

White paper on Tertiary Education – problems and shortcomings

Council of Higher Education Institutions

Jiří Zlatuška, vice-chairman of CHEI

White Paper and Beyond Conference, Prague, 16 October 2009

(Presented to the CHEI Board and enhanced by comments of CHEI Board members)



WPTE - problems

- Lack of open and non-manipulated debate; no attempt to involve public on an informed basis (e.g., WPTE does not reflect comments and suggestions to the draft version collected by Council of H.E.I. and Rector's Conference).
- Deforming autonomy of institutions and their structures.
- Dubious governance structure.
- Tuition fees – model, bubble effect.
- Radical change in areas linked to local “culture”.
- Academy of Sciences as part of the system, and research funding.
- No additional public funds, more avenues of influencing public institutions by private agents.
- Obsessed with funding and governance issues, while other topics are underestimated. (WPTE does not contain terms “tenure”, “career”, “ethics”.)
- Serving absurd and uninformed political prejudice (fmr PM Topolánek earlier today: „Český univerzitní model je až na kosmetické změny ve své podstatě stále stejný, jako za komunismu.“).

WPTE – methodological flaws

- No reflection of changes in environment (financial and demographic trends).
- Some data WPTE is based on were obsolete even at the time of writing. (E.g., Chart 3 in WPTE shows 2004 data, even though 2005, 2006 and 2007 data were available.)
Even the OECD country note (Nov. 2006) is based on more recent data than WPTE (Jan 2009).
- According to recent Rectors's conference data, government financial contribution (per student, inflation adjusted figures) has decreased by 30 per cent since 2006.
- Despite rapid changes, WPTE only works with OECD data, even though national data are often more detailed and available much earlier.

WPTE – methodological flaws, cnt'd

- Only certain suggestions from OECD Country Note (2006) are considered, while others selectively ignored, e.g.: “87. *National policy standards for governance structures of the faculties*” – instead of discussing these, the Draft Law ignores the term “faculty” completely (one of the issues perceived by the academic community as central to maintaining quality).
- No analysis included why previous reforms (advocated by proponents on WPTE team) did not bring expected effects.
- No analysis of reasons why the government authorities do not use the existing steering tools to support their vision (e.g. to increase the rôle and share of professionally-oriented undergraduate programmes).
- Survey of Academic Staff was *not* independently verified; the claim to the contrary by the WPTE team is clearly unacceptable from professional point of view.



WPTE – omissions of positive news

- Existing quality and performance of universities is *not* analyzed by WPTE.
- QS World University Rankings 2009 shows improved positions: Charles University ranks 229 (up from 290 in 2007), ranking 88 in Natural Sciences, 140 in Arts and Humanities, 185 in Social Sciences; Czech Technical University ranks 394 (up from 520 in 2007), ranking 171 in Engineering and IT) – if Institute of Chemical Technology was included, the rank would improve even more.
- 2009 Scientific Performance Ranking of World Universities by Taiwan HE Evaluation and Accreditation Council also ranks Charles University at 226 based on 10-year window of real paper citations (not just journal IF used as a proxy elsewhere), up from 314 in 2007.
- These universities are among the opponents of WPTE. (Unfortunately there is no ranking of ministries.)

Issues of General Agreement

- Record-high participation rate (*using N. Barr's term: participation rate is the opposite of "shameful", yet without introducing tuition fees*)
- Quality erosion.
- Need of differentiation.
- Demography consequences.
- Equity imperative.
- Costs / problematic availability of public support.
- Accreditation in need of streamlining and being able to hit core issues.
- Relevance of education to the job market.

Autonomy and Public Accountability

- Shortcomings of current autonomous governance structure advocated by WPTE are not based on evidence.
- Public institutions in general, not just HEIs do not have tradition of representatives expressing public interest.
- The idea of TEC acting as “an insulator” may sound interesting until one realizes it failed dramatically whenever actually implemented (cf. public media councils and the so-called “un-political” nominations for them).
- Dangers of conflicts of interest emerging from assumed governance structures in WPTE are not taken into account (socialization of private company costs, indirect public support, inadequate distribution of authority among competing institutions).
- WPTE’s use of empty vocabulary – “representatives” of groups of stakeholders on BoT/TEC – is a telltale sign of systemic problem.
- Business responsibility differs from that of public institutions – local companies often owe their success to their foreign mothers; also note high level of bribery on big public contracts (not to speak about the fact that, e.g., former communist secret police colonel’s appointment as a university Rector would be prohibited by the Law, but may well sit at its BoT as a CEO of multinational company branch).

Issues of Autonomy not reflected in WPTE

- William Rainey Harper, first President of U of Chicago (University and Democracy, 1899):
‘The three birth-marks of a university are ... self-government, freedom from ecclesiastical control, and the right of free utterance. And these certainly give it the right to proclaim itself an institution of the people, an institution born of the democratic spirit.’
- Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1762 (2006), “Academic freedom and university autonomy”:
‘academic freedom and university autonomy are the cornerstones of Europe’s academic heritage.’ (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 26 September 2007 at the 1005th meeting of the Ministers’ Deputies.)
- When “Captains of industry” and the politicians acting on their vested interests lecture universities on changes the academia should implement, it clearly contradicts the above.



Change and its Institutions

- The radical change advocated by WPTE and Draft Law scripters does not take into account existing institutional culture and problems emerging from import of alien structures.
- Academia consists of mixture of formal and informal institutions and their enforcement and interaction defines overall performance – risks following from the fact that informal component is not amenable to deliberate short-run change; risks from this are not considered in WPTE.
- No analysis is made concerning negative impact of inability of the Ministry of Education to formulate sensible HE policy.
- Shortcomings often result from profit maximization under less than perfect ministerial rules or regulation – an issue neglected completely by WPTE.

Reform or Tuning the System?

- WPTE assumes wide-ranging “revolution” and quite radical departure from existing structures.
- Counter-WPTE position emphasizes the need to tune existing regulation.
- Alternative vision exists (Charles University proposal), no comparison of alternatives have been made in WPTE.
- WPTE advocates “reform” for reform’s sake – politician’s desire to be seen as “reformer” but no intrinsic need for it, neither recognition that reform can make things worse, not better.

Tuition Fees, Cost Sharing

- Some motivations taken from completely different setting (equity, access, social differences) whose premises are no longer valid.
- Not really admitting that “*Cost-sharing throughout the world is a policy response to the inability in nearly all countries to keep up with higher education’s rapidly rising costs.*” (D. Bruce Johnston, 2005.)
- Quality or relevance link is assumed but not evidence-backed (UK student satisfaction, Australia relationship between school quality and employment prospects).
- No analysis reflecting financial crisis impact developed in WPTE:
 - bubbles,
 - inflated expectations,
 - unsustainable rise of the cost of study.
- Income-contingent repayment lacks the ability to provide feed-back in student behaviour; delayed transfer of tuition money to H.E. institutions; huge administrative cost as a cost of securing uncertainty.
- „Institute for HEIs Analysis“ (Mr. Fischer, among others) included „principled critique“ of effects of deferred fees when commenting earlier draft of WPTE already in July 2008, ignored by WPTE similarly comments of others which did not fit the framework limitations of WPTE authors [even though *very* relevant to scarcity of public funds] .

HEIs need space for their own strategic planning

- WLTE assumes enhanced competences to HEIs and some decrease of bureaucracy (or earmarked money).
- Yet the real steps taken by the government differ – more earmarking, attempts to remove carry-over funds (even though they actually represent a token of institutional independence from government budget).
- Management autonomy made more difficult because of regulations and red tape.
- Autonomy would be better suited by preferring lump-sum model of funding.
- One-size fits all funding formula promotes socially sub-optimal behaviour.

WPTE - Whitewash with respect to Draft Law preparation

- Sensitive issues presented with several variants, yet no comparison of advantages and risks is made,
- Draft Law narrows this to options which may not be presented in WPTE in a thorough manner.
- Risk identification is completely lacking.
- Why has the evaluation team not been given a translation of the Draft Law? (No matter that its discussion did not produce any minutes or outcomes by the participants.)
- **HE Reform has *not* been adopted by the Cabinet as part of its regular business; WPTE has only been *noted*, not accepted by the Cabinet.**

Ethical Issues

- Ethical issues neglected.
- No consideration to public/private interactions such as Pilsen-Carlsbad case, etc.
(the latter being an example of neglect and negative effects of managerial style running a HE institution, clearly *not* an example contradicting self governance, autonomy and student involvement in governing structures).
- No analysis of older instances of no consequences delivered from known unethical cases.
- No provisions for enhancing transparency and public visibility.
- Accountability with respect to the public – not just economy as WPTE pushes forward, but also ethical issues need to be addressed – *the real issue being tertiary **education**, not just commercial service.*

Quality and Academic Qualifications

- Czech H.E. graduates exhibit consistently low unemployment (OECD data neglected by WPTE; excellent position of Czech graduates on qualified job market is *not* attributable only to transitional economy factor).
- WPTE uncritically claims that closer connection between company activity and school is needed.
- The problem of base academic activity funding vs. covering marginal costs based on detailed academics' activity structure neglected by WPTE, which retains the earmarking mindset as far as academic employment contracts are concerned.

A Note on Education and Climate

(Instead of Conclusion)

- If only Czech Republic was following the Nordic way in supporting Education in general, and tertiary Education in particular. 😊
- The Weather these days in the Czech Republic may be seen as if it follows the Nordic way as far as temperature and snow is concerned [32+ inches of snow sets 30-year record]. 😊😊
- But don't be fooled by that - the political establishment has yet to follow the lead as far as Education Policy is concerned, though. 😞😞😞