Vitae Researcher Development International Conference 2014

International comparisons in postgraduate education: quality, access and employment outcomes

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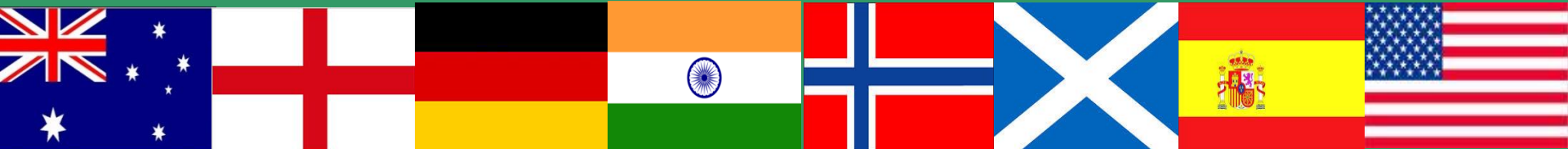
Australia England Germany India Norway Scotland Spain United States



Report summary

- Context for each country: HE environment and geo-political situation
- Three themes: quality; access; employment outcomes
- Case studies on seven countries
- Main report: how England performs compared with other countries
- Conclusions

Numbers of PGT and PGR students by country, compared with total population and numbers of universities, showing PG as % of all HE awards (Table 1)

Country	Population	Number of Universities	Number of HE awards	Number of PG awards (Proportion of total HE awards)	Proportion of total number of PG awards (%)	
					PGR	PGT
Australia	20,000,000	39	299,474	94,456 (31.5%)	8.6	91.4
England	54,000,000	130	660,925	217,915 (33.0%)	9.8	90.2
Germany	82,300,000	121	307,244	85,367 (27.7%)	31.4	68.6
India	1,270,000,000	659	20,706,755	2,653,344 (12.8%)	12.8	
Norway	5,000,000	17	40,568	13,344 (32.9%)	9.7	90.3
Scotland	5,200,000	19	68,305	25,350 (37.1%)	11.7	88.3
Spain	46,500,000	79	220,583	54,663 (24.8%)	16.3	83.6
United States	317,000,000	1,361	3,065,479	926,788 (30.2%)	18.9	81.1

General observations

- Recognition of value of PG degrees:
  personal, societal, economic
- Initiatives to strengthen PG education and institutions
- Many shared characteristics among the countries…
- …yet each has a unique set of circumstances that affect PG education
- Impossible to generalise but can identify strengths and challenges

Strengths, by country

Australia	• PG loan system • Comprehensive qualifications framework
England	• International recognition of excellence and strong research output • Quality of doctoral training
Germany	• No tuition fees • 'Germany scholarships' for gifted students
India	• Growing economy • Potential to increase participation • PG entry tests
Norway	• Centres of Excellence • No tuition fees • PGR funding
Scotland	• Research pools • Enhancement driven policy • PG tuition fee loans
Spain	• University observatory of grants, aid and academic performance • International campus of excellence programme
United States	• International recognition of excellence and strong research output • PGR entry tests • Role of community colleges in fair access

Challenges, by country

Australia	• Coursework' masters as preparation for doctoral research • Low levels of research training support • Access for indigenous people
England	• Uncertainty around PG funding and balancing priorities of UG and PG • Relatively high tuition fees in global market
Germany	• Uncertainty around PG funding • Variable quality across institutions • 'Level inflation'
India	• Variable quality across institutions • Gap between rich/poor and urban/rural communities • Lack of global positioning • Low numbers of PhDs
Norway	• Balancing the needs of college sector with maintaining quality • Grade inflation and lack of consistency of outcomes
Scotland	• Need to rationalise the multiplicity of doctoral training opportunities
Spain	• Funding challenges, in the wider economy and in HE • Conservative and still-developing qualifications framework
United States	• No national quality assurance organisation • No national initiative for professional skills development • Relatively high tuition fees

How does England compare?

- High research profile benefits PG study; greater recognition of the contribution of doctoral candidates?
- World-leading doctoral training and professional skills development
- Diversity of masters programmes and outcomes
- Timely completion; variability across subjects
- Mature QA and qualifications and credit framework; better alignment with ECTS?

Conclusions

- Concern to maintain quality in the context of growing numbers and diversity of HE providers
- Elite institutions in all countries, with STEM subjects more generously funded
- PG outcomes influenced by subject / topic
- Value of PG degrees, yet range of outcomes, widely recognised
- Most countries face financial challenges in maintaining PG numbers and quality
- Country-specific commitment to access to PG education
- Access necessarily related to funding
- Diversity of postgraduate destinations across countries
- Challenge of ensuring PGR degrees are fit for dual purpose of supplying next generation of academics and preparing graduates for wide range of employment