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Reform of the Romanian university system

a 'good governance' case study

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Overview

- Why this case study?

- The call for Romanian HE reform: the mid-2000s

- The 2011 Law of Education: higher education reform at work

- Follow-up to the Romanian classification exercise: the EUA Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP)

- The IEP 'system review': outcomes and recommendations

- Implications for Thai HE?

Why this case study?

- A European perspective on HE reform

- A focus on governance

- An example of classification of universities in a diverse HE system

- A sector-wide institutional evaluation exercise

- Relevance for governance and reform in Thai higher education

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Outline of the Romanian higher education system: 1990s to mid 2000s

- Diversity of institutions, governance, and missions
- 56 public (state) HEIs; 35 private accredited HEIs; 21 provisionally authorised private universities
- University autonomy guaranteed by law; but limitations in financial and personnel matters
- Develop strategy within prevailing legal provisions
- Rector elected by governing body; latter elected by Senate
- HEIs required to develop internal QA
- Independent external QA/accreditation body

The call for higher education reform: the mid-2000s

- 1990s reforms to improve management capacity

- Also new curricula, lifelong learning, and research development

- By 2007 consistent reform and modernisation called for:

➢ Increase quality and relevance of HE;

➢ Accelerate decentralisation of financial and human resources; also administration and curricula;

➢ Programmes to enhance the performance of institutions, management, and academic staff.

The call for higher education reform: the mid-2000s

The 2007 diagnosis called for:

➢ full autonomy of universities in managing financial and human resources

➢ differentiation of universities in terms of missions

➢ improvement in external evaluation of public and private HEIs (institutional and study program level)

The call for higher education reform: the mid-2000s

Diagnosis identified significant shortcomings:

➢ All universities have education and research mission = not addressing realities in research, employability, society engagement

➢ Low participation rates = poor employability

➢ No incentive for improvement = shift to performance-related funding, not student numbers

➢ Lack of autonomy in HR policy = no flexibility

➢ Uniformity in management and organisation = no flexibility to develop QA systems to fit own priorities

➢ Inefficient university management = poor performance in core functions (research, innovation, teaching)

The 2011 Law of Education: higher education reform at work

Key provisions of the 2011 law: classification

Increased university autonomy and public responsibility

➤ universities to establish own mission, internal structures, strategy, QA systems, financial and HR management

Diversification through classification into three groups

➤ advanced research universities

➤ teaching and research universities (including artistic/creative universities)

➤ teaching oriented universities

Classification based on outputs: university identifies mission; provides data; evaluation follows

The 2011 Law of Education: higher education reform at work

Key provisions of the 2011 law: ranking of study programmes

- an exercise for ranking of study programmes; linked to financial incentives
- information to stakeholders for each academic discipline (quality in teaching, research, and society engagement)

The 2011 Law of Education: higher education reform at work

Key provisions of the 2011 law: public funding

- funding designed to take account of classification and ranking

- resource allocation and financing to reflect all types of HEI, mission, and quality

- finance through core funding with additional stream for 'best' universities and study programs

The 2011 Law of Education: higher education reform at work

Key provisions of the 2011 law: other significant reforms

- Rationalisation and concentration of resources: development of university consortia, or institutional mergers;

- Encourage 'entrepreneurialism' in universities; and changing governance and management;

- Reform of human resources policy: encourage high performers

Follow-up to the Romanian classification exercise: engaging the EUA Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP)

- 2011 Law requirement: classification to be followed by institutional evaluation of all universities by an international body

- EUA Institutional Evaluation Programme selected by Romanian authorities

- Evaluations completed in context of reform and its objectives, including the classification exercise.

- Aim: to strengthen core elements of Romanian universities (autonomy and administrative competences) by improving QA and management proficiency.

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Follow-up to the Romanian classification exercise: the Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP)

- Between January 2012 and August 2014, 70 universities evaluated under two projects:

➢ *Performance in Research, Performance in Teaching – Quality, Diversity, and Innovation in Romanian universities*: 41 universities: 11 classified as 'advanced research and teaching universities, and 30 as 'teaching and scientific research universities (including teaching and artistic/creative universities)'.

➢*Ready for innovating, ready for better serving the local needs - Quality, Diversity, and Innovation in Romanian universities*: 29 'teaching and learning universities'

The IEP evaluation methodology

Evaluation of:

➢ Decision making processes, institutional governance structures, and effectiveness of strategic management;

➢ Relevance of internal quality processes, and whether outcomes are used in decision-making and strategic management

The IEP evaluation methodology

Four key questions (a 'fitness for [and of] purpose' approach)

➤ What is the university trying to do? (mission, norms, profile)

➤ How is the university trying to do it? (governance and strategy)

➤ How does the university know it works? (quality assurance)

➤ How does the institution change in order to improve? (strategic management and capacity for change)

The IEP evaluation methodology

- IEP evaluations are mission driven

- Each university evaluated in context of its own mission and objectives.

- Members of IEP teams drawn from different national HE systems…

- …but implicit consensus about the elements of a 'good higher education system' and of a 'good European university'

IEP Peer Review:
a perspective on the components of a 'good higher education system'

System level:

- Government, ministry, buffer body, quality assurance agency, ensure conditions that enable institutions to function in accordance with national priorities whilst respecting institutional autonomy

- A good HE system does not allow some HEIs to lag behind

IEP Peer Review:
a perspective on the components of a 'good higher education system'

Institutional level:

Reflecting Bologna reforms:

- teaching and learning mission is student-centred;
- research activity supports good teaching;
- regional engagement enhances teaching and research;
- partnerships help to ensure quality;

Good governance principles:

- a university takes timely decisions and responds strategically to societal needs;
- equilibrium between collegiality and institutional leadership;
- self-steering made possible by internal QA procedures.

The IEP 'Romanian system review' report: key findings from 70 evaluations

- Long-term strategic capacity of institutions limited by scope of their autonomy, constant legislative change, and financial uncertainties;

- National regulatory and QA framework reinforces institutional isomorphism;

- HE system characterised by fragmentation: many small institutions; lack of institutional cooperation; and variance in sustainability and quality

The IEP 'Romanian system review' report: some general observations

- Universities have to address global competition and the conditions of knowledge-based economies

- EU modernisation' agenda

- Pressure to become more strategic, to sharpen the definition of their institutional profile, and be more effective in leadership and management.

- Governments have introduced reforms in institutional autonomy and diversification, funding, and quality assurance.

The IEP 'Romanian system review' report: some general observations

- The 2011 Law in Romania recognised need to improve governance, management and leadership

- Classification scheme meant to increase diversification of the system through funding concentration (effect blunted by the economic crisis)

- Tendency to mission drift not halted historically by the legislative environment and by national approach to QA.

The IEP 'Romanian system review' report: selected outcomes and recommendations

- 30 recommendations in the 'system review' report: grouped under ten priorities.
- Six priorities relevant to 'good governance and reform in Thai HE'

1. *Stimulate institutional change;*
2. *Secure sustainable funding;*
3. *Assure quality;*
4. *Applied research;*
5. *Engagement with society*
6. *Rethinking the higher education landscape.*

Priority 1: Stimulate institutional change

- Legal framework limits institutions' capacity for self-steering and strategic development

- Improve governance: academic committee structures and management executive arrangements to facilitate decision-making

- Governance in private universities: inadequate checks and balances

- External quality assurance system: revise to support institutional differentiation

Priority 1: Stimulate institutional change

- Institutional efficiency: governance structures need to be streamlined (proliferation of faculties, departments, research centres)
- Institutional efficiency: hampered by inefficient approval processes in matters such as strategic planning.
- Strengthen strategic capacity: legal dispositions should facilitate diversity of mission and sector differentiation
- Institutional strategic planning: based on ambitions and aspirations rather than solid analysis
- Performance needs to be measured and monitored: good data information systems required

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Priority 2: Secure sustainable funding

- Legal dispositions discourage multi-year institutional planning: stifles agility and long-term strategic capacity
- National authorities should expand institutions' budgetary and financial autonomy
- Institutions should calculate full costs and use risk-assessment instruments
- Internal allocation mechanisms should be a strategic tool for long-term institutional development
- Diversification of funding sources requires capacity to engage with local external stakeholders (public and private)
- Diversification of funding requires reformed national financial regulations

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Priority 3: Assure quality

- Inspectorial approach to external QA should be replaced by a trust-based, improvement-oriented and context-sensitive process

- Facilitate the development of a quality culture in HEIs in contrast to a compliance culture

- HEIs should ensure that internal QA processes are supportive of quality promotion

- Results of quality evaluations should feed into strategic processes and strategic planning

Priority 4: Applied research

- Research aspirations of 'advanced research' and 'teaching and scientific research universities' should be supported by documented research strategies with clear and realistic priorities

- Research capacity of smaller 'teaching and learning universities' should be developed through applied research and strengthening links between research and teaching

- Fragmentation of research teams should be reduced through incentives for institutional alliances and networks

Priority 5: Engagement with society

- Universities lack structures to support engagement with society

- National authorities should promote the regional role of universities: increase institutional autonomy, including financial and budgetary processes;

- Institutions need to look strategically at local and regional engagement: including cooperation with neighbouring universities and regional private actors

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Priority 6:
Rethinking the higher education landscape

- Limited financial resources: review shape and size of HE system to ensure responsiveness to current challenges

- A threshold should be established for the minimum size of institutions (particularly for university title)

- Develop incentives for greater inter-institutional cooperation and institutional consolidation.

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Lessons and implications for 'good governance and reform' in Thai HE?

- There is no 'blueprint' for reform; no 'blank sheet'
- Are there lessons and implications from the Romanian reforms and IEP evaluations?

Lessons and implications for 'good governance and reform' in Thai HE? (1)

Governance arrangements (corporate and academic)

- Governance arrangements must support institutional effectiveness, sound management and leadership
- Major challenges in a diverse sector; national initiatives essential

Strategic planning capability

- Pressure to become more strategic and effective in decision-making
- National legislation and regulations must facilitate strategic capacity

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Lessons and implications for 'good governance and reform' in Thai HE? (2)

Funding and finance

- Choice of funding model? Public/private balance?
- Greater institutional autonomy? Shift to market-driven approach?
- Single and transparent funding body to steer national objectives?

Size and shape of the sector?

- Capacity and future direction of sector linked to size and shape
- Mission diversity? Benefits of rationalisation? Regional partnerships and collaboration? 'mission partnerships'? balance between research and teaching?

Lessons and implications for 'good governance and reform' in Thai HE? (3)

Engagement with society

- What type of engagement? Degree of entrepreneurialism expected?

- Type of mission? How is research to be applied and knowledge transferred?

- Do universities have the appropriate infrastructure to support public responsibility role?

Lessons and implications for 'good governance and reform' in Thai HE? (3)

How to assure quality in a diverse sector?

- Choice for government and national authorities…

- Classification and ranking? Accreditation or audit/review? A methodology to reflect institutional differentiation?

- Degree of trust? Improvement-led or inspection driven?

- A single national quality agency (with professional and industrial accreditation bodies?)