**Key current trends in Higher Education**

**Sally Brown and Phil Race, March 2014.**

**Key trends we’ve noted**

* The boom in undergraduate study worldwide;
* A potential crisis in Masters level provision;
* The growth of private provision;
* Students or their families having to pay their way;
* New global regions driving global competition in research;
* Internationalisation will grow broader and deeper;
* Problematic business modelling and strategic planning.

**The boom in undergraduate study:**

* 2000-2010 the percentage of adults receiving tertiary education globally has risen from 19%-29% and this is predicted to rise rapidly;
* China and India will be responsible for much of this increase but both will want to target HE programmes as unemployment of graduates is rising in both;
* Student numbers from Sub-Saharan Africa are also predicted as part of a move for developing countries from 20-25% enrolment;
* HEIs missions are therefore likely to diverge further with some focussing more on research or PG provision and others concentrating on UG provision.

**The growth of mass education**

* This may take the form of mass education with significantly increasing sizes of HEI;
* Distance education is seen as a panacea in some areas with the increasing promotion of Massive Open On-line Courses (MOOCs) currently gaining much publicity;
* HEIs including Harvard, MIT and the UK OU offer free on-line content, with some offering peer review opportunities for assignments;
* Currently most MOOCs don’t offer assessment or credit opportunities and retention can be a significant problem.

**What do HEIs of the future need to be like?**

* Although the content of what is being taught will continue to be very important, where academics source their content will need to change, with less emphasis on individual or small scale course production and greater use of cooperative materials production. Curriculum and content design needs to be less the responsibility of an individual and more a collective task, with greater use, for example, of Open Educational Resources;
* We need a stronger focus on developing student literacies (assessment literacy, academic literacy, information literacy, Social Literacy etc.) is becoming a greater part of the academic’s role;
* Future HEIs need to concentrate on the accreditation and recognition of student achievement and the fostering of student engagement.

**A potential crisis in Masters level provision**

* Many HEIs see post-graduate provision as a key growth area;
* However, there is significant competition between HEIs and nations for postgraduate students, with many European HEIs teaching all Masters programmes in English, thereby eliminating the traditional advantage of Irish, UK, Australasian and North American universities;
* As graduates become debt-laden it is not clear how many will be prepared to take on further debt for a PG qualification;
* Few HEIs have worked out viable business models for PG programmes.

**The growth of private provision**

* In Latin America in recent years most HE is now private whereas most was public 20 years ago;
* Private provision is growing rapidly in the UK particularly in fields such as Finance and Law, with strong encouragement from the UK government;
* The US which has led in offering private HE has seen for-profit college enrolment increase tenfold since 2001;
* Developing countries such as India see this as being a great opportunity to finance growth;
* Quality assurance and enhancement issues will need to be resolved, because, for example, the US provide providers have very high attrition and debt default rates.

**Students or their families having to pay their way**

* In many nations, higher education is being reframed as a private rather than a public good;
* In the UK fees have grown to £9,000 with the burden of support for higher education moving from the state to individuals (and admin fees in Ireland look as if they will go the same way);
* In nations like Italy where fees have tended to be low, what students get for their money is also minimal.
* Recently Finland (in 2010) and Hungary (from 2013) have introduced fees (although Germany is set to drop the small fees they have in place);
* Fees in the US have increased by 42% since 2000-1.

**This has led to an increase in demands for accountability**

* Quality assurance issues become more prominent when the individual (or their families)are footing the bill
* The nature of the transaction changes if the student sees himself or herself as a customer and may expect higher service standards from teachers and institutions (and may complain if they don’t pass that the HEI is at fault);
* A changing relationship between HEIs and students (and their parents) evolves, where value-for-money demands may drive more student complaints and grievances.

**New regions driving global competition in Research**

* The number of scientific articles being produced globally is growing substantially;
* Traditionally high-ranked research nations like the US and the UK are increasingly being challenged by Asian and other nations and are investing much more cash in their scientists;
* High spending nations such as China, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan and Brazil are investing to help them move up the research rankings;
* This is putting pressure on researchers in nations like Ireland and the UK where research budgets may be constrained.

**Internationalisation will grow broader and deeper**

* Almost every nation offering Higher Education is seeking to increase the number of international students so Ireland is in competition with many nations, not just Anglophone ones;
* The number of internationally mobile students is expected to double to 8 million by 2025: where will they go?
* Nations including Brazil are seeking to gain a competitive edge by specifically increasing the numbers of their students studying internationally;
* As developing countries get better at retaining their skilled academics, traditionally secure international markets are likely to shrink.

**International higher education growth**

* We are seeing increasing amounts of **transnational** education where education is delivered by an HEI from one nation in another and this is likely to be very important to all ambitious HEIs in the next decade;
* More and more nations are setting up full campuses abroad including India, Qatar, Singapore, United Arab Emirates and China;
* This makes HE more accessible and cheaper than sending students abroad;
* In the past the US, UK, Australia and European universities dominated this market but some nations are choosing to set up transnational clusters e.g. Doha Education City in Qatar.

**Key trends in higher education pedagogy**

* A movement towards wider use of open educational resources and less reliance on traditional lectures for course delivery;
* A move towards ‘flipped classrooms’, where students are expected to read and learn key material outside class and collective sessions are used for discussion, elaboration, practice, and remediation of misunderstandings;
* A tension in assessment between the hunt for cheap and efficient means of assessing large numbers of students (computer-based assessment and un-moderated peer review, as commonly used on MOOCs) and striving to offer student-centred, authentic and personalised assessment to encourage learning;
* The need to manage student expectations, particularly around feedback on assignments and support.

**The implications for Spanish and UK institutions**

* We need to employ flexible academics who are keen to teach international students on-site and at remote campuses;
* Staff need to develop basic linguistic competences in, for example, Mandarin, Portuguese and Arabic;
* We need to develop our own cross-cultural capabilities, better understanding different cultural mores and contexts;
* Our distance and flexible learning curricula need to be focused internationally.

Question: What staff development and recruitment requirements are there in your current international strategy plans? Will summer schools use your own staff or bought in sessional/casual staff? How would you train and support them?

**Problematic business modelling and strategic planning.**

* Change is happening so fast that HEIs have little time to make rational and strategic plans;
* Shifts in governmental imperatives make long- or even medium-term planning problematic;
* The international recession is making business modelling and prediction of issues like student recruitment and retention extremely complex;
* Conventional management and leadership training for HEIs may not be keeping pace with institutional needs.

**References**

Elizabeth Gibney (2013) A different world THES 31 Jan 2013

*2011 Blue Skies: new thinking about the future of higher education,* London: Pearson.

OECD (2013) Education at a glance