

# Governance in higher education

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# Summary

Good higher education governance is about quality decision-making for effective oversight of relationships between higher education institutions (HEIs) and their internal and external constituents, which include students and the academic and professional staff as well as the State, private sector, civil society, suppliers, the free press, and others. There are three main HEIs governance types: internal, external, and, market-oriented and their implications for the smooth governance of HEIs. It is suggested that irrespective of the stakeholder, the key for governance remains consensus-building to ensure diverse perspectives and possibilities for future institutional design and development.

Diverse factors determine the nature and duration of HEIs governance. They include massification and commercialization of higher education access; increased accountability to external stakeholders; globalization and changing geo-political environments; transformations of technologies; changes in the place of youth in society; in some societies, growth of the public sector and the social media; armed conflicts/wars and racism/tribalism as well as emergent phenomena like the Covid-19 pandemic.

Although a desired goal, absolute institutional autonomy is unrealistic because the higher autonomy and responsibility go together, and because HEIs are first and foremost a public good. Although it may be necessary for HEIs to preserve their unique identities, especially regarding academic freedom – given the role they can play as a conscience of the state and globally, and because they are affected by what happens in the broader community –, they cannot be trusted to be the ones to exclusively regulate themselves.

Quality assurance bodies can play an important role in enhancing institutional performance although what quality needs to be assured deserves continual scrutiny, especially on how it is to be achieved and how to measure progress. Because accountability to the wider public demands that university governance systems develop outreach programmes that are socially responsible, HEIs governors, in partnership with institutional managers can oversee relevant affirmative action policies and programmes, for example, good practices in promulgating and overseeing relevant inclusion policies.

Information Technology (IT) can be a potentially helpful resource for enhancing access of delivery of university programmes and for enabling governance systems, despite the drawbacks that may come with inequality of access to the technology and potential misuse of student data, among other challenges.

Given the wide diversity in the types and efficacy of HEIs governance systems across the world, recommendations are made on how UNESCO can assist governance in HEIs better to serve the public good.

# Acknowledgements

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With the purpose of producing updated analysis and recommendations for the 3rd World Higher Education Conference (WHEC2022), UNESCO organized the Technical Expert Group (TEG), whose members were tasked with preparing background documents on each of the main themes of the Conference. Experts participating in the TEG included César Guadalupe, Dag Olav Hessen, Susanna Karakhanyan, Achim Hopbach, Mpine Makoe, David Mills, Ka Ho Mok, Kilemi Mwiria, Jamil Salmi, Sylvia Schmelkes, Francesc Pedró, Damtew Teferra. This is one of the TEG's background documents, which respectively approached the following themes:

- Impact of COVID-19 on higher education
- Higher education and the SDGs<sup>1</sup>
- Equity, inclusion, and pluralism
- Quality and relevance of programmes
- Academic mobility in higher education
- Governance in higher education
- Financing higher education
- Data and knowledge production
- International cooperation to enhance synergies
- The futures of higher education

The following UNESCO focal points participated in or provided support, at different moments, to the TEG's activities: Dana Abdrasheva, Daniele Viera, Phoebe Kirkup, Paz Portales, Victoria Galán, Huong Nguyen, Hassmik Tortian, Qingling Kong, Peter Wells, Harold Mera, Takudzwa Mutize, Talal El Hourani, José Antonio Quinteiro, Keith Holmes and Emma Sabzalieva. The TEG's activities were directly coordinated by José Luis Guzmán.

The TEG met online four times throughout 2021 (March 24, May 19, July 21, and September 8) and held an in-person meeting in Barcelona on 29-30 November 2021. Besides extensive literature review, the process of elaborating the documents included 24 online consultation meetings facilitated by the TEG members. These meetings involved more than 180 experts or stakeholders from all regions of the world. In addition, the TEG members considered comments provided by diverse reviewers for each theme and a technical team of UNESCO specialists reviewed the final versions.

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1. A synthesis based on the report of the UNESCO Global Independent Expert Group on the Universities and the 2030 Agenda (EGU2030): Knowledge-driven actions: Transforming higher education for global sustainability (2022). The full report can be found here: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000380519> (Accessed 9 February 2022.)

While occasional references are made to relevant literature on higher education governance, most of the views shared in the paper summarize the thoughts shared by six eminent scholars in higher education governance during three focus group meetings taking place between April and July 2021. The six are Ronald Barnett, emeritus professor of higher education, University College London Institute of Education, UK; Sir Hilary Beckles, vice-chancellor, University of West Indies; Meng-Hsuan Chou, scholar and professor in public policy and global affairs, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore; Carolina Guzmán Valenzuela, scholar professor at the University of Tarapacá, Chile; Linda Tuhiwai Smith, scholar professor in Indigenous education, New Zealand; Paul Zeleza, vice-chancellor, United States International University, Kenya. Harold Mera (Colombia), policy specialist from IESALC-UNESCO, was the focal point for preparing this document.



# Acronyms

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AUN	Asian University Network
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asia Nations
HBU	Historically black universities
HBCU	Historically black colleges and universities
HEI	Higher education institutions
IESALC	International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean
IAU	International Association of Universities
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
NGOs	Non-governmental organizations
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SHARE	Support for Higher Education in the ASEAN Region
RIHED	Regional Centre for Higher Education and Development
STEM	Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNIKO	Universities Austria
WHEC2022	World Higher Education Conference 2022

# Presentation

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This background document is one of the ten commissioned by UNESCO for the 3rdWorld Higher Education Conference 2022 (WHEC2022) under the theme of higher education governance, but with a focus on only public higher education institutions (HEIs). While still a subject of continued debate, the document sometimes refers to governance and management interchangeably, because none can do without the other.

Section one, on **higher education governance meaning and context**, describes what higher education governance is and why it is important for higher education. In brief, good higher education governance is about quality decision-making for effective oversight of relationships between HEIs and their internal and external constituents, represented by students and the academic and professional staff on the one hand and the state, private sector, civil society, suppliers, the free press, respectively, and others. It is exemplified by policymaking processes that are broadly participatory, predictable, open, enlightened, professional and which take account of the interests of all key stakeholders. Good governance is critical for HEIs institutions because they are complex organizations that require professional shepherding to enable them to promote institutional improvement and sustainability and maintain a legal and ethical standing in the eyes of key constituencies.

Section two focuses on **higher education governance and responsiveness to dynamic contexts**. It begins with a description of the three main HEIs governance types: internal; external; and, market-oriented and their implications for the smooth governance of HEIs. It is suggested that irrespective of the stakeholder, the key for governance remains consensus-building to ensure diverse perspectives and possibilities for future institutional design and development.

To put the matter of governance into perspective, the lists the main factors that determine the nature and duration of HEIs governance as: massification and commercialization of higher education access; increased accountability to external stakeholders; globalization and changing geo-political environments; changes in technologies and in place of youth in society; in some societies, growth of the public sector and the social media; armed conflicts/wars and racism/tribalism as well as emergent phenomena like the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, on stakeholder engagement with HEIs, it is proposed that notwithstanding the need for HEIs to defend and to advance their own interests, engagement with the state, and the corporate and civil society sectors can be mutually beneficial.

Section three refers to **governance as it relates to institutional autonomy, organizational effectiveness, and accountability**. Although a desired goal, absolute institutional autonomy is unrealistic because the higher autonomy and responsibility go together and because HEIs are first and foremost a public good. Guarding against loss of all autonomy will require of HEIs to upskill their communication and marketing departments so that they can provide efficient, timely, clear, and persuasive messages and stories to their diverse constituencies using multiple platforms. Although it may be necessary for HEIs to preserve their unique identities, especially regarding academic freedom, for the role they can play as a conscience of, and because they are affected by what happens in the broader community, the state and globally, they cannot be trusted to be the ones to exclusively regulate themselves because some of them get too preoccupied with their own institutional goals to the exclusion of the wider education sector and national, regional and global interests.

This section also addresses issues related to quality assurance outreach programmes. It is appreciated that quality assurance bodies can play an important role in enhancing institutional performance.

# Content

	<b>Summary</b>	2
	<b>Acknowledgements</b>	3
	<b>Acronyms</b>	5
	<b>Presentation</b>	6
<b>01.</b>	<b>Higher education governance. Context and meaning</b>	8
	1.1. The overarching context of higher education governance	9
	1.2. Why does higher education governance matter?	10
<b>02.</b>	<b>Higher education governance and responsiveness to dynamic contexts</b>	12
	2.1. HEIs governance models and institutional responses	13
	2.2. Striking a balance	15
	2.3. The nature and direction of higher education governance	16
	2.4. Stakeholder involvement in HEIs' governance	18
<b>03.</b>	<b>Institutional autonomy, organizational effectiveness, accountability, and relevance</b>	20
	3.1. Higher education governance and accountability	21
	3.2. Institutional autonomy and organizational effectiveness	22
	3.3. Oversight bodies, accountability, and organizational performance	23
	3.4. Outreach programs and accountability to society	24
<b>04.</b>	<b>Participation, diversity, and pluralism in higher education</b>	25
	4.1. Access for the most marginalized	26
	4.2. Regional and global inequalities in higher education provision	28
	4.3. Integrating refugees and asylum seekers	30
	4.4. The place of IT in managing access	30
	4.5. Country driven inclusion and diversity	31
	<b>Conclusion. Final thoughts</b>	32
	<b>References</b>	33

# 01.

**Higher  
education  
governance.  
Context and  
meaning**

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# 1.1 • The overarching context of higher education governance

UNESCO's International Bureau of Education defines governance as:

... Structures and processes that are designed to ensure accountability, transparency, responsiveness, the rule of law, stability, equity and inclusiveness, empowerment, and broad-based participation. Governance also represents the norms, values and rules of the game through which public affairs are managed in a manner that is transparent, participatory, inclusive and responsive. Governance, therefore, can be subtle and may not be easily observable. However, in a broad sense, governance is about the culture and institutional environment in which citizens and stakeholders interact and participate in public affairs. It is more than the organs of the government...<sup>2</sup>

Evidently, good governance is a prerequisite for poverty reduction and sustainable development. It enables stakeholder participation in development programs in a transparent, accountable, effective and equitable manner, while remaining faithful to the rule of law.

This document acknowledges that governance and management have often been used interchangeably, mainly because the two are more akin to Siamese twins; one body but different souls. While governance mainly refers to institutional power-sharing mechanism, management is more about the planning, implementing, and monitoring of actions meant to achieve the overall institutional governance objectives.

Hilary Beckles sums this interdependence both neatly and succinctly: '...They really are different animals that ought to be grazing in separate pastures even if divided/integrated by a common gate. Traditional universities with strong collegial cultures have empowered academics to provide both oversight (governance) and leadership (management)...'

Zgaga (2006, p 38) reiterates this inclusive view of governance when he writes that '...higher education governance is obviously a multidimensional concept. On one hand, it can be connected directly to government(s); in modern times governments 'govern' social subsystems like higher education, etc... On the other hand, in its common use, it is close to 'management' and/or 'administration, particularly regarding institution(s) and/or organizations...'. Table 1, which captures the interdependence of the two, will be reflected in the ensuing discussions.

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2. <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/geqaf/technical-notes/concept-governance>

3. Focus group discussion notes, 2021.

**Figure 1. Governance and management: Related but different**

Governance	Management
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ Sets norms, strategic vision and direction and formulates high-level goals and policies.</li> <li>➔ Oversees management and organizational performance to ensure that the organization is working in the best interests of the public, and more specifically, the stakeholders who are served by the organization's mission.</li> <li>➔ Directs and oversee the management to ensure that the organization is achieving the desired outcomes and to ensure that the organization is acting prudently, ethically, and legally.</li> <li>➔ Acting as a communicator between the state and society on the one hand and individual institutions on the other hand.</li> <li>➔ Promoting institutional sustainability amid national, regional and global challenges of the C21.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ Runs the organization in line with the broad goals and direction set by the governing body.</li> <li>➔ Implements the decisions within the context of the mission and strategic vision.</li> <li>➔ Makes operational decisions and policies, keeps the governance bodies informed and educated.</li> <li>➔ Responds to requests for additional information.</li> <li>➔ Responds to relevant national, regional and international policies/protocols.</li> </ul>

Source. <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/geqaf/technical-notes/concept-governance>

## 1.2. Why does higher education governance matter?

Higher education governance refers to the way universities and other higher education institutions are organized and managed or ‘...the formal and informal exercise of authority under laws, policies and rules that articulate the rights and responsibilities of various actors, including the rules by which they interact...’ (De Boer, H. and File, J. 2009:10). Good governance revolves around the quality of decision-making for effective oversight of relationships between HEIs and their internal (students and staff), and external constituents (the state, private sector, civil society, suppliers, the free press, etc.), exemplified by policymaking processes that are broadly participatory, predictable, open, enlightened, professional and which take account of the interests of all key stakeholders. The key characteristics of good HEI governance can be summarized as:

- Participation such that all key stakeholders have a voice in decision-making.
- Consensus-building to accommodate diverse perspectives but ensuring compatibility with the institution's guiding vision and, so far as possible, the interests of all key players.
- Checks and balances to guarantee accountability of institutional managers to the state and society, eradication of executive malfeasance.
- A feedback mechanism for concerns of the internal and external institutional constituencies and for the resolution of any tensions between the two.

On the other hand, poor governance is characterized by undemocratic decision-making, lack of decision-making accountability, corruption, financial mismanagement, blindness to legitimate interests of key constituencies and refusal to stand up to large powers of the state and other power blocs especially where there is abuse of executive power by the state (Kaufmann, et al. 1999).

HEIs are complex organizations. Therefore, they require professional shepherding to promote institutional improvement and sustainability and maintain a legal and ethical standing in the eyes of key constituencies. For students, key governance issues relate to equity of access to higher education opportunities, diversity of faculty, participation in institutional decision-making to air their views, quality of learning, student welfare, industry placement and the job market, and the cost of education. On the other hand, the academic staff issues focus on consultation to maintain their academic freedom and to pursue legitimate academic goals. The key governance concern for the professional university staff is the constant vacillation in governance models including centralization and decentralization which can lead to an altogether dysfunctional system. For the top management, governance is tasked with ensuring that institutional leaders and boards of governors have a coherent vision of the institutional mission (Gibbs et al. 2015; Vostal, 2021).

Outside of HEIs, good governance is critical for promoting good working relations with the state, which is usually the principal benefactor of the public university. The state is likely to be more supportive of HEIs with a good track record of preparing the country's youth to play respective positive roles in society, promote the stature of the country in the world community through sound research and respectable global rankings, and contribute to the generation of solutions to global and national development challenges. In addition, governance requires collaboration across multiple policy sectors that are partners in development with the state, but which may have previously experienced little or no interaction. For civil society, governance is essential for the upholding of a positive institutional image with the broader community.

Beyond national boundaries, the shift towards knowledge economies and societies has challenged HEIs governance systems to be at the centre of contemporary public policymaking (Chou et al., 2017:1, Gibbs et al., 2015; Vostal, 2021), related to:

- Collective global challenges facing humanity (see the UN's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); among others.
- Higher education as a key knowledge sector where knowledge is an important player, not least in the digital era.
- The determination as to which knowledge is generated (and its legitimacy) and by whom and how it is generated and disseminated<sup>4</sup>.
- Critical thinking in teaching and research to address the many crises characteristic of the world (Jameson, 2019).

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4. Meng-Hsuan Chou, focus group discussion notes, 2021.

# 02.

**Higher education  
governance and  
responsiveness to  
dynamic contexts**

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## 2.1. HEIs governance models and institutional responses

Although patterns evolve in the type of governance systems, three are dominant: internal, external/state-wide, and market-oriented (Austin and Glen, 2016). The three paradigms represent the diversity of HEIs' interaction with their key internal and external constituents.

**Internal Governance.** This is the traditional university governance model where academics make many of the critical governance and academic-related decisions, in support of the autonomy and academic freedom of HEIs. This model of academic self-governance is '...rooted in the tradition that universities should principally be governed by their academic staff using collegiality to guide governance interactions among colleagues... based on the argument that academics understand their discipline, how the discipline is linked to the goals and aspirations of the university, are in the best position to guide the process towards goals and aspirations attainment...' (Austin and Glen, 2016).

Under this model, power resides at the faculty level. However, critics point out that internal university governors are unlikely to be responsive to the broader national and global interests advanced by the state, the private sector and civil society. Under this model, the quality of internal governance can be improved through:

- Defence of the principles of academic freedom by the academic community.
- Improved participation of internal stakeholders in key decision-making (what they call 'cooperative governance' in South Africa).
- Diversity, equity and inclusion in student and staff bodies.
- Demonstrating civility and collegiality, effective communication, and social responsibility in managing institutional affairs (Zezeza, 2021).

**External/State-wide governance.** Under this model, the state tends to have a strong hold on the management of institutional affairs, not least by virtue of its dominance in higher education financing. The state – directly or through the governors it appoints – sets the institutional policies and sectoral objectives and enforces the legal frameworks. The biggest problems for the university community so governed are that:

- The state may encumber institutions with responsibilities they may not be keen on advancing or may lack the ability to implement.
- State dominance also comes with a decline in institutional autonomy, academic freedom and staff and student unionism because of a tightened government control which has a propensity for heavy-handedness.
- State control may also engender the spawning of policies and codes of conduct that force staff compliance, loyalty, and acquiescence.

Furthermore, to strengthen its grip on the university, the state may support the establishment of a small senior executive group, with the Vice-Chancellor/Rector as the chief executive officer. In this arrangement, the executive becomes no more than an appendage of the state, while remaining less accountable to the academic community. Under such circumstances, the university community may be forced to be more loyal to governors who are accountable to their appointers and not the university constituency. State dominance is particularly evident in China and Africa, where regulatory agencies, governing boards, and management seek to govern strictly as dictated by the state (Zezeza, 2019).

**Market-oriented governance.** Increasingly, across the world, states have steered their higher education systems in the direction of a quasi-market, a hybrid of market disciplines and strong state steering. In this model, HEIs adopt a 'total quality management' regime, resembling business enterprises and embracing economic efficiency and being accountable to benefactors. Consequently, HEIs' core constituencies – staff and students – are often relegated to being mere employees, overseen by a governance structure representing the state's interest and those of other external stakeholders. Meanwhile, faculties, colleges, schools, research centres and academic departments are viewed as business units, while education and research are viewed as, and treated like, a private and not a public good (Chou, M, et al, 2017).

In this model, student financing corresponds to the private sector in orientation. Effectively, student loan schemes have become more common than student scholarships. As a result, international student numbers and private fee-paying students become an essential source of institutional income, while investments in research are primarily about income generation. Zeleza (2019) observes how the private sector influence in higher education in many African and Latin American countries has become characterized by what he calls the 5Cs: '...corporatization of management, consumerization of students, casualization of faculty, commercialization of learning, and commodification of knowledge...'<sup>5</sup>

However, there are crucial aspects of university education such as teaching, research, publishing, student supervision and peer reviews, which, although necessary for higher education, cannot generate much income for most HEIs, especially in universities that do not enjoy high international ranking. Moreover, this monetization and weaponization of knowledge and education as a frontier for capital accumulation imperils disciplines such as the humanities and the social sciences which cannot attract much external income despite their importance to societal wellbeing. A further risk of a heightened marketization is that of reducing HEIs to economic entities (Rettig, P. R., 2021; Barnett, R., 2018) because it can only limit their responsiveness to the many interconnected and dependent worldly problems amid ecosystems of knowledge, social institutions, humans, the economy, learning, culture, and the natural environment.

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5. <https://www.theelephant.info/features/2018/07/05/the-giant-challenge-of-higher-education-in-africa>



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## 2.2. Striking a balance

Irrespective of the governance model – internal, external, and market-oriented – HEIs are challenged with harmonizing the interests and expectations of their stakeholder groups. For example, where the market orientation model HEIs is more dominant as in the USA, the UK and increasingly in Western Europe, Australasia, and some countries in Latin America, HEIs will need to derive acceptable ways of managing students who believe that the education they pay for should not be diluted by the increased numbers resulting from affirmative action. However, on balance, they should not exclude students who, but for their unfavourable circumstances, not of their making, belong in those institutions.

Similarly, in countries where academic staff and students are strongly unionized, as in the Nordic countries, accommodation of these constituencies should not be at the expense of denying them the right to speak out. In countries in Africa, China, and elsewhere where state control of university business is more organized, governors need to seek ways of persuading the state of the need to see institutional leaders as partners and not as mere implementers of state directives<sup>6</sup>.

In both the state-steered and the market-oriented models, governors should seek to act as an effective buffer between the state and the institutions they represent instead of as mouthpieces of the former and/or the market. Irrespective of the stakeholder, the key for governance remains consensus-building to ensure diverse perspectives and possibilities for future institutional design and development.  
learn.

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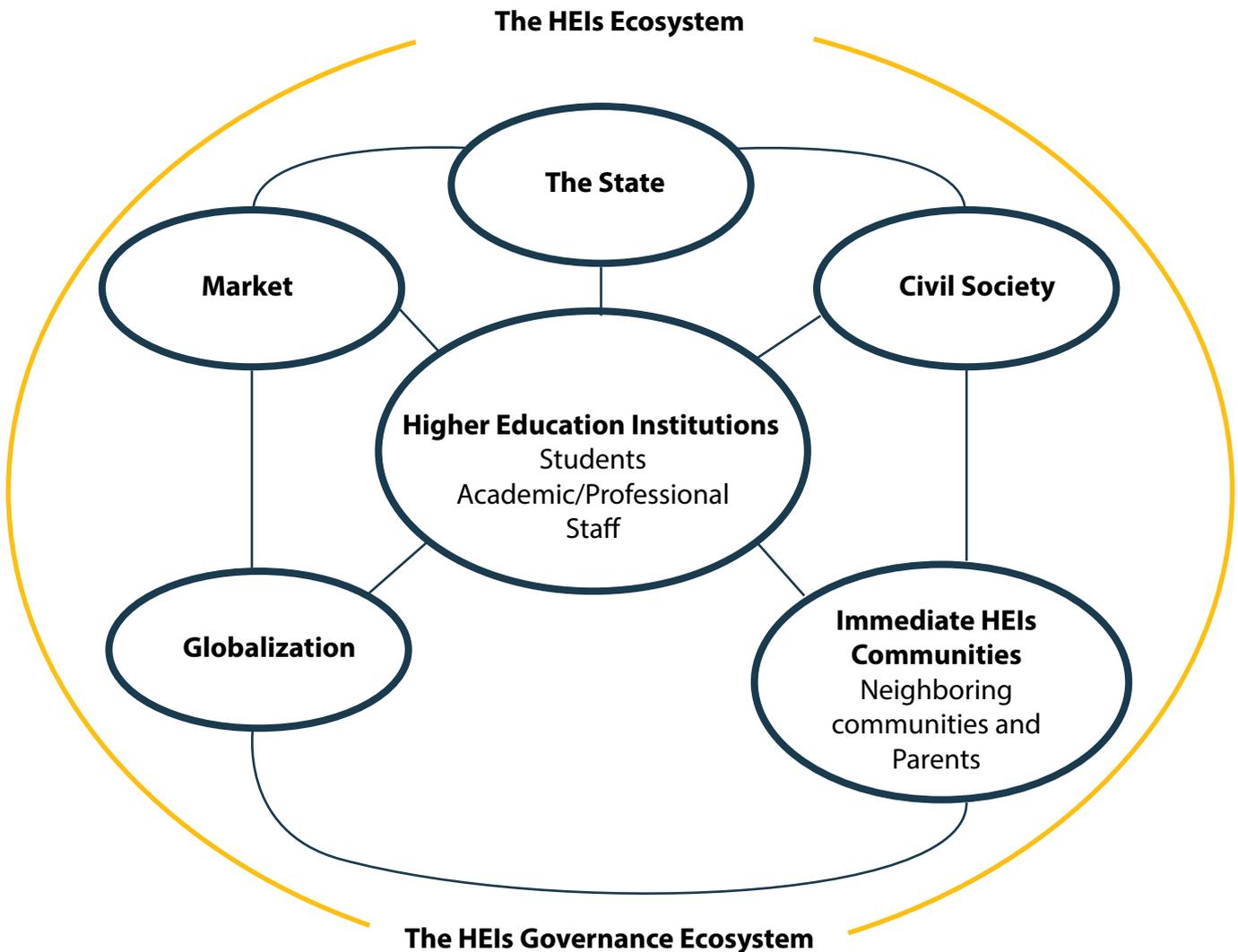
6. Meng-Hsuan Chou, focus group discussion notes, 2021.

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## 2.3. The nature and direction of higher education governance

Among other factors, the nature and direction of good governance is influenced by global, regional, and national realities within which institutions have to operate. As illustrated in figure 1, these factors include HEIs internal constituents (academics, students, professional staff), external constituents (the state, the private sector, civil society, parents of students, alumni, HEIs local and regional communities, the media), and global forces.

**Figure 1. Factors determining HEIs governance systems**



Guzmán-Valenzuela et al (2019) identify evolving key influences on higher education governance to be those of massification and commercialization and the need for increased accountability to external stakeholders. Others are globalization, changing geo-political environments, changes in technologies and in place of youth in society, in some societies growth of the public sector and the social media, armed conflicts/wars, racism/tribalism, and emergent phenomena like the Covid-19 pandemic.

**Massification.** Although HEIs in Europe and North America opened to large numbers of students in the 1960s, it is only in the 80s and 90s that similar trends were witnessed in Asia, Latin America, and parts of Africa. Not unexpectedly, opening university doors to more students have created tensions by exposing the state's inability to ensure that the resultant expansion is matched by a commensurate allocation of resources. As a result, the burden of meeting the increased costs is shifted to students and their parents.

Affordability for national students is a particularly significant challenge for families living in countries where marketization coexists with high levels of fragility in terms of income and labour security. Additional challenges are posed by the diverse backgrounds of students who enrol in HEIs, their ability to pay (with the more affluent among them getting into the prestigious courses and universities), increased global student and staff mobility, and the demands of managing larger student and staff data.

**Privatization/commercialization.** Private education providers have been meeting the increased demand for a university education which the public higher education sector cannot satisfy. Where this has happened in some African countries such as Kenya, Uganda and Nigeria, the result has been an uncontrolled privatization of public universities, which to all intents and purposes, are mere business enterprises (Clark, 1998). In some cases, some public HEIs have tended to be the biggest private universities.

These developments have thrust to the fore governance challenges related to the inequalities of access, quality of education offered by both poorly regulated private universities, and poorly equipped public universities, and those to do with how to manage the two sets of students in public universities - those who are fee-paying, and those sponsored by the state (Mwiria, et al, 2007).

**Increased accountability and control.** The massification and privatization of higher education have exposed HEIs governance systems to more control by the state and those who invest in private university education, making them vulnerable to political and economic manipulation. In addition, the inequality of access and the resultant stratification between those who can afford private university education and those who cannot, run counter to the sense of education as a public good. The main challenge for governance here is responding to a vocal constituency that may not be able or prepared to provide the resources to address their own concerns.

**Conflicts, wars, and racism/tribalism.** In some developing and underdeveloped countries, persistent conflicts, wars, racism, and tribalism have affected how HEIs are managed and the variety of responses that come with these challenges. How universities deal with these challenges in the face of the external forces beyond their control is a considerable challenge for their governance systems.

**The Covid-19 pandemic.** As is the case for most other formal organizations, higher education governance systems have been forced to develop innovative ways of managing the use of both their physical spaces and financial resources because of this unprecedented global crisis. Key challenges for governance and management have included the inability to effectively coordinate important programmes such as meetings and seminars, unreliability of existing internet facilities as well as the limited appreciation of the technology by some governors and managers, and unsustainability of institutions which cannot mobilize the external and internal resources needed for key programmes. Yet, the pandemic has spawned some positive aspects, not least the savings accrued through virtual meetings and lectures and the ease through which members of different constituencies have been able to contribute to both the governance and management functions.

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## 2.4. Stakeholder involvement in HEIs' governance

Although HEIs are inclined to defend and to advance their own interests especially in an increasingly competitive environment, engagement with the state, and the corporate and civil society sectors can be mutually beneficial:

- Engagement with the state can help in reducing undue involvement of the state and other external forces, which otherwise might reduce institutions' viability.
- Holding universities to account can maintain a due monitoring of institutional managerial performance.
- State involvement in university affairs can also safeguard the rights of employees and underrepresented students against inward-looking institutional managers.
- Some measure of state oversight of universities may motivate managers to reach out to the wider society through community outreach programs and the development of policies and programs to promote national development and international goals (Ronald Barnett; Focus Group Discussion Notes). In Hong Kong, state-universities-industry collaboration, with the state playing the role of 'market facilitator', has created opportunities for the public HEIs to mobilize substantial non-state resources for research, development and entrepreneurship (Mok K.O., 2005).

Well-meaning states are also better placed to speak for marginalized communities, and those historically left out of university education. A good example is the HEIs established to alleviate historical injustices in higher education access among formerly colonized communities, indigenous populations in Australia, New Zealand, the Americas and South Africa, and the politically and economically disadvantaged racial/ethnic groups, religious minorities, women, and those living in remote parts of their respective countries. They include Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the USA; Historically Black Universities (HBUs) in South Africa; First Nations University in Regina in Canada; the Sami University of Kautokeino in Norway; Batchelor Institute in Australia, Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi in New Zealand, and similar national minority universities in China and India<sup>7</sup>.

Redressing these historical injustices in New Zealand has involved discussions at the ministerial, HED governance, and at the academic staff and student levels through a ministerial advisory group set up for the purpose. An important role for governors, therefore, is to aim at getting the institutions they lead, to the extent possible, to advocate principles of justice and respect for all persons irrespective of social and other backgrounds.

Recognizing and appreciating the state's role in university governance can also contribute to the promotion of stronger ties between the two, as evidenced by the experiences of Singapore, Southeast Asia, and the European Union (Chou and Ravinet, 2017):

- In Singapore, the state coordinates with six autonomous universities to develop policies and programs related to student admissions, changing labour market demands, and issuances of work permits and student visas. The universities are Nanyang Technological University, National University of Singapore, Singapore Institute of Technology, Singapore Management University, Singapore University of Social Sciences, and Singapore University of Technology and Design.

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7. [www.wananga.ac.nz](http://www.wananga.ac.nz), <https://winhec.org>

- In South-East Asia, plans to implement regional cooperation in higher education to achieve institutional differentiation on task allocation. Under this arrangement an inter-governmental organization, the Asian University Network (AUN) manages the political decision-making; and a network of universities -Regional Centre for Higher Education and Development (RIHED) implements the partnership. AUN coordinates activities between 30 flagship higher education institutions in the region focused on discipline-based collaborative initiatives, projects, networks and associated mobility scholarships for institutions participating in these activities. RIHED on the other hand focusses on programmes related to promoting access, excellence, and synergy in higher education for regional development.
- In Europe, the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area of the European Union have prioritized higher education policy coordination in the countries of the Association of the Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN) comprising of Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.
- It is also possible for HEIs to partner across continents, as is demonstrated by the European Union Support for Higher Education in the countries of the ASEAN Region (SHARE) program whose aim is to strengthen regional cooperation both within ASEAN regional countries, and between them and the EU, and to enhance the quality, competitiveness, and internationalization of ASEAN HEIs and student outcomes (SHARE, 2021).

# 03.

**Institutional  
autonomy,  
organizational  
effectiveness,  
accountability, and  
relevance**

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## 3.1. Higher education governance and accountability

Responding to competing stakeholder interests depends on factors discussed earlier in the document, such as: privatization, market forces, the level of an institution's financial independence, the need for greater inclusion, staff and student politics and the role the state assigns to public universities, and global, regional, and national economic and political realities. Although the involvement of non-university stakeholders in university governance has resulted in the loss of some level of autonomy for the university community to self-regulate, some level of engagement can be beneficial for both the university community and those they serve. In any case, university communities have to come to terms with the reality that autonomy has to be partnered with responsibility. Moreover, for their very survival in increasingly more competitive economic and political environments, university governance systems have to be responsive to higher education as a public good that also demonstrates value for money.

In discussing matters of autonomy, one must contend with factors to do with the political, historical and cultural dimensions of respective countries, because the state plays an important role in shaping the HEIs governance. In cases where most HEIs are funded and regulated by the state as with Germany and Argentina, HEIs governance systems are different from those in states where neoliberal policies and the private sector are dominant as with the USA, UK, and Chile.

A proper level of autonomy is only possible where institutions align their missions with their aims depending on whether they are predominantly public/private, teaching/research-intensive or non-profit/for-profit universities. To enhance the working relations with the relevant stakeholders, HEIs governors must accommodate the interests of these groups by incorporating them into their institutional missions, strategies, and culture without letting them take centre stage.

Institutional interests can be protected by inviting external stakeholders to reach a consensus on how best to partner for a common goal. For example, external stakeholders can participate in pertinent university activities like teaching and collaborative research projects.

Universities can also strengthen working relations with the different parties by providing a platform for them to share their views, for example, by refining key documents, including draft mission statements and corporate strategies. Third, university managers can invite different interest groups to important planning meetings to agree on possible action plans to achieve the institution's mission path to avoid unnecessary conflicts and enhance the institutions' room for agency. Finally, governing bodies of higher education institutions could work together to strengthen their bargaining power<sup>8</sup>.

Mutually beneficial engagements with external stakeholders require HEIs to effectively upskill their communication and marketing departments to enable them to provide efficient, timely, clear, and persuasive messages and stories to diverse constituencies using multiple platforms (local (vernacular) radio and TV stations, social media, local language newspapers), and public meetings. Given the growing mistrust of universities evident in some parts of the world, their ability to be transparent to wider publics in simple, non-technical jargon via social media can advance understanding of the university as an instrument for societal development<sup>9</sup>.

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8. Ronald Barnett, focus group discussion notes, 2021.

9. Paul Zeleza, focus group discussion notes, 2021.

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## 3.2. Institutional autonomy and organizational effectiveness

Given the increasing demands for HEIs to serve the broader public interest, absolute freedom to self-regulate may not be desirable or sustainable. This is because some HEIs can be too focused on their own institutional goals to the exclusion of the wider education sector and national, regional and global interests. Self-regulation can also intensify stratification within and among institutions. The matter is exacerbated in that few universities possess adequate information-gathering systems to inform important decision-making related to self-regulation.

Nevertheless, a certain level of self-regulation is necessary for HEIs to preserve their unique identities, especially regarding academic freedom, for the role they can play as a conscience of, and because they are affected by what happens in the broader community, the state and globally. It is possible for universities to enjoy a level of self-governance and autonomy while at the same time impacting the broader socio-economic and political contexts of which they are integral. This is exemplified where students and staff have defied the state in defence of institutional autonomy by standing up to wider forms of political oppression. In Hong Kong, Chile and Colombia, students have defied their higher education institutions by demanding public education and academic freedom (Guzmán-Valenzuela and Bernasconi, 2018). In Nigeria, academic staff unions have been able to force increased funding to their institutions by the state, specifically in infrastructural development.

Because states and universities have to co-exist, and because they have to respond to both public and private interests, self-regulation must be viewed from the perspective of less government interference and more institutional autonomy (Kells, 1995) and where institutions do not entirely succumb to political and financial interests (Guzmán-Valenzuela and Barnett, 2013). Under no circumstances should universities be denied the freedom to make decisions on student admissions, faculty recruitment and promotion, on the curriculum and on their research and scholarly topics. HEIs are also the best placed to enrol students in accordance with their missions while ensuring more inclusivity.

Second, faculty recruitment and promotion should be based on established professional norms while accommodating those in interdisciplinary fields of teaching and research, and the less represented groups such as women and religious and racial and ethnic minorities. Third, it is the business of HEIs to design curricula that observe the expected quality standards while allowing for some flexibility in recognizing and accrediting courses of foreign students to support student mobility and exchanges<sup>10</sup>.

Achieving the required balance requires an institutional leadership respected for its integrity and an efficient governance system. Thus, identification of heads of institution must be based on demonstrable leadership abilities (including managerial ability) and passion and understanding of the higher education sector. They should also be capable of appreciating and dealing with issues of systemic injustice and inequality. These leadership qualities must be backed by a private sector mindset, political savviness, and social skills to lobby and mediate for the university among the political class and their respective internal constituencies. Other useful skills and competences should include multi-genre written and oral communication skills, high emotional intelligence, agility, fortitude, unflappability, and moral compass.

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10. Meng-Hsuan Chou, focus group discussion notes, 2021.

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## 3.3.

## Outreach programs and accountability to society

With the right leadership, quality assurance bodies can play an important role in enhancing institutional performance. But the matter of quality deserves continual scrutiny, as views develop on, how it is to be achieved and how to gauge such progress. This review process should have a measure of transparency among the relevant internal constituencies. Views may differ over time as to whether emphasis should be placed on the immediate quality of teaching and research or on performance indicators, accountability processes and procedural efficiency (Pitman et al., 2015). Meng–Hsuan Chou (2017) explains how from a governance perspective, quality assurance can be viewed as some form of hybrid governance consisting of both internal and external processes allowing institutional leaders to receive feedback on an institution’s approach to key challenges.

Quality assurance bodies can assist higher education governance systems by:

- Playing an accountability role by promoting institutional quality standards and expectations; supporting universities in discharging their core missions with institutional integrity and social impact.
- Promoting the sharing of good practices from different parts of the world.
- Supporting institutional leadership development and opportunities for different national institutional leaders to share experiences.
- Being ambassadors for universities with governments, the private sector and civil society.
- Setting the university’s mission in a wider context by drawing matters of world significance to a university’s attention<sup>11</sup>.

However, oversight bodies can also – unwittingly or intentionally - serve as extensions of the state, and so limit institutional autonomy. Governing bodies, therefore, may find themselves having to adopt quasi-political stances to maintain and/or enhance the limited pool of institutional autonomy available to them.

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11. Ronald Barnett, focus group discussion notes, 2021.



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## 3.4. Outreach programs and accountability to society

Among other aims, accountability to the wider public demands that university governance systems develop outreach programs that are socially responsible (Watson et al., 2011). The role of governors here may include prompting their institutions to take on wider perspectives, in addressing the needs of their local communities and regions. HEIs' outreach programs should include programs to empower the youth, women, and other marginalized social and economic groups, the development of solutions to community problems based on research findings, and the provision of policy advice and advocacy. For example, in Singapore, universities participate in community development by providing scholarships and mandatory internships for students within the neighbouring communities, and by strongly encouraging its faculty members to actively engage in community projects and outreach<sup>12</sup>.

To carry out the outreach mandate most effectively, governors should require of HEIs managements to develop missions and corporate strategies for the delivery of the identified community programmes. Accountability through outreach programs can also be developed by a service mentality, by internalizing outreach as an institutional obligation of faculty members and not a requirement by external stakeholders. Where universities do not voluntarily embark on community outreach, governors should seek to exercise their powers in influencing strategic plans accordingly. Meanwhile, university oversight bodies should make involvement in social programs a key criterion for evaluating and ranking them, something the *Times Higher Education* has embraced.

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12. Meng-Hsuan Chou, focus group discussion notes, 2021.

# 04.

## **Participation, diversity, and pluralism in higher education**

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## 4.1. Access for the most marginalized

In expanding diversity, the governance function is primarily that of overseeing affirmative action policies and programs related to how:

- Higher education is funded.
- Students are constituted.
- Qualifications are regulated.
- Academic staff are recruited, managed, and get tenure.
- How to minimize the effect of expansion resulting in lower-quality education for those meant to benefit from new inclusion policies.

An essential task for affirmative action policies is ensuring that diversity does not exacerbate the social stratification of the student body based on ability to pay, with students from privileged backgrounds monopolizing the best institutions and preferred study programs. For example, in Kenya, Columbia and Chile although higher education is heavily subsidized by the government and a majority of the students access university student loans, the best degree courses are almost a preserve of students from high-cost private primary schools who go on to secure admission in the best endowed public boarding secondary schools. Conversely, students graduating from resource-poor public primary schools proceed to day-secondary schools and have little hope of qualifying for any of the competitive professional degree courses in STEM or medicine, business, or law.

In the matter of enhancing access for marginalized communities, the main role for governance has to do with closely overseeing the general direction of the policies in place to confer legitimacy and transparency upon them, around the following related actions:

- Developing through teaching and research objective strategies and programmes for promoting quotas for students from marginalized backgrounds attending primary schools in transitioning into the prestigious secondary schools and consequently higher education because the problem of marginalization starts at basic education. In addition, similar programmes to enhance young peoples' chances of accessing appropriate scholarship programs and bursaries in higher education have to be devised.
- Identifying strategies for enhancing student numbers while addressing challenges of maintaining quality with lower unit costs, fragmentation and expansion of institutions, relationships between departments and disciplines, devolution of resource allocation, and generation of additional income streams.
- Developing policies related to providing specialized services for students and staff who are often discriminated upon based on gender, ethnicity, race, sex, religious orientation and disability.
- Paying attention to quality assurance and constant monitoring of the education offered to these marginalized groups because entry does not always translate into a rewarding educational experience and positive post-graduation outcomes.

Although affirmative action is increasingly being acknowledged by many countries as a legitimate policy option, related reforms have not addressed the root of inequality of access due to:

- Lack of resources.
- Challenges in attracting and retaining talents from different marginalized backgrounds (including in teaching and leadership).
- Conservative institutional systems, policies, structures, and cultures that can hinder progress.
- Lack of adequate data on institutional challenges and insufficient information on best practices for inclusion.

New governance models have thus to come up with policies and strategies to address these challenges if meaningful diversity in the composition of the student body have to be realized. In this connection, institutional governors will need to partner with management to build consensus with the university community, beginning with institutional heads, deans, and heads of department and with staff and students on what would be considered the necessary inclusive actions and how to actualize them. The overall strategy should be that of addressing undue inequalities across higher education institutions at the national, institutional, continental, and sub-regional levels<sup>13</sup>. This collaboration should be accompanied by:

- Consensus-building on the way forward by the major parties on campus.
- The development of relevant objectives and strategies.
- Reform of the relevant administrative structures, staffing norms and strategies for recruitment and retention.
- Strengthening management skills at all levels.
- Continuous data collection and analysis to learn from good practice.

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13. Carolina Guzmán Valenzuela & Paul Zeleza, focus group discussion notes, 2021.

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## 4.2. Regional and global inequalities in higher education provision

Between 1975 and 2018, international student numbers were estimated to have risen from 0.8 to 5.6 million in 2018 (OECD, 2020), and is estimated to have reached 10 million today. Academic staff movements are understandably less pronounced. Nevertheless, student mobility is an important matter for governance because it reflects the unequal power relations between the countries that send their students overseas and those that receive them, with the latter being by far the more dominant for historical and economic reasons.

These are relations that date back to colonialism and mirror academic dependency, the North/South divide and what Guzmán-Valenzuela et al (2019) call '**empires of knowledge**' because they are about an asymmetrical movement of knowledge and its expansion from the centre to the periphery. The question for governance thus is how national power within the North and West influences the direction of movement of knowledge and how the identity of a traveling student and academic/researcher constructs his/her identity within this power/knowledge landscape to ensure that they are not victims of some form of cultural imperialism as result of which they interpret even their country realities from the perspective of the countries in which they enrol for studies.

In addressing these hierarchical, asymmetrical, and unequal academic flows between the formerly imperial and the colonized countries, the global North and the global South, new governance systems should promote the development of clear policies of equitable and mutually beneficial international exchanges and research engagements for a more just relationship between the former colonies in Africa, the Caribbean, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and others on the one hand, and the West and North on the other hand.

Ironically, HEIs of the former colonies tend to far more removed from the everyday experiences of the ordinary citizen than is the case for their counterparts in the former colonies mostly because higher education access is more democratized in the latter. Hence, new governance frameworks and practices must cultivate clear policies to respond to calls for local relevance regarding the development needs of contemporary and post-colonial societies and economies, a feat achievable through the development of inclusive curricula and engagements that focus on international, intercultural, interdisciplinary and information literacies and transnational experiential learning opportunities.

Governance models should also respond to there being many students and staff of the former colonies and other developing countries who chose to work in the North. HEIs governance systems of countries that suffer brain migration can turn the brain drain into gain by crafting strategies for mobilizing their diaspora intelligentsia to be important actors in transnational university networks. To this end, initiatives such as the Carnegie African Diaspora Fellowship Program and the Consortium of African Diaspora Scholars Programs spring to mind as readily applicable templates<sup>14</sup>.

Higher education management should oversee student and staff mobility and regional and international intellectual networks. However, governors too can be an essential bridge between universities and states regarding cross-border student and academic staff movements, not least by facilitating initiatives enabling a smooth transition. Relevant actions here may include:

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14. Paul Zeleza, focus group discussion notes, 2021.

- Working with recipient countries with relevant government departments to eliminate administrative and bureaucratic barriers to mobility through properly worked out collaborative agreements (Berry, C. 2013).
- Promoting active surveillance of the security of immigrant students and staff with regard especially to their possible oppression by hostile states and third parties.
- Mounting programs on the pre-departure orientation of immigrating students.
- Organizing speedy processing of immigration paperwork such as visas and work and research permits<sup>15</sup>.

Once immigrating students reach their destination, receiving universities can support them through credit transfers, academic bridging programs and social networks on and around campuses.

Governors should further design programs to:

- Promote policies related to the inflows of international students as well as mobilization of additional funding in catering to their needs (Berry, C. 2013).
- Lead policy discussions on differential tuition, contracts, and conditions of work for international students.
- Facilitate work-study programs on campus and employment within countries of study after graduation.
- Integrate, assimilate, and work towards the inclusion and equitable treatment of international students, faculty, and administrators.
- Foster engagements with the state and relevant regulatory agencies on matters related to student and academic staff mobility.

Other initiatives governors could initiate to support international students include crafting of inclusive policies targeting students of developing countries, many of whom find it hard to enrol in top global universities due to economic and unfriendly immigration barriers.

However, even those who manage to secure entry are not guaranteed completion or post-graduation employment. The last few years alone, not least with the growth of populism among some democracies in the West, have been witness to states adopting policies that have been injurious of international students' interests, by reducing visa and employment opportunities<sup>16</sup>. In some of the major destinations for foreign students, isolated cases of racism against foreign students have been reported.

Internationalization-related challenges such as the negative impact of colonialism in the former colonies, academic dependency and the North/South divide, and the near-monopoly of knowledge by the Global North, with China in close pursuit, can best be addressed at the political level by government ministries, and at the international level, especially (but not only) by UNESCO-led initiatives in partnership with national governments and relevant regional and international organizations.

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15. Meng-Hsuan Chou, focus group discussion notes, 2021.

16. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, focus group discussion notes, 2021.

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## 4.3. Integrating refugees and asylum seekers

Refugees and asylum seekers are another group of marginalized youths, which finds it difficult to access higher education, finish their studies, or homologate their titles in the host countries. Refugees have an even more acute challenge in developing countries where even locals may have neither access nor the resources to complete their higher education studies. Using the UK experience, Lambrechts (2020) identifies key factors inhibiting the integration of refugee students. The first has to do with national policies imposed on universities by the government and complex structures and processes of admission in most host countries' universities. She points to the lack of timely, accessible, quality information for potential refugee students; overly stringent requirements for admission and bureaucratic inertia; and complex financial support procedures for refugee students.

As of 2019, approximately 16 European countries had such programs although the type of support available to refugees differs between countries. The experiences of these European Union countries with handling refugee students' needs (Bacher et al., 2020; Berg et al., 2021; Jungblut et al., 2020) can provide lessons for the integration of refugees into national higher education systems.

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## 4.4. The place of IT in managing access

IT is a potentially helpful resource for enhancing access of delivery of university programs and for enabling governance systems. Internet-based provision can do much to advance students' access to regional and international universities. As the COVID 19 pandemic has demonstrated, technology can be vital in facilitating pedagogical approaches that depend on virtual technology. Unfortunately, IT and IT-related programmes have equally been associated with low student graduation rates and higher costs than conventional teaching programmes.

To fully benefit from IT, there is need to demystify the perceived complexity of IT among many university governors. Therefore, governors should undergo training workshops. Such workshops could also address matters related to the ethical policies in the use of student and staff data, not only to safeguard individuals' privacy but also to win their approval. Moreover, because IT can exacerbate rather than reduce endemic social and regional disparities related to access and performance in higher education, governors have to configure appropriate policies for example, in relation to learning analytics, (Avella, J et al., 2016).

Significant too for redress by governors are the inequalities in the spatial distribution of Internet facilities across rural and urban areas and between continents. Second, because IT can reinforce inequalities between the wealthy and the developing countries, a priority for HEIs governance in the less developed countries should be policies that promote accelerated investments in technology, followed by professional development of faculty and management on a wide range of IT issues, including cyber security, protection of personal data, transparency and educational possibilities and benefits (Zezeza and Okanda, 2021). These and related reforms call for greater institutional autonomy, which can be elusive, especially in countries with dominant external and market-oriented governance models.

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## 4.5. Country driven inclusion and diversity

Greater inclusion and diversity in student and staff populations is achievable by promoting equity of representation of the various HEI's constituencies in governance. A priority for inclusion should be marginalized populations. Such widening of the social space in which HEIs operate can bring to the table a broader societally and globally relevant agenda. Broadening stakeholder engagement further allows the critical stakeholders in governance to learn from each other. It may be useful for relevant constituencies to propose names of their preferred representatives to the appointing authorities and identify other participatory strategies to enhance inclusion of the marginalized voices. There is also a need to clearly define how these constituencies should 'share institutional power' because newly appointed representatives of the marginalized may be intimidated by their traditionally privileged counterparts in the governing bodies. Therefore, all governor appointees require exposure to relevant training on their expectations as governors<sup>17</sup>.

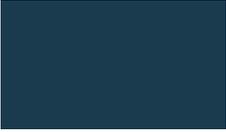
Governors and management can also accelerate inclusion through efforts to win the cooperation of all university constituencies, from the top administration to the most junior staff, by engaging directly with them to widen their understanding of the university in question and own critical management decisions.

Lessons can be learned from Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and South Africa which have devised innovative strategies to promote reconciliation and inclusion of indigenous peoples in all sectors of society, including higher education. These reforms have been accompanied by curriculum change, retooling of procurement, and hiring practices, and inclusion of disadvantaged groups in university governing bodies<sup>18</sup>.

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17. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, focus group discussion notes, 2021.

18. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, focus group discussion notes, 2021.



# Conclusion. Final thoughts

There is a wide diversity in the types and efficacy of HEIs governance systems – whether in countries with long histories of university education and democracy, those with much less experience, and those lying somewhere in the middle. The question then is stark: How can UNESCO assist governance in HEIs better to serve the public good? Below are some proposals:

**Learning from success stories.** HEIs from the least developed countries could learn from experiences of the West, North and the fast-growing China's higher education sector. There is much scope for exchange programs around personnel and short-term attachments between HEIs of the developed and developing countries, and for training in higher education governance. There will also be a need for a network of higher education governors where emerging trends in governance could be shared at international conferences and through relevant publications exploring possibilities for adaptation rather than adoption of experiences.

**Professionalizing governance.** The presence of partisan politics and religious frameworks, has to be confronted head-on. Because such interference springs from a limited appreciation of what universities are about conferences and workshops can help to raise the level of reflexivity in such quarters. In addition, potentially useful is for local and international organizations that invest in universities to direct some of their budget to student and staff unions and civil society organizations to strengthen their voices in HEI's decision-making processes because they are unlikely beneficiaries of state funding.

**Addressing poverty and unequal power relations.** Governance systems reflect development levels of the countries in which the institutions are located. What needs to be done is to be embarked on a journey to address the underdevelopment challenge. Here HEIs in the developing countries should take the lead by initiating research projects and teaching programs that widen opportunities to study; and second, convincing the academic community to be active in national politics to contribute to a climate of sound national level governance.

**Benefitting from Globalization.** Being futuristic calls for heavy investments in quality higher education and its governance through accelerated graduate training. But those countries needing to make progress the most do not have the resources to make it possible. Whether the required graduate scholarships will come from national governments, bilateral donors or established HEIs, developing countries should press for admission quotas (affirmative action) to be established by the top universities of the world, although there then also should be structures to ensure that scholarship beneficiaries return to their home countries after graduation. Internship and short-term employment opportunities can nevertheless be helpful in providing such individuals with resources to contribute to academic governance on their return home.

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# Governance in higher education

Organized by UNESCO in collaboration with the Government of Spain, the 3rd World Higher Education Conference (WHEC2022) aims at breaking away from the traditional models of higher education and opening doors to new, innovative, creative, and visionary conceptions that not only serve current agendas for sustainable development, but also pave the way for future learning communities that overcome barriers, speak to all and are inclusive of all lifelong learners.

The WHEC2022 promotes a global conversation nurtured by diverse narratives on higher education through various activities: generation and dissemination of knowledge; formulation of updated policy recommendations; identification and sharing of innovative practices; networking and strengthening of partnerships; broad participation of stakeholders at local and international levels (within and outside higher education systems: professors, researchers, youth, managers, authorities, policy makers, experts, entrepreneurs, social leaders, etc.); and development of renewed paths framed by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and looking at the Futures of Education.

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