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National strategies on citizenship related competencies in higher education: a comparison of Poland, UK, Hungary and Portugal

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Abstract

The European Tuning Project identified generic competencies to be attained by graduates in Higher Education. Three of these competencies are related to citizenship and interculturality: appreciation of diversity and multiculturality; ability to work in an international context; and understanding of cultures and customs of other countries. A CiCe working group is researching European higher education curricula to identify how these competencies are being addressed in different subject areas. This paper draws together the findings on different national approaches and presents a comparison of four countries: Poland, UK, Hungary and Portugal.

National and European citizenship

Citizenship has historically been associated with membership of a nation-state. However, the citizenship related competencies identified in the European Tuning process (appreciation of diversity and multiculturality; ability to work in an international context; and understanding of cultures and customs of other countries) imply a different citizenship ideal to national conceptions that emphasise cultural and ethnic homogeneity. European integration has given us new supranational rights to move, reside and work across the European Union and this is reflected in moves to integrate European higher education under the Bologna Process. Bologna attempts to implement a European framework of undergraduate and postgraduate provision that would ensure common standards and facilitate student mobility.

The student-citizen in this model is not determined by birth or ethnicity but in terms of participation in education and work and a broadly conceived European cultural space (Wright 2004). They are viewed as autonomous knowledge workers and lifelong learners able to negotiate liberalised and complex markets. In line with this, the citizenship related skills and competencies identified in the tuning process imply students able to move psychologically, as well as physically, with relative ease between cultures and across national boundaries. Yet this is expected to occur within higher education institutions (HEIs) that remain in many respects national institutions for national citizens.

Embedding citizenship-related competencies in higher education requires a move away from nationally oriented systems of higher education and a shift, not just in the direction outlined in Bologna but towards a European higher education sector consistent with

principles of diversity, equality, and multiculturalism. The following national case studies highlight the possibilities and limitations of achieving this in the current context.

The United Kingdom

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is not a nation-state and as such it is not characterised by national cultural or ethnic homogeneity. It is a multi-national state consisting of four nations (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland). Immigration to the UK has a long history including well-established groups and communities such as the Irish, Jewish and Chinese. The post-war world period was characterised by immigration from the New Commonwealth countries including the Asian sub-continent (Pakistan, Bangladesh, India) and the Caribbean. More recently and following conflict in the former Yugoslavia and the expansion of the European Union, there has been immigration to the United Kingdom from Central and Eastern Europe.

The Labour government's stance on multiculturalism is characterised by a schism. On the one hand, immigration and asylum policies have become more restrictive and policing and surveillance of certain ethnic groups has increased, as have pressures to integrate into the 'British way of life'. On the other hand, there is recognition that British institutions have to change if they are going to meet the challenges of a diverse society and remain faithful to human rights obligations. One of the most significant developments of recent years has been the Macpherson Report that was the result of an inquiry into the police investigation into the murder of Stephen Lawrence. According to the Report, the failure of the Metropolitan police to properly investigate the death of this young black man was a consequence of institutionalised racism seen as:

> 'the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture and ethnic origin.' (Macpherson 1999: para. 6.34)

While concerned with the police, the Macpherson Report has legitimated action to address racism in all public institutions and recent amendments of the Race Relations Act have required institutions, including HEIs, to produce race equalities plans and policies (Pilkington 2004: 104, 114). This has become particularly pressing as HEIs have widened access to include growing numbers of students from minority ethnic communities (ibid: 112). However, as Pilkington notes 'what is significant in this context is the extraordinary lack of attention paid to race and ethnicity in relation to higher education' (ibid: 113).

The pressures on HEIs to address issues of diversity look likely to increase as new equality legislation comes into force. The 2006 Equality Act places obligations on all public institutions to treat all citizens equally regardless of race, gender, religion, sexual orientation and disability. This represents a significant shift in UK equality law towards a more interventionist policy calling on proactive equality and diversity strategies from public bodies. Furthermore, it extends the remit beyond gender, race and disability to include areas such as sexual orientation and religion.

The UK 'equality and agenda' poses a significant challenge for HEIs and academics. A

recent report on equal opportunities at a UK university highlights barriers at the level of institutional strategies and policies as well as at the level of curriculum design and individual staff (Cook et al 2006). The research team identified considerable variability across the institution and a gap between policy and practice. Equality and diversity was not mainstreamed across the curriculum (ibid: 41). There was also strong evidence of lack of staff expertise and a lack of openness to equality and diversity issues (ibid: 42). There is no reason to assume that this HEI is atypical and there is some justification for generalising from these findings.

Despite the gap between policy and practice there is now in the UK a strong legislative basis for action. There are also examples of good practice in UK universities. In particular, issues of diversity and multiculturalism are integral to the curricula of certain social sciences and related vocational areas. Cook et al (2006) examined national subjects' benchmark statements for 10 areas and identified social policy and administration and social work as an area where there is a strong and explicit reference to equality and diversity. However, their analysis indicates inconsistency even within social science subjects with relatively few references to these issues in psychology benchmark statements (ibid: 22).

What is interesting in the UK is the extent to which there are national strategies, policies and mechanisms that are directed towards an equality and diversity agenda. However, there may be a gap between a proactive policy agenda, specific supported initiatives and the wider higher education system. In particular, there is no evidence that significant resources are being committed to mainstreaming diversity, multiculturalism and inter-cultural learning across the sector. For example, there has been a notable decline in the numbers of students studying languages in recent years and the closure or downsizing of language departments in many universities.

Hungary

Hungary is largely a mono-cultural country with about 90 per cent of the population considering themselves to be Hungarians. The remaining groups can be divided into three (1995); Gypsy (Roma) population estimated 5-8 per cent, large minorities (Germans, Croatians, Serbs, Slovaks etc.) and small minorities (Greeks, Bulgarians, Ukrainans). Multicultural issues were not a focus in Hungary until the mid-1990s. In Higher Education, until recently there were no policies concerning multiculturalism. Multiculturalism exists within a framework of equal opportunities in the 2005 *Law on Higher Education*:

> **'8. §** (1) Independently from citizenship, anyone can take part in the education provided by the Higher Education system, and may freely choose the institution where he or she wishes to study.
>
> (2) The language of Higher Education is Hungarian. Those belonging to national or **ethnic minorities may study using their mother tongue, or their mother tongue and Hungarian,** as stipulated by law. Higher Education may be provided in part, or in full, in a language different from Hungarian.

> **44.** §(2) In **the entrance examination** procedure, members of national or ethnic minorities **may use their mother tongue**, provided they studied in a minority secondary school in which that language was used, or bilingual education was provided, and in the maturation exam, the minority language was used.'

Equal opportunities law states that it is one main aim of the law to establish equal treatment and equal opportunities in H.E. Universities are then obliged to establish equal opportunities, which formulate suggestions and examines discrimination. However the main focus appears to be gender and disability. The output requirements (i.e. the competencies of a student who successfully completed the course) for degree courses are set out in the *Decree 15/2006 of the Minister of Education*. Annex 1 describes general competencies that could be acquired by all students of Higher Education. These competencies are, however, only related to employment and there is no explicit mention of multiculturalism. The inclusion of multiculturalism depends on decisions made within Universities about the curricula of individual programmes. For example, there is evidence of a multicultural focus in courses such as Roma studies, cultural anthropology, teaching training, tourism and international business. There is no systematic attempt to address multiculturalism across the Hungarian H.E. sector despite some evidence of a relevant policy framework.

Poland

Communist Poland was characterised by policies that promoted monoculturalism and 'unity of nation'. The end of communism combined with globalisation and EU membership has opened up Polish society to greater diversity. Nevertheless, the need for openness is very difficult for a 'traditional' Polish mentality. The number of immigrants is growing but remains small scale compared to many west European countries. National, ethnic, and religious minorities include Germans, Ukrainians (including Łemkowie), Belarussians, Latvians, Slovaks, Roma, Jews and Czechs. The minorities living in Poland did not have their rights to cultivate their culture and language until 1989. It was not until Article 35 of the Polish Constitution of 1997 that minorities were granted rights to maintain and develop their own culture.

The National and Ethnic Minorities and Regional Languages Act was adopted by the Polish Parliament on 6th January 2005. This is the first legal document that gives a precise definition of national and ethnic minorities in Poland. This Act describes 'national minorities' as those groups who identify themselves with an established nation i.e., Germans, Ukrainians, Jews etc. It also defines 'ethnic minorities' as those who do not have their own country - those who are state-less such as the Roma people. Other points of the legal definition are common for both types of minorities. This controversial Act has provoked discussion about the situation of new minorities e.g. the Vietnamese. It emphasises that a foreign community can only be recognised as a national and ethnic minority if its ancestors had lived in Poland for at least a hundred years.

It is important to stress that there are no general core curricula for HEIs in Poland. The autonomy of Universities is enshrined in Polish law (from 27 July 2005). Each university can independently establish educational syllabuses, new specialisations and

curricula and research areas. Multicultural and intercultural education is not a part of the legislation effecting Polish HEIs but are voluntary activities undertaken by institutions as part of Polish and European civil society. A selection of important initiatives and best practices are presented here (also see Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz, Wołodźko, Strzemecka-Kata, 2006).

There are some multicultural initiatives that all institutions will participate in. Significantly, compared to the communist era, universities are now free to organise educational paths for foreign students, employ foreign teachers, organise international, didactical and investigative teams, participate in international programs and projects and organise exchange of visits both of students and teachers. The most popular and appreciated - by students and teachers in universities - method of multicultural, intercultural and European education is a creation of opportunities for contacts and exchanges with other European countries. Many students participate in Socrates exchange, visiting and studying in the universities in many European countries. There are other examples of initiatives outside of the formal seminar and classroom including Student Scientific Circles. For example, the Scientific Circle of a Department of Psychology of Cross-Cultural Relations at the Warsaw School of Social Psychology (SWPS)[1].

In terms of formal teaching and institutional organisation, we can point to Departments that are multicultural in their practices and methods. As one might expect, multicultural education in Polish universities is particularly undertaken in foreign language education. The curricula of linguistic specialisations consist of many issues concerning the culture of the given language. In some universities - located in the borderlands - there are formal opportunities for multiculturalism. Specific courses that are related to interculturalism can be identified across Polish universities. For example, a course for students in Jagiellonian University in Krakow: 'Intercultural Education as a Tool for Conflict Prevention':

> The aim of this course is to explore the dimensions of conflicts in divided societies, models of cohesion and social integration (in the past and present) and to come to grasp with possible solutions (Ambrosewicz-Jacobs, 2006).

Of further note is a course of Intercultural Education at Warsaw University organised by the Faculty of Pedagogy. Finally, there is the example of a specific institution that is characterised by its multicultural ethos. The High School of Informatics and Management in Rzeszów is an open university with many foreign students who not only study but also participate in many school events presenting their own culture.

The above represent a small sample of initiatives relevant to citizenship-related competencies in Poland. These can be institutional, student-led and curriculum based. There is also evidence of conferences and networks that provide opportunities for sharing these initiatives. There is however no evidence that these are mainstreamed across institutions and disciplines and there are no state-led initiatives to achieve this as in the case of the UK.

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[1]   http://www.swps.edu.pl/new_www/english/

Portugal

Portugal, formerly a country of emigration, can now be seen as a country of immigration as well and the immigrant and foreign segment of the population has contributed significantly to the changing demographic characteristics of the country (cf. Rosa, Martinez de Seabra & Santos, 2004). This has been acknowledged in educational legislation. The Comprehensive Law on the Education System, approved in 1986, states that the educational system should ensure the equality of opportunity through a democratic education, being a state duty to ensure such that this education is for all the children, under the principles of equality, universality and gratuity.

Higher education in Portugal expanded rapidly since the seventies – from about 50,000 university students at the time of the 1974 Portuguese revolution epoch this number has grown to about 340,000 in 2001 (Barreto, 1996). The expansion has included an increase in ethnic minority students originating from former Portuguese colonies in Africa and Asia (East Timor) and Brasil. However, apart from the case of teacher training, multicultural and intercultural education and citizenship are subjects with almost no expression in the formal curriculum of university undergraduate programmes (cf. Cibele & Santos Silva, 2000). Since the nineties, HEIs have been including courses on diversity and multiculturalism, either as optional or mandatory, in the teacher-training curriculum. Even when programmes have no such course as an independent subject, it is, however, usually included in courses in the social sciences. Programmes not directly related with education, social sciences and social work tend to exclude these subjects as a part of university studies. Another feature is the growth of graduate programmes now offering subjects such as European citizenship, post-colonialist, intercultural communication and education. This tendency may be interpreted as a sign of the value that academics and research centres are giving to subjects related to diversity and intercultural learning.

Nevertheless, students' intercultural learning and citizenship competencies do not depend exclusively on disciplinary content. Universities and other higher education institutions have several other means to promote such competencies, such as international mobility, internationalisation at home, promoting voluntary activities and including students' campus activities. There is some evidence that institutions are developing institutional structures to support student's mobility and include international experiences as part of the curriculum.

Conclusion

Issues of diversity and multiculturalism have become more significant in recent years for all the countries discussed in this paper. A proactive national policy agenda that directly impacts on HEIs is clearest in the UK, however there is evidence of a gap between policy and practice. There is some evidence of state direction in Hungary within a framework of equal opportunities. There is very little evidence of a specific HE policy agenda in Poland and Portugal possibly reflecting a less regulated and more autonomous HE system. Nevertheless, in all countries, institutions and academics promote and extend a European citizenship of diversity and multiculturalism through a range of activities reflecting their autonomy within national/European civil societies. This results

in pockets of excellence, some sharing of good practice but little evidence of mainstreaming across institutions. It remains to be seen whether European citizenship related competencies related to multiculturalism and diversity can be consistently embedded within national higher education institutions still primarily geared towards national citizens.

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