

# **Demographics and Higher Education in Europe – Institutional Perspectives**

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# Beauty and Brains: Student Information Tools and Attracting International Students to European Higher Education

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## 1. Introduction

Higher education may be at the eve of another decade of immense change. In many European countries, the demographic situation is changing to one with shrinking cohorts of young people. In Africa, population effects of HIV/AIDS will be devastating unless substantial changes take place. In Asia, the two 'giants' India and China seem to be waking up in terms of economic and social development, and are witnessing rapidly increasing numbers of students. For example, according to a recent report (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2007) Chinese graduation rates (2005-2006) are almost twofold those of the United States. Higher education institutions in Europe must reconsider their role in society for these reasons: traditional student pools are 'drying up' while new ones are emerging. Yet, what the future holds cannot yet be ascertained. Will emerging student pools disappear again (for instance if China's expanding higher education system starts to absorb its own students)? Or will the development of a new middle class in those countries increase the prospects for students to go abroad and, thus, affect student demographics even more? And, apart from demography, society is demanding different roles from higher education in the emerging knowledge society. Politically, on the one hand some neo-liberal tenets are beginning to become widely-held 'self-evident' points of view, for example leading to the introduction of tuition fees and similar economic elements, while on the other hand some politicians are backtracking from extreme beliefs in the market. In Europe, we may add the drives for changes embodied in the Bologna Process and the Lisbon Agenda, which should lead to a transparent higher education area encompassing forty-five countries, and a research area of the twenty-seven European Union member

states. Finally, the higher education community must come to terms with 'globalisation'. Globalisation is a reality that offers today's students the choice of study options on a global scale.

An eurocentric view would hold that the old continent has to find ways of maintaining its quality of life, which includes technological and social developments for environmental sustainability while at the same time with scientific and technological progress to ensure economic growth. Both qualitatively and quantitatively, much is demanded from Europe's higher education institutions.

One of the many effects of these changes is the increasing permeability of national borders with subsequent effects on higher education systems. By the same token, international aspects of higher education systems are gaining importance, by the same token. In the framework of General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS)<sup>1</sup>, four modes of international provision of higher education are distinguished:

- Mode 1: From the territory of one country into the territory of any other country (*cross-border supply*);
- Mode 2: In the territory of one country to the service consumer of any other country (*consumption abroad*);
- Mode 3: By a service supplier of one country, through commercial presence in the territory of any other country (*commercial presence*);
- Mode 4: By a service supplier of one country, through presence of natural persons of a country in the territory of any other country (*presence of natural persons*).

The mode that seems to come most natural to higher education, with its tradition of students travelling to universities in foreign countries, is the second above-mentioned mode (consumption abroad).

Student migration at a global scale can be interpreted as 'brain drain' for the home countries, because once students travel abroad for studies, they

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<sup>1</sup> GATS is a legally enforceable set of multilateral rules covering international trade in services.

may stay in their host region for their further career and life, to the disadvantage of social and economic growth opportunities in their home region. A broader perspective includes processes of student migration, taking into account factors, such as, first, brain gain in the host country but also in the home country (Jalowiecki, 2004); second, the possibility of a positive-sum game: the brain gain is larger than the brain drain, or there is a net positive effect for the world society. On the negative side of this positive-sum game, such an outcome may be reached through higher degrees of inequality (cf. 'knowledge gap' in Stiglitz, 2007), which may result in higher degrees of international tensions. Third, connections of permanently migrated high potentials to their home regions lead to a higher level of integration of the total society (Meyer, 2001).

The development of cross-border education is not purely an exogenous phenomenon, but rather something that actors in higher education can influence to some extent. This paper will discuss what actors in Europe's higher education systems are doing in that respect. More specifically, the paper will look at the strategies of two major European countries with regard to stimulating student immigration as a form of cross-border higher education.

## 2. Cross-Border Education

### 2.1. *Student mobility as one form of cross-border education*

Internationalisation of post-secondary education is an increasingly important trend in the global world. Increasing the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area for the rest of the world has been a driving force of the Bologna Process since its inception (Trends V<sup>2</sup>, p. 44). Cross-border education (CBE) is one component of the internationalisation of post-secondary education. The other key component is 'internationalisation at home'.

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<sup>2</sup> 'Trends' is a series of reports by the European University Association. The aim of the series is to give a regularly updated overview of the state of European higher education in the framework of the Bologna Process.

This text is concerned with the mobility of international students towards France and the United Kingdom (as examples for Europe) and how this is influenced (or not) by Student Information Tools (SITs).

CBE includes mobility for students, teaching and other academic personnel, programme mobility and institutional mobility. Student mobility is the key facet this article will tackle and probably the most substantial part of CBE. It includes: full study abroad for a foreign degree; part of academic partnership for home degree or joint degree; and, exchange programmes.

In the frame of CBE, SITs are used mainly to inform students who go to another country to study (consumption abroad, or GATS mode 2). SITs cannot be used to annihilate barriers to consumption abroad, such as: visa requirements and costs, foreign currency and exchange requirements, recognition of prior qualifications from other countries, quotas on numbers of international students in total and at a particular institution, restrictions on employment while studying, or recognition of new qualification by other countries.

However, SITs can be powerful means to balance increases in individual demand for higher education on a global scale with barriers such as those mentioned above, as well as providing timely information on policy changes (*e.g.*, a change in visa requirements). The next sections will describe SITs in France and the United Kingdom, their impact on student mobility as well as their pitfalls.

## *2.2. Rationales for cross-border education in France and the United Kingdom*

There are several rationales for cross-border education, which can be policy-related, institutional and student-focussed. There are four policy rationales<sup>3</sup> for cross-border education<sup>4</sup>: (i) the mutual understanding approach; (ii) the

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<sup>3</sup> Naturally, different players will prioritise and focus according to their national-political context.

<sup>4</sup> Although we are concerned specifically with student mobility, as an influencing factor of the demographic patterns, the rationales apply (to different degrees) to all forms of cross-border education.

skilled migration approach; (iii) revenue-generating approach, and (iv) the capacity-building approach<sup>5</sup>.

The mutual understanding approach to cross-border education is the common historical basis of internationalisation policies for higher education. In this approach, countries seek openness to the world and strengthened ties between countries through the creation of international networks of political and business elites. The privileged policy instruments thus lie in generally modest student mobility and academic partnership programmes and, for relationships between developed and developing countries, in development assistance projects. Although the mutual understanding can have an economic impact, it does not consider cross-border education as part of a broad and articulated economic policy. Academic, political, cultural and social rationales appear to be seen as more important than short- and medium-term economic rationales. In short, cooperation is much more important than in the three other approaches, which give more importance to international competition. The example of the European Union illustrates how far-reaching the cultural and political components of this approach to internationalisation of post-secondary education can be.

In the skilled migration approach, cross-border post-secondary education is viewed as a means of supporting economic growth and competitiveness in a knowledge economy. Cross-border education is used in a strategic way in order to attract skilled students that may become skilled immigrants in the receiving country and to stimulate the competitiveness of the higher education system, both considered as crucial for the economic growth in a knowledge economy. The main feature of the skilled migration approach to internationalisation is a drive to attract larger numbers of foreign students, generally through a combination of agencies that market the higher education sector abroad and an immigration policy that makes it easier for foreign students to stay after their studies.

The revenue-generating approach shares the rationales of the mutual understanding and skilled migration approaches, but offers higher education services on a full-fee basis, without public subsidies. Compared to domestic students, foreign students generate additional income for

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<sup>5</sup> The following paragraphs draw heavily on OECD 2004, pp. 220-231.

institutions that are encouraged to become entrepreneurial in the international education market. Under this strategy, governments tend to grant institutions considerable autonomy and seek to secure the reputation of their higher education sector and protect international students, for example through quality assurance arrangements. Examples of this approach are Australia, the United Kingdom (for non-European Union students), New Zealand and the United States (for undergraduates).

A final approach to the internationalisation of higher education, more prevalent in emerging economies, is the capacity building approach. This is an importer perspective which views cross-border education as a means to meet unmet demand as well as to help build capacity for quality higher education.

Institutions have rationales of their own, including the possibility of networking and, therefore, improving their own reputation and prestige. Faced with the potential enrolment surges from all over the world, institutions need to reposition themselves on the global market. As they try to attract bright students and researchers, more funds, etc. (using, *inter alia*, SITs), institutions are becoming increasingly stratified hierarchically. Institutions are also likely to respond to domestic funding contexts. It is noteworthy, for example, that the highest growth in international student enrolments is recorded in countries with a revenue-generating approach, where institutions are encouraged to become more entrepreneurial. The increasing worldwide demand for cross-border education is also an incentive for institutions to be more international and to attract more foreign students. The recent Trends V report gathered data on the geographical areas in which (European) institutions would most like to enhance their international attractiveness. While Europe (including the European Union and Eastern Europe) remains the top priority for enhancing attractiveness, Asia has overtaken North America and has seen a substantial increase (from forty to fifty-nine per cent) since the 2003 Trends III report; over seventy per cent of institutions in Finland, France, Hungary, Lithuania, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom cite Asia as their priority. Australia, the Arab world, despite some increase in attention, and Africa remain the lowest priority areas for higher education institutions across Europe (Trends V, pp. 44-45).



Students may decide to become mobile for several reasons, such as language, cultural, or geographic proximity; perceived quality of life in host country; networks of present/former students; nature of the accessibility and range of post-secondary studies in their country of origin; reputation the host country's higher education system and institutions; the costs involved in studying abroad; recognition of skills and qualifications; immigration procedures; opportunity on the labour markets.

The next sections will discuss strategies and tools to attract foreign students to France and the United Kingdom.

### **3. France and the United Kingdom: Strategies to Attract Foreign Students**

#### *3.1. Student information tools in France*

Since the late 1990s France embarked in a series of coordinated efforts to internationalise its higher education (Kuptsch, 2003; 2006). The French government announced in January 2000 that it would double the number of visas delivered to foreign students, while the Ministry of National Education suggested that, in the long run, foreigners should constitute twenty per cent of the higher education student body<sup>6</sup> (Kuptsch, 2003, 2006), a sharp rise from the nine to ten per cent foreign<sup>7</sup> university pupils counted at the time (Saraswati Report, 2004). To achieve such ambitious goals, different forms of cross-border education were explored, yet student mobility remained probably the most critical dimension.

France took a strong stance in promoting its national higher education system to appeal to students from across the globe. Several outreach activities have been taking place over the past years. Generally, these initiatives do not include commercial rankings. The standings of French universities in international institutional rankings are sometimes mentioned

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<sup>6</sup> It is unclear, however, whether this statement referred to all students with a foreign passport or merely to those who had done their schooling abroad.

<sup>7</sup> Including students who came to study in France and resident foreigners who enrolled in a French university upon graduation from a French secondary institution.

as an incentive for students to choose France as their study destination<sup>8</sup>, but references on the official dissemination tools set up by the government to attract foreign students are lacking. Moreover, unlike other countries such as Germany and the United Kingdom, France has not made significant efforts to create its own national ranking to promote itself beyond its borders<sup>9</sup>.

The most notable SIT is, arguably, 'Edufrance'<sup>10</sup>. Established in 1998 under the auspices of the ministries of National Education, Foreign Affairs, and of Culture and Communication together with the State Secretariat of Foreign Trade<sup>11</sup>, Edufrance is a 'public interest agency' and web portal<sup>12</sup> that acts on behalf of the two Ministries of Education and Foreign Affairs to promote French higher education abroad.

It markets French higher education internationally through its links with 181 higher education establishments and its network of over seventy regional offices in almost fifty countries. Many of these countries have cultural and linguistic ties with France. Over a third are members or observers of the Francophone International Organization, and several are

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<sup>8</sup> For example the site of the French consulate in Atlanta, US ([http://www.consulfrance-atlanta.org/article.php3?id\\_article=863](http://www.consulfrance-atlanta.org/article.php3?id_article=863)), emphasises the positive standing of French institutions in the Financial Times rankings.

<sup>9</sup> On the contrary, the CHE ranking in Germany, for example, has the explicit aim to give information on German HEIs for foreign students and therefore efforts are made to have the website fully translated in English (<http://www.daad.de/deutschland/studium/hochschulranking/04690.en.html>). In France this is not the case, possibly because there is a greater emphasis on the relationship with the francophone world.

<sup>10</sup> Now called CampusFrance: CampusFrance is the product of the merger of Agence EduFrance and two other key vehicles for university and scientific mobility, CROUS and EGIDE. Agence EduFrance has until now been responsible for promoting French higher education and has achieved a solid track record and wide recognition as one of the world's leading organizations in this area. CNOUS and EGIDE manage French government scholarships as well as programs for university cooperation sponsored by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (see <http://www.edufrance.fr/en/b-agence/agence01.htm>).

<sup>11</sup> See: Official Journal, No 271 of 22 November 1998, at <http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr>, accessed September 15, 2007.

<sup>12</sup> See <http://www.edufrance.fr>, accessed September 15, 2007.

former French colonies<sup>13</sup>. Indeed, cultural proximity seems to be a decisive factor when it comes to attracting foreign students. The 2004 OECD report *Internationalisation and Trade in Higher Education – Opportunities and Challenges* (p. 212) shows that fifty-one per cent of foreign students in France come from former African colonies. Instead, a small minority are citizens of Commonwealth countries. These links are often reinforced by bilateral agreements and policies to encourage student exchange mobility or fund specific international projects involving educational institutions and to strengthen ties with areas where the relationship with France has been traditionally weaker (ibid.).

Edufrance has created tools for the promotion of specific fields such as engineering (the 'n+i' programme<sup>14</sup>, including fifty-five member establishments), legal studies (Edudroit, including some twenty member universities) and for on-line student guidance. The website and the in-country office presence are complemented by the organizing 'education fairs' (which we previously classified as SITs in their own right). In 2004, Edufrance organized eighteen major education fairs. The fairs in China (Beijing and Shanghai) were the largest ever held. For some of the fairs, the agency secured funding, in partnership with other European Union bodies. Edufrance has undertaken a complete overhaul and modernisation of its internet sites so as to attain the highest possible standard in this area.

In addition to Edufrance, other initiatives are indicative of France's efforts to promote its higher education in particular countries. For example, to improve the reception of students wishing to study in France at the overseas representations and to facilitate the paperwork involved, the

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<sup>13</sup> See <http://www.francophonie.org/index.cfm>, accessed September 15, 2007.

<sup>14</sup> 'n+i' is a CampusFrance network of engineering institutes in France (national) and abroad (international). 'n+i' Engineering Institute(s) is intended for students and young professionals who graduate in Engineering or Sciences at a minimum level of a Bachelor's degree (Licence, B.Tech, B.Eng, B.Sc, B.Phil, Licienciatura... or equivalent) and who seek additional top training in France with a view to practicing engineering on the international scene. For French students wishing to study abroad, the 'n+i' Network of Institutes and programs welcomes engineering students enrolled in French partner institutions (list) and interested in locating a 6–12 month educational program or internship or 18–24 month master's program, <http://www.nplusi.com/>, accessed September 15, 2007.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs decided to test a new structure in five countries (in the Maghreb region, Senegal and Vietnam), known as the Study in France Centre (CEFs). The CEFs inform students of these countries on higher education opportunities in France and accompany them through the application process.

Arising from the experience of the Language and Academic Assessment Centre (CELA), already operational in China for the last two years, these Centres offer foreign students the possibility of submitting their application on-line and monitoring the administrative processing in real time. They can have a personal interview, receive help defining their proposed course of study, and access all Edufrance documentation on higher education in France. Thanks to an intranet system, the various embassy services involved can use data generated by the website and thus more efficiently and more reliably provide necessary documents, notably visas. Soon, the higher education institutes will also be linked to this computerised system. They will then be able to interact with the CEFs, stipulate the kind of candidate student profile that they are looking for and receive useful information on the candidate students: proposed course of study, validity of their qualifications, command of the French language, and so forth. The pilot CEFs became operational in June 2005.

### *3.2. Student information tools in the United Kingdom*

The United Kingdom (UK) has adopted a revenue generating approach to internationalisation and competes with other countries in selling its higher education services. It is estimated that international students bring 3.8 billion GBP a year into the UK<sup>15</sup>. For this reason, the UK has initiated aggressive actions to consolidate existing markets, penetrate new ones, and scuff the influence of its main competitors. The British Council, present in 109 countries, has been the chief liaison for students across the globe.

Taking stock of increasing competition in Higher Education, the 1999 Prime Minister's Initiative (PMI) was launched to increase the number of international students following a UK education, in recognition of their

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<sup>15</sup> See Consultation Document 'Positioning for Success', 2003.

importance in fostering international relations and bringing long-term political and economic benefits to the UK<sup>16</sup>. The main elements of the PMI involved investment in a UK education marketing campaign managed by the British Council, the streamlining of entry procedures and work rules for overseas students, and increasing the number of Chevening scholarships<sup>17</sup>. It involved stakeholders from UK Trade and Investment, Ministry of Defence, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Home Office, UK visas, the devolved administrations and the British Council. The initiative was managed by a Project Working Group chaired by the Department for Education and Skills. In fact, the PMI is a comprehensive set of marketing and communications strategies (or SITs, according to our prior definition), including the 'Education UK' brand, marketing and communications campaigns, the 'Education UK' Website and publications, and working with agents.

The 'Education UK' Brand, developed and managed by the British Council on behalf of the Government, is the national brand built to communicate the UK's education offer to a global audience. The Government and British Council have developed this brand to encourage students who are considering overseas study to choose the UK. They wish to increase demand for UK education by reinforcing and developing positive perceptions and challenging negative ones. The brand also intends to support the marketing and branding initiatives of individual UK institutions that can apply to use the Education UK brand logo in their own promotions<sup>18</sup>.

The 'Education UK' brand platform is also used for marketing and communications campaigns at global, regional and country-specific levels. The 'Education UK' website and publications purport to be 'great tools for

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<sup>16</sup> See <http://www.britishcouncil.org/eumd-pmi-history.htm>, accessed 15 September 2007.

<sup>17</sup> The Chevening scholarships are funded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and administered by the British Council. They enable overseas students to study in the United Kingdom, see <http://www.chevening.com/>, accessed 15 September 2007.

<sup>18</sup> See <http://www.britishcouncil.org/eumd-brand>, accessed 15 September 2007.

marketing UK education and training to international students'<sup>19</sup>. The website provides an easy-to-search database of courses on offer in the UK (including English language, degree and postgraduate courses) and includes initiatives such as the three-minute 'movie' which stresses the advantages of a UK education.

On 18 April, 2006 Prime Minister Tony Blair, in consultation with the education sector, launched the PMI for International Education to build on the success of the first PMI. The strategy comprises four interconnected strands: UK positioning; ensuring the quality of the student experience; strategic partnerships and alliances; and diversification and consolidation in priority countries. The new PMI was largely influenced by the consultation document *Positioning for Success*<sup>20</sup>, which was distributed throughout the UK education sector as the 1999 PMI strategy was coming to an end. This document suggested a new strategy to help the UK capitalise on future opportunities, combat increasing competition in the international education market and to strengthen its position in traditionally USA-dominated markets such as Japan, South Korea, Brazil and India.

The strategy suggested not only focussing on branding and aggressive marketing campaigns, but also building the UK's capacity (including overseas-delivered courses and qualifications) for an expected rise in international enrolments and building sustainable long-term relationships with students and graduates and the world of work.

Two key aspects of the UK strategy are noteworthy. First, there is an emphasis on the potential economic advantages of a UK education for to-be graduates. The UK strives to convince future students that a UK education, vs. that of other countries such as the USA and Australia, is worthwhile. This approach is different from the French one; the Edufrance site emphasises most of all France's tradition of non-discrimination and equal treatment between French and international students. Second, the UK focuses both on

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<sup>19</sup> See <http://www.britishcouncil.org/eumd-pmi-uk-positioning.htm>, accessed 15 September 2007.

<sup>20</sup> See [http://www.britishcouncil.org/education\\_uk\\_-\\_positioning\\_for\\_success\\_-\\_consultation\\_document.pdf](http://www.britishcouncil.org/education_uk_-_positioning_for_success_-_consultation_document.pdf), accessed 15 September 2007.

its European position as well as its difference from the Continent (in other words its unique transatlantic focus).

Although there is no 'official' endorsement of rankings, they are more often mentioned in the UK marketing strategies than in France. The Education UK newsletter for education advisors, for example, stresses the position of UK universities in the latest world rankings<sup>21</sup>. The British Council also supplies information on the various rankings available for the UK, distinguishing between the so-called 'official rankings' (The Research Assessment Exercise and the Subject Review Reports) and those presented in published newspapers (*e.g.*, The Times or The Guardian)<sup>22</sup>. This attention given to rankings might be a sign of the ongoing efforts to highlight the prestige of the UK's Higher Education and its institutions in the world.

In addition to branding and advertising, there are other initiatives to attract foreign students to the UK, including easing Visa and work-permit requirements<sup>23</sup>. Moreover, in 2002 the 'Real UK' campaign was launched in thirteen countries<sup>24</sup> with the chief goal of inspiring prospective students and challenging negative stereotypes about the UK. Students were encouraged to enter a competition via the website and supported by a host of UK celebrities. The prize was a trip to the UK where winners met a number of UK icons, experienced UK lifestyle through attending pop concerts and football matches and were exposed to a cross section of UK educational opportunities. Footage from the trip has been compiled into promotional videos for use in overseas marketing activity.

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<sup>21</sup> See <http://www.britishcouncil.org/usa-education-advisors-newsletter-2006-december.pdf>, accessed 15 September 2007.

<sup>22</sup> See for example: <http://www.britishcouncil.org/norway-education-study-advice-ranking-assessment.htm>, accessed 15 September 2007.

<sup>23</sup> Students are now allowed to work up to 20 hours per week during terms and full time during vacation periods.

<sup>24</sup> Brazil, China, Egypt, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Jordan, Korea, Malaysia, Russia, Taiwan, Thailand, the United Arab Emirates and Vietnam.

#### 4. Student Mix and Student Information Tools?

The prior section described what tools France and the UK use to attract foreign students. It was stressed that student mobility is one of miscellaneous forms of cross-border education. This section will emphasise the differences between France and the UK. Next, based on the available sources, we will suggest how particular perceptions amongst the different target audiences are created. These perceptions may encourage certain choices over others and, thus, play a relevant role in shaping the composition of the receiving countries' student populations. This entails that student migration is also 'replacement migration'<sup>25</sup>, and SITs can thus be seen as instruments to influence the degree of replacement. Hence, SITs may influence different national higher education systems, as they are affected differently by international student mobility. The concluding section of this article will draw attention to the potential for different SIT mixes in moulding student bodies in the two countries under consideration.

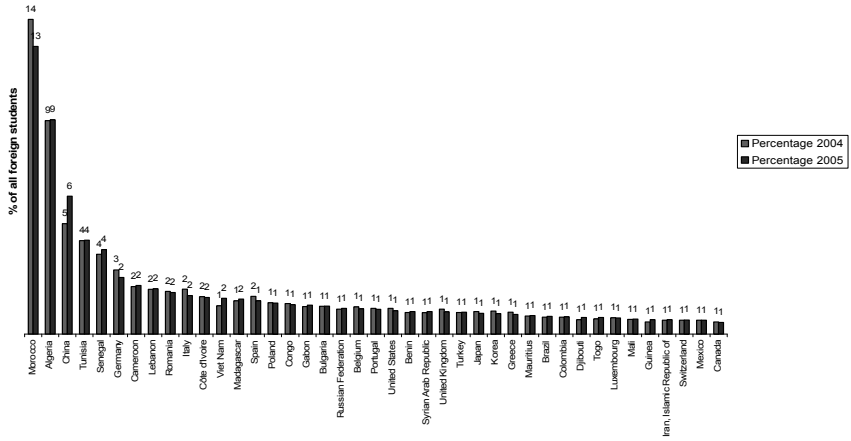
Section 2.2 described the four key policy approaches to cross-border education. Increasingly countries around the world are trying to attract foreign students in a bid to profit, yet in Europe the revenue generating approach is mostly associated with the UK (and The Netherlands). France, while beginning to pursue this path as well, has mostly adopted the skilled migration approach, which explains the importance attached to easing visa applications and the possibilities for new graduates to remain in the country for employment. Indeed a key problem is the future labour market gap, especially in science and technology. Yet, what the impact will be in the middle to long term on science and technology in the destination countries (as well as in the countries whence students come) remains open. The European Union is striving for more graduates in scientific and technological fields, but as yet there is no unified European Union policy to attract foreign students who might contribute to filling a gap that apparently Europeans struggle to fill.

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<sup>25</sup> Replacement migration can be defined as an increase in immigration to maintain certain demographic parameters.

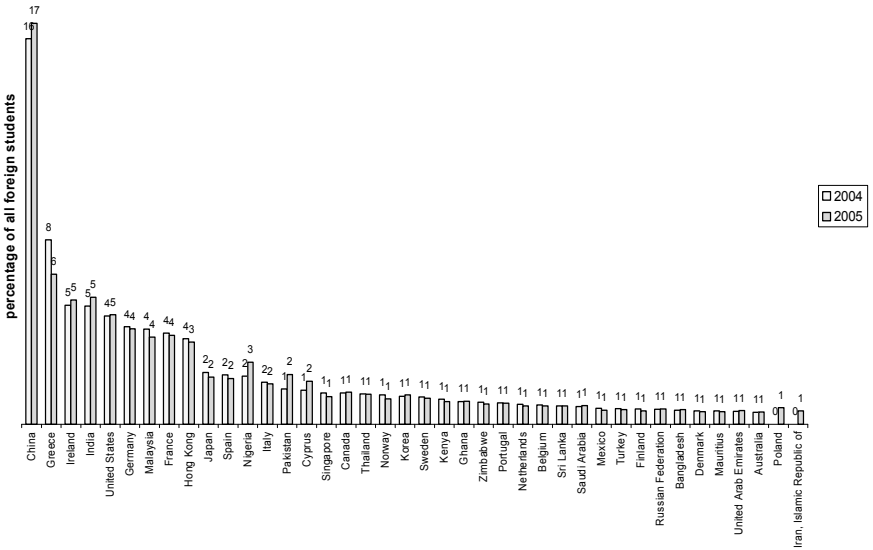


Figure 1. Foreign students in France (2004 and 2006)



Source: OECD, 2006.

Figure 2. Foreign students in the UK (2004 and 2005)



Source: OECD, 2006.

The creation of a positive image of France in the eyes of potential foreign students is the first of the four options suggested by the Saraswati group (Harfi, 2005, pp. 249-250)<sup>26</sup>. This strategy has actively been pursued through the Edufrance website. The website emphasises most of all France's tradition of non-discrimination and stresses that no distinction is made between French and international students. There are no references to the standing of French universities in international rankings (although there are references to the excellent quality of the French higher education tradition).

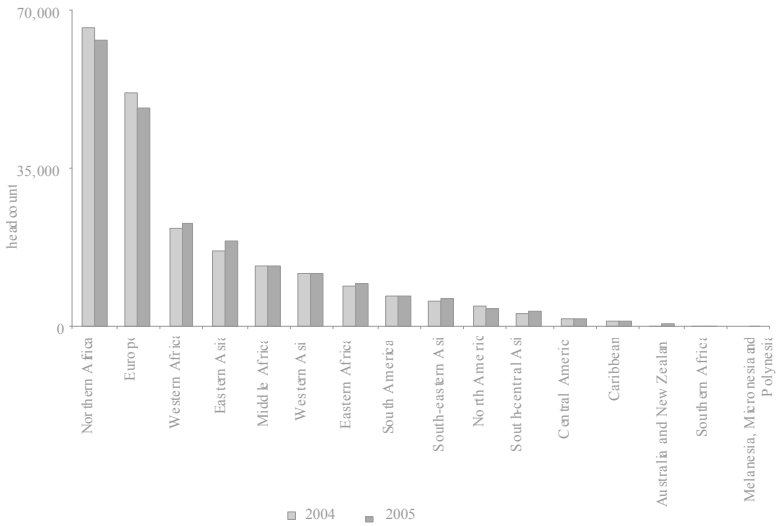
In the UK, key efforts have gone into branding its higher education, and stressing the importance of a UK education as opposed to main global competitors. Consequently, the UK pays more attention to the positioning of its institutions in global and national rankings, suggesting that the prestige of its system is viewed strongly under the perspective of the relative position of its institutions vis-à-vis competitors worldwide.

The following charts show the contribution of students from different national backgrounds in France and the UK in 2004 and 2005 (OECD, 2006).

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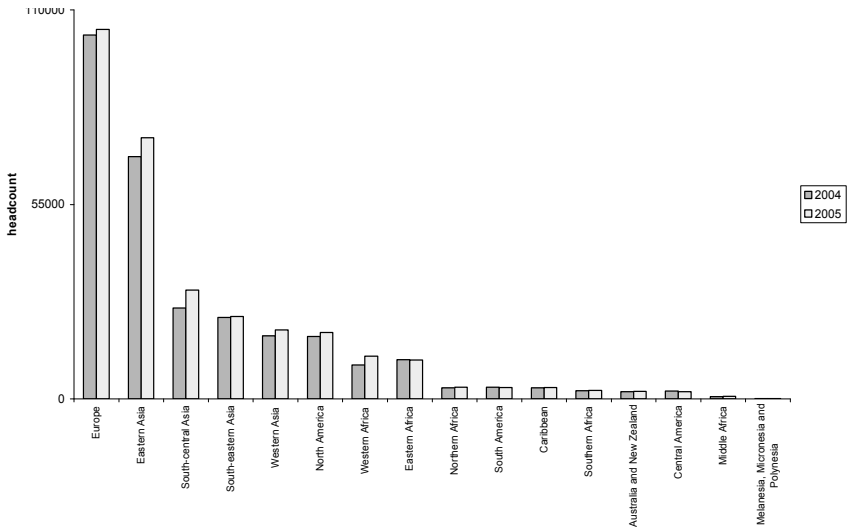
<sup>26</sup> The other three scenarios are: (a) more export of France's educational institutions so that foreigners would be exposed to France's educational system without being on French territory (and they might pay fees overseas), (b) a smaller increase in foreign students without specific policies to streamline the flow of foreigners (*i.e.*, country of origin and choice of programmes), which would likely result in proportionally more students from Asia and Latin America, and (c) a similar limited increase in numbers accompanied by targeted streamlining of incoming student flows (Harfi, 2005, p. 247).

Figure 3. Foreign students in France by region (2004 and 2006)



Source: OECD, 2006.

Figure 4. Foreign students in the UK by region (2004 and 2006)



Source: OECD, 2006.

From the data is apparent that:

- Both countries have seen an increase in Asian (particularly Chinese) students. In France this is interesting since the overall number of foreign students declined between 2004 and 2005;
- France focuses mainly on Asia and other regions, such as the Caribbean, while the major focus of the UK, besides receiving many European students, is Africa and Asia;
- In France the number of African students diminished both in relative and absolute terms, although there are sharp differences between areas (North Africans diminished, but Western and Eastern Africans increased). In the UK the absolute numbers favour the Asian students, although there the percentage increase is double for Africans students. The colonial bonds with the UK seem to be stronger than those with France (the commonwealth association might play a role in this).

The data cannot give a definitive answer to the question whether there is a causal link between SIT improvements and dramatic surges in foreign students during the last decades. The concluding section of this article will draw attention to the potentials of different SIT mixes in moulding student bodies.

## **5. Conclusion: Why Do Student Information Tools Count?**

SITs wish to play a role in shaping student demographics by influencing student choice. Yet, SITs do not exist in a vacuum. On the contrary, they are players in a multi-faceted game, where economic, sociological and historical ties are pivotal. Moreover, the recent Bologna reforms, most notably the Bachelor-Master-Doctorate cycles, are relevant factors. The separate cycles imply different priorities (and different pools or markets) for students, institutions, and governments alike. Therefore, SITs ought to be aligned with these developments too. This fits in the question of what audience is being targeted, which goes beyond the purported level of education, to touch upon a great variety of factors such as socio-economic background, culture, ethnicity, etc. (see also, Cremonini et al., 2007).

Sociology can shed some light on extant mobility trends. While there is a wealth of possible explanations about current demographic trends, educational systems of certain countries (including the UK and France, but also countries this paper did not cover such as the USA, and Germany) remain generally more attractive to many students around the world. This might be because these countries fall in so-called 'zones of civilizational attraction' (Collins, 2001). A zone of civilizational attraction works as a pattern of social contacts or a flow of people, which explains why students have a tendency to travel to certain centres or countries that are attractive and recognised. A zone of civilizational attraction can be thought of as a 'zone of prestige' (ibid.). It is noteworthy that geopolitical and economic hegemony do not translate *ipso facto* in civilizational prestige (twentieth century France is an example of the contrary, because Parisian intellectual culture 'set the fashions that have been emulated throughout the richer and more militarily powerful parts of the world' (ibid.))

It has also been suggested that student mobility may relate to a centre-periphery effect (ibid.). This idea, which is linked to the concepts of a 'zone of prestige' and a 'zone of civilizational attraction', and also to the 'knowledge gap' (Stiglitz, 2007), posits that many of the educational possibilities are constructed in specific places around the world, which then become the most obvious study destinations for prospective students. Other countries cannot benefit from the contributions of incoming students: first, the students' home countries at least temporarily lose talented people ('brain drain') and second, the non-chosen potential destination countries are missing the 'brain gain' that only benefits the 'zones of civilizational attraction', making both categories of countries more peripheral in the future (a positive feedback loop; in other words: a vicious circle). The idea of a 'zone of civilizational attraction' or a 'zone of prestige' suggests that economic and political influences are also pivotal. Students from countries or areas pressed by economic and political problems are more likely to seek opportunities in wealthier parts of the world. These areas often coincide with 'zones of prestige', but this situation can be evidenced even within countries: for example Eastern Germans are more likely to wish to study in the west of the country than vice-versa, in spite of significant efforts made at the federal level to rebalance internal (student) migration by rendering the east attractive for applicants.

Moreover, evidence shows that currently, the ties with former colonies and language ties are still critical. For example, the toughening of language requirements in France is likely to attract French-speaking students, notwithstanding efforts made to market the French language as an important reason to choose France as a destination. Similarly, countries with traditional links to the UK send more students there than to France (or elsewhere). This suggests that while targeting different populations (as is evidenced by the multi-language form of information supplied for example on the Edufrance site), SITs are still more effective with traditionally 'close' populations. Although not surprising, it does suggest that cultural proximity remains crucial: there is not a single global market for cross-border education, but different markets for different 'cultural regions'.

This text did not purport to prove definite causal relationships between certain tools and certain patterns of student migration. The article has pinpointed the fact that SITs are relatively new and increasingly important players in a changing world. It is worth exploring if and how SITs can open the doors of existing 'prestige zones' to new national higher education systems or help certain countries keep their stronghold in particular zones. SITs could even shift the boundaries of the zones altogether and play a role in creating new centre-periphery balances and overcoming ancestral colonial legacies.

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