higher Education in the BRIC Member-Countries: Comparative Patterns and Policies, Economic and Political Weekly, XLVIII, 14, 41-47.


Thank you for listening