



# Higher Education Research Projects

June 2010

CHERI undertakes research, nationally and internationally, on the changing relationship between higher education and society. Projects have examined topics such as graduate employment, workplace learning, quality assurance, educational and social transformation, widening participation and social equity issues, learning outcomes and their social and organisational mediation, and the changing nature of the academic profession. Our work is supported by research councils, foundations and policy bodies. CHERI is part of the Open University.

Below are brief details of some of CHERI's current and recently completed projects. They are organised under four headings:

- Research projects on the changing shape of higher education and its relationship with the rest of society
- Projects setting agendas for future higher education research and policy
- Projects directed towards particular aspects of higher education policy
- A Higher Education Empirical Research Database.

Equal importance is attached to each type of project and each informs and strengthens the others. Briefer details of some previous CHERI projects are provided at the end.

## More information

More information on all of these projects and the publications which resulted from them as well as more information about CHERI can be found on the CHERI website.

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# 1. Research projects on the changing shape of higher education and its relationship with the rest of society

The five projects – three international and two national – in this area address fundamental issues concerning the role of today's expanded and increasingly diversified higher education systems.

## **Changes in Networks, Higher Education and Knowledge Societies (CINHEKS)**

This is a three-year project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council within the European Science Foundation's Higher Education and Social Change (EUROHESC) research programme.

'Knowledge society' is one of the key ideas in explaining the current changing relationship between higher education and society. This notion is based on a premise about the importance of knowledge in contemporary social and economic development. Within this frame of reference, higher education systems and institutions are viewed as 'engines' of development for economic competitiveness and social progress. Such changing missions and roles for higher education imply major changes in traditional arrangements for governance, academic practices, research orientation and social partnerships and networks.

The CINHEKS project is a collaborative multi-country investigation into how higher education institutions are networked in knowledge societies in three regions of the world: Europe, the USA and Japan.

The research focuses on the concrete linkages among academics, institutions and external role-players in different knowledge societies, the impact of such networks on academics, institutions and society, and the basis of distinct differences between different knowledge societies. The methodology includes comparative historical analysis, analysis of policy trends, institutional case studies, an internet survey, and a correlation of theoretical analysis and empirical findings with contemporary policy discussions about knowledge societies. The project intends to both refine 'knowledge society' as an explanatory construct of social theory and critically examine how higher education institutions are

connected with knowledge societies to provide more evidence-based content for policy development.

The CINHEKS project is being led by the University of Jyväskylä (Finland) and is being undertaken in collaboration with researchers from CHERI, plus research teams at the University of Kassel (Germany), Hiroshima University (Japan), Technical University of Lisbon (Portugal) and the University of Arizona (US). The project runs from October 2009 – September 2012.

## **Higher Education and Regional Transformation (HEART): Social and Cultural Perspectives**

Research into the local and regional impact of universities has tended to focus on economic factors. This project explored the relatively under-researched impacts of universities on the social and cultural lives of the communities of which they are a part, including the impact on social cohesion and inclusion, on citizenship and on the alleviation of various forms of social disadvantage.

This project was funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council under its initiative on the Impact of HEIs on Regional Economies between May 2007 and December 2009. Its aim was to develop a comparative framework to research the direct and indirect impacts of higher education institutions on disadvantaged groups and localities in their sub-regional environment. The central question of the research was:

*To what extent and in what ways do universities in practice operate to benefit or further disadvantage members of socially disadvantaged groups within their regional contexts?*

In particular, the project aimed to advance understanding of the role played by universities in:

- helping to build new or strengthen existing institutions of civil society
- encouraging and facilitating new cultural values and social cohesion
- selecting and socialising new leaders
- generating new possibilities for relationships between local, national and global trends and opportunities.

The case study approach that was adopted combined a regional focus and a grounded institution-centred approach. Four universities/regions were selected. Stage one of the research focused on one institution/region, which provided the basis for a comprehensive exploratory case, supplemented by an opinion poll survey, questionnaire surveys and secondary analysis of national and regional data-sets. These data collection methods were modified and applied to three stage two case study institutions/regions, which provided a wider range of institutional/regional contexts as well as a comparative perspective on the research questions that have been identified.

Five themes have emerged from the project, which reflect the findings from the four case studies:

- Universities and economic development/regeneration
- Regional and university images, cultures and the drivers and resistances to change
- Universities and active citizenship, regional leadership and the 'public good'
- Universities and social disadvantage: winners and losers from the regional impact of universities
- Communications and dialogue between universities and their regional stakeholders

These themes and the findings from the individual case study universities/regions will form the basis of a book to be published in 2011.

### **The Changing Academic Profession (CAP)**

CHERI is collaborating on an international study of the academic profession – a successor to the well-known Carnegie study carried out in the early 1990s. Its aim is to examine the changes being experienced by academics in different parts of the world and to consider differences and similarities between countries and between types of higher education institution, different subjects and types of academic job.

Surveys of nationally representative samples of the academic profession in different countries provide the central focus of the project. Over 20 countries worldwide are participating in the study. The project has resulted in several conferences and publications on the changing experiences and expectations of academic staff in different countries.

This project commenced at the start of 2006 and is ongoing. The UK part of the study has received funding from Universities UK and the Higher Education Funding Council for England and support from several other policy bodies. The international dataset will be made publicly available in the latter part of 2011.

### **What is Learned at University? The Social and Organisational Mediation of University Learning (SOMUL)**

This four year project was funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council as part of its Teaching and Learning Research Programme. Its aim was to increase our understanding of the range of learning outcomes of an increasingly diverse higher education system and to investigate how these are socially and organisationally mediated.

The study concentrated initially on students and graduates in three contrasting subjects – biosciences, business studies and sociology. For each subject, five study programmes were selected to represent the different social and organisational features in which the project is interested. Students from these programmes were investigated at various stages during and following their undergraduate careers with a focus on their conceptions of learning and personal and professional identity. The wider applicability of findings from the initial three subjects was assessed in relation to a further group of subjects, again taking a range of programmes with different social and organisational characteristics.

CHERI led the project which was undertaken in collaboration with researchers from the Centre for Research into Lifelong Learning at Stirling University and the Institute of Educational Technology at the Open University. The project commenced and was completed in 2008.

Working papers based on the project, published by the Higher Education Academy are available on the project website at [www.open.ac.uk/cheri/pages/CHERI-Projects-SOMUL-Outputs.shtml](http://www.open.ac.uk/cheri/pages/CHERI-Projects-SOMUL-Outputs.shtml)

A book based on the project entitled 'Improving What is Learned at University: An exploration of the social

and organisational diversity of university education' is published by Routledge.

<http://www.open.ac.uk/cheri/pages/CHERI-Reports-2008.shtml>

### **The Flexible Professional in the Knowledge Society (REFLEX)**

This project was funded by the European Commission under its Sixth Framework Programme. CHERI undertook the project with partners in eight other European countries (The Netherlands, Germany, France, Norway, Italy, Finland, Spain and Austria). The main aim of the project was to look into the effectiveness of higher education in meeting the challenges posed by the 'knowledge society'. The project focused on three broad and inter-related questions:

- Which competencies are required by higher education graduates in order to function adequately in the knowledge society?
- What role is played by higher education institutions in helping graduates to develop these competencies?
- What tensions arise as graduates, higher education institutions, employers and other key players each strive to meet their own objectives and how can these tensions be resolved?

The project consisted of (i) a country study highlighting the main structural and institutional factors that shape the relationships between higher education and work in the nine participating countries; (ii) a qualitative study on graduate competencies in the knowledge society; and (iii) a survey of higher education graduates in each of the countries.

Reports based on the project have been prepared by CHERI for HEFCE are available on the CHERI and HEFCE websites. The reports cover:

- The employment of UK graduates: comparisons with Europe
- The context of HE and employment: comparisons between different European countries
- Subject differences in graduate employment across Europe
- Competencies possessed and required by European graduates
- Age differences in graduate employment across Europe
- Graduates retrospective views of HE

Read them all at

[http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/2008/rd22\\_08/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/2008/rd22_08/)  
and

## 2. Projects setting agendas for future higher education research and policy

Several of CHERI's current projects and activities are about setting agendas for future higher education research and policy. Below are details of initiatives which are looking ahead towards the higher education of the future.

### **Higher Education in Europe Beyond 2010: Resolving Conflicting Social and Economic Expectations**

This project was part of the 'Forward Look' programme of the European Science Foundation. Its aim is to develop a scientific agenda for future higher education research.

John Brennan of CHERI led the project with Jurgen Enders of the University of Twente in the Netherlands, Christine Musselin of the University of Sciences Po in France, Ulrich Teichler, University of Kassel in Germany, and Jussi Valimaa of the University of Jyväskylä in Finland. CHERI's Tarla Shah was the co-ordinator. The project reviewed existing research literatures and made recommendations for future research under the following themes:

- Higher education and the needs of the knowledge society
- Higher education and the achievement (or prevention) of equity and social justice
- Higher education and its communities: interconnections and interdependencies
- Steering and governance of higher education
- Differentiation and diversity of institutional forms and professional roles.

Workshops of international scholars were held in different parts of Europe during 2006/07 to critique and extend the separate reviews and produce a synthesis. The project debated the implications of the theme and synthesis reports for higher education policy at European and national levels. The project's final conference was held in London in October 2007.

ESF published the thematic report entitled "Higher education looking forward: relations between higher education and society" in September 2007 and the synthesis report entitled "Higher education looking forward: an agenda for future research" in July 2008. Both are available on its website at [www.esf.org/publications.html](http://www.esf.org/publications.html).

### **The Transformation of Public Research Universities**

This US Social Science Research Council project which aims to establish a new international and interdisciplinary social science research agenda on 'the new meaning, the un-making, and the re-moulding of the public research university'.

The Council has set up a working group of 25 influential social science scholars and public leaders from different disciplines, institutions and countries to attempt to bring an 'expanded vision' to the issues facing public research universities. Finance, governance and competition will provide the main themes for the examination of the transformations facing the world's universities. A book and a website of publicly accessible research results are planned.

The project is funded by the Ford Foundation. CHERI is participating in the project through its director, John Brennan, who is a member of the project's working group and will be contributing to its publications.

### 3. Projects directed towards particular aspects of higher education policy

CHERI has a long history of working with higher education policy bodies, providing research, evaluation and information services to support the different stages of the policy process. Projects of this type are often short and conducted to tight timescales. Below are details of some current and recently completed ones.

**Understanding and measuring the value and impact of services in HE that support students,** with AMOSSHE – The Student Services Organisation (funded by the HEFCE Leadership, Governance and Management Fund)

The project is developing a holistic approach to understanding and evaluating the value and impact of services in HE institutions that support students.

It will:

- the rationale for institutional policies and practices;
- identify meaningful ways to assess and demonstrate the impact and value of student services in HEIs;
- develop potential measures and pilot them in different support services in several HEIs;
- produce and disseminate tools and techniques to evaluate the value and impact of services.

Outcomes will include a literature review; and a 'toolkit', or series of toolkits, for service managers to use to implement this approach and thus demonstrate service value. This will recognise the varied approaches and needs of different institutions and allow HEIs to adapt the tools as best befits their institutional circumstances. The toolkit will be piloted in four different types of HEIs in England.

Overall, the project will seek to improve universities' understanding of the value of their support services, help to increase efficiency and professionalism and support enhancement of the quality of services and the student experience. Dissemination of outputs from the project will be undertaken in June 2011. Further information on the project can be found at [www.amoshe.org.uk/content/vip](http://www.amoshe.org.uk/content/vip)

**The Experiences of Black and Minority Ethnic Staff in HE**

CHERI and the Centre for Higher Education and Equity Research (CHEER) at the University of Sussex are collaborating on a research and development project commissioned by the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU).

The study aims to explore the experiences of black and minority ethnic (BME) staff working in English higher education institutions and contribute towards developing better work environments for them. The study focuses on three thematic areas: 'management practice', 'support frameworks and relationships' and 'leadership and development'.

The research employs a mix of qualitative and quantitative research techniques, including an online survey of all English HEIs, and interviews and focus groups with members of staff at selected HEIs in England. It involves three main stages of data collection which become more focused on a small number of case study institutions as the project develops.

**EUROSTUDENT: the 'social dimension' of studying**

CHERI is collaborating in an EC-funded European project on the social and economic conditions of student life. The project aims to provide data, especially to national higher education ministries and other policy bodies, on various aspects of students' living and studying conditions in order to better understand the different national situations and to assess the strengths and weaknesses of their respective frameworks in international comparison with a view to improving effectiveness.

CHERI is part of the international consortium, led by the Hochschul Informations System GmbH, which is conducting the project.

### **The Comparative Student Experience**

This study was commissioned by the Higher Education Funding Council for England and explored differences between the experience of higher education study in the UK and the experience of study in other (mainly European) countries. The study took the form of a literature review and further analysis of existing national and international datasets from other CHERI projects.

The study looked at how much time students devoted to their studies and how that time was spent, at their attitudes and approaches to study and at how these seemed to affect the outcomes of learning. Comparisons were made with students in other European countries and, within the UK, between different universities and subjects and between different types of student.

The study explores the diversity of the student experience in higher education and discusses the significance and implications of the differences to be found.

The project's report – *Diversity in the student learning experience and time devoted to study: a comparative analysis of the UK and European evidence* - is available on the HEFCE website.

Read the report at [http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rdreports/2009/rd06\\_09/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rdreports/2009/rd06_09/)

### **Study into Student Engagement**

CHERI completed a study commissioned by HEFCE which aimed to determine the present extent and nature of student engagement in higher education in England to help inform policy development and institutional practice in this area.

For the purposes of the study, student engagement was defined as the processes whereby institutions (and sector bodies) make deliberate attempts to involve and empower students in the process of shaping the learning experience. As such, it is concerned with institutional and student union processes and practices such as those relating to formal student representation and student feedback, and other informal processes which seek to inform and enhance the collective student learning experience. It was not concerned with specific teaching, learning and assessment activities that are designed to enhance an individual student's engagement with their own learning.

The study comprised two main strands:

- an online survey of publicly-funded higher education providers (higher and further education institutions) and student unions; and
- fieldwork with a number of providers and student unions.

Through the **fieldwork**, the project team aimed to explore in more detail:

- the rationale for institutional policies and practices;
- the range of processes and practices in operation;
- institutional measures of effectiveness and perceptions of barriers to effectiveness; and
- planned changes (if any) to existing processes and practices.

Such exploration was undertaken through interviews and/or group discussions with key personnel from student unions and a selection of students who were course representatives in 2007/08, a number of faculties/departments and central units, together with a review of relevant institutional documentation.

The final report was launched at a conference hosted by UUK, GuildHE and the National Union of Students in London on 18 February 2009.

Read the report at [www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rdreports/2009/rd03\\_09/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rdreports/2009/rd03_09/).

### **University League Tables and Their Impact on Institutional Behaviour**

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) commissioned research into newspaper league tables of higher education institutions (HEIs), how they are compiled and the impact they have on institutions. CHERI undertook these two major strands of research in collaboration with Hobsons Research.

The first strand investigated the methods and underlying data used in those rankings of most interest to English HEIs: specifically the national rankings produced by the Guardian, Sunday Times and the Times and the world rankings produced by THES and Shanghai Jiao Tong University. These included:

- semi-structured interviews with representatives from each of the compilers;
- further identification of source data, methodologies, calculations, weightings and approach to sensitivity analysis, and the assumptions and rationale for these; and

- exploration of conclusions drawn from the rankings and comparison with other, competing conclusions.

The second strand consisted of small-scale case study research looking at how six higher education institutions were respond to league tables and whether or not they were taking steps to climb the rankings. This included semi-structured interviews with key personnel and small group discussions with a selection of academic and other staff in each case study institution. Concurrently, an online survey of all English HEIs gathered top-line data on the impact of league tables on institutions and their views on this.

Both strands of research were informed by the burgeoning literature on league tables and the emerging evidence of their impact on institutions. The findings from the research were discussed with representatives from sector agencies (e.g. HESA, UCAS) and representative bodies (e.g. UUK and the individual interest groups and GuildHE). The project was completed by March 2008 and the results were published in April 2008.

Read the report at [www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rdreports/2008/rd05\\_08/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rdreports/2008/rd05_08/).

#### **Interim Evaluation of Lifelong Learning Networks**

Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs) are a Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) initiative which aims to improve the coherence, clarity and certainty of progression opportunities for vocational learners into and through higher education. The first LLNs were established in 2005 and there are now 29 LLNs representing almost national coverage of higher education institutions and further education colleges.

CHERI undertook an interim evaluation of the LLNs as a 'progress check' to help HEFCE develop policy and support good practice as it develops. Though each LLN has developed its own approach to fulfilling the overall objective, HEFCE identified three aspects as fundamental to each LLN: curriculum developments that facilitate progression; establishment of appropriate information, advice and guidance; establishment of robust progression agreements. The interim evaluation comprised a range of interlocking activities, including exploration of a eight case study LLNs, supplemented by analysis of documentation relating to the full complement of LLNs. In addition to considering progress in relation to the three fundamental aspects of LLN activity, the interim evaluation took into account: evidence of institutional commitment, partnership working and stakeholder engagement;

responsiveness to key regional and sector developments; dissemination of good practice; and progress made in relation to specific targets.

The work was carried out between June 2007 and January 2008.

Read the report at [http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rdreports/2008/rd05\\_08/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rdreports/2008/rd05_08/)

#### **The Impact of Foundation Degrees on Students and Employers**

This study was commissioned by Foundation Degree Forward as part of their research strategy. Foundation degrees (Fds) were a specific UK government initiative launched in 2000 with the aim of meeting a perceived shortfall in the numbers of people with intermediate higher technical and associate professional skills, and of increasing and widening participation in higher education. By design, Fds are intended to be developed in close collaboration with employers, to ensure the integration of academic and work-based learning.

Subsequent government policies have reinforced their desire to increase the level of work-based learning within higher education and secure wider employer buy-in. Most recently, a government-sponsored wide-ranging review of the UK's skills base (the Leitch Review of Skills, 2006) stresses the need to raise significantly the proportion of people with higher level skills across the work force through increased employer engagement and workforce development.

CHERI undertook the study jointly with the Learning and Skills Network. Brenda Little of CHERI co-directed the study (with Maggie Greenwood, Research Manager at the LSN), and CHERI's Maki Kimura was one of the researchers working on the study.

The study was undertaken during May 2007 and February 2008 and aimed to cover issues relating to the impact of Fds as follows:

- Student perspective: exploration of the factors that led them to enrol on an Fd; their views and experiences of integrating academic and work-based learning; and (for students who have now completed their Fd) the benefits of having a Fd qualification;
- Employer perspective: exploration of factors that led them to make a commitment to Fds; the extent of their involvement in Fds; their assessment of the impact of Fds on their workplace.

Additionally, by working closely with Fd practitioners in institutions, the study aimed to build capacity amongst those delivering Fd programmes.

Read the report at

<http://www.fdf.ac.uk/files/CHERILSNreport.pdf>.

### **Engagement in Course Development by Employers Not Traditionally Involved in Higher Education: Student and Employer Perceptions of its Impact**

CHERI has undertaken the above systematic review for the Department for Children, Families and Schools.

A systematic review is a piece of research that seeks to bring together and 'pool' the findings of primary research to answer a particular review question, taking steps to reduce hidden bias and 'error' at all stages of the review. The review process is designed to ensure that the product is accountable, replicable, updateable and sustainable.

The CHERI review team worked in partnership with the EPPI-Centre of the Institute of Education, University of London who provided training in systematic review methods, support with tools and methods, and quality assurance support at various stages of the review.

The work was published in January 2008 on the EPPI-Centre and DIUS websites: [eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms/Default.aspx?tabid=2316](http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms/Default.aspx?tabid=2316) and [www.dius.gov.uk/publications/DIUS-EPPI-08-01.pdf](http://www.dius.gov.uk/publications/DIUS-EPPI-08-01.pdf).

### **Excellence in Learning and Teaching**

The Higher Education Academy commissioned a review of the literature on excellence in learning and teaching in higher education to enhance the sector's understanding of the varied conceptualisations and usages of the term 'excellence' and consider the implications for future policy and practice in relation to promoting and developing excellence.

The literature searched included published research in the form of journal articles; books; reports from UK policy bodies and other agencies; as well as 'grey' literature. It covered conceptual studies, academic critiques and research studies on learning and teaching, as well as policy documents.

Within a diverse and expanding system of higher education, such as in the UK, discourse on teaching and student learning highlights the tensions between different notions of excellence – for example,

excellence as a positional good for students, an aspirational target for continuous quality enhancement, a form of reputational advantage for higher education institutions or a means for achieving governmental economic and social goals.

The review addressed questions of conceptualisations and usage at different (but interlinked) levels: system-wide; institutional; departmental; individual, and from two different perspectives, teaching and student learning.

Whilst the literature contains extensive references to excellent teaching there seemed to be far fewer references to excellent learning. However, much of the literature did not engage in any substantive manner with concepts, nor consideration of use in practice as evidenced through empirical studies.

The report, which sets out a number of implications for policy and practice, is published by the Higher Education Academy.

Read the report at

[http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/York/documents/ourwork/policy/Excellence\\_in\\_TL\\_LitRev.doc](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/York/documents/ourwork/policy/Excellence_in_TL_LitRev.doc)

### **Research into Part-time Students' Career Decision Making: A feasibility study**

This feasibility study for the Higher Education Careers Services Unit (HECSU) aimed to produce a specification and rationale for how research on part-time students' career decision-making can be implemented. Professor Claire Callender (London South Bank University) and Alan Woodley (Open University) participated in the study. In particular, it aimed to identify, define and understand:

- The scope of the research
- The research questions
- The methodological issues

As part of the study, the relevant literature (e.g. on methodology, gaps in the existing research evidence etc) was reviewed and a small number of individuals with relevant expertise were consulted in a systematic way. The resulting research specification sought to facilitate comparison with the concurrent HECSU-funded study of full-time students, *Futuretrack*.

The feasibility study commenced in August and was completed in December 2006. The outcome of the evaluation was a report to HECSU.

### **Towards a Strategy for Workplace Learning**

CHERI undertook this project together with management consultants KPMG LLP to assist the Higher Education Funding Council for England in the development of a workplace learning strategy. The main purposes of the study were to establish the current objectives of workplace learning in relation to higher education, to evaluate the extent to which they were being achieved and to assess the potential future contribution of workplace learning to higher education.

The study addressed the following issues within the context of HEFCE's long-term strategy:

- How should HEFCE, through its funding and policy levers, build on the current strengths of workplace learning?
- How should HEFCE, through these levers, address weaknesses in workplace learning?
- What opportunities are there for workplace learning in the future, and what can HEFCE and other stakeholders do about them?
- What could potentially be damaging to workplace learning, and what might HEFCE and other stakeholders do about it?
- What are the emerging issues for the HE sector (including HE in further education) which may impact on the relationship between learning and work and on lifelong learning in the longer term and what should HEFCE and other stakeholders do about these?

Read the report at [www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rdreports/2006/rd09\\_06/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rdreports/2006/rd09_06/).

### **Learning through Placements**

This study, commissioned by the Higher Education Academy and funded by the Higher Education Careers Services Unit, was undertaken jointly with Sheffield Hallam University's Centre for Research and Evaluation. The study aimed to investigate students' perceptions of learning from work

placements, to explore how they try to transfer and build on that learning in later stages of their programmes. It also explored how values and ethical positions are developed on work placements.

Students on a range of undergraduate programmes were interviewed, as were the relevant programme leaders. The work was undertaken between July 2005 and March 2006.

Read the report at [http://www.prospects.ac.uk/downloads/documents/H ECSU/Conferences%20and%20events/Changing%20Student%20Choices/Work\\_based\\_learning\\_LH\\_BL.pdf](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/downloads/documents/H ECSU/Conferences%20and%20events/Changing%20Student%20Choices/Work_based_learning_LH_BL.pdf)

### **Vocational Provision for Young People and Adults in Building Crafts and Hospitality CoVEs in London**

This project investigated vocational provision and progression routes (including to higher education) for young people and adults in Building Crafts and Hospitality CoVEs (Centres of Vocational Excellence) in London. The research team included colleagues from Continuum at the University of East London.

The project was funded by the Learning and Skills Council and aimed to identify and explore: the support mechanisms that are in place for learners to progress; any apparent gaps in progression routes; the impact of widening participation policy and practice; how collaborative relationships and links have developed with employers and other partner organisations; the distinctiveness of the London environment; and the impact of the Olympics 2012.

The work was undertaken between September 2005 and March 2006.

Read the report at [www.lseducation.org.uk/user/order.aspx?code=062676&src=XOWEB](http://www.lseducation.org.uk/user/order.aspx?code=062676&src=XOWEB)

# 4. Higher Education Empirical Research Database

The Higher Education Empirical Research (HEER) database comprises summaries of published empirical research on higher education, which are stored in a searchable web-based database.

## What is the HEER database?

The **Higher Education Empirical Research (HEER) database** is an open resource, free to all users.

It is a web-based resource comprising summaries of published empirical research on higher education topics, most of which date from 2000.

The database is sponsored by the following organisations:

- Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)
- Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)

## How can the database be accessed?

The database can be accessed via <http://heerd.open.ac.uk/>.

Upon access you will be asked to register your details (for monitoring and improvement purposes only). This will also enable you to receive updates (via email alerts or web feeds) about new items as they are added to the database.

Guidance on how to use the database can be found in the 'help' pages. There is also a 'contact us' facility if the help pages aren't able to answer your questions.

## What type of research does the database hold?

The database only stores research that is empirically-based. It does not include opinion, position or theoretical papers.

A range of types of research is included comprising academic research published in journals and books and 'grey literature' - that is, policy research which is funded by policy and funding bodies. Most of the research is UK-focused.

Relevant research is identified from regular searches of journals and other sources - for example, the websites of UK HE policy and funding bodies and research centres, international organisations, and others.

## How is the database structured?

The research included in the database covers the following themes:

- Access and widening participation
- Business, community and regional issues
- Course design and structures
- Graduate labour market
- Institutional management and finance
- International
- Learning, teaching and assessment
- Quality assurance
- Research
- Staffing
- Students - characteristics, experiences and expectations

The database can be browsed or searched using these headings and their related sub-themes. It can also be browsed or searched by year, author and publisher, and searched using 'free text'.

## Who will find the HEER database useful?

The database has been developed for the main higher education policy bodies. While these bodies will continue to be its main sponsors and customers, the database will be of use to the following personnel in higher education institutions:

- senior institutional managers (in HE and some FE colleges)
- planning officers
- researchers (institutional researchers, educational and other researchers)
- support staff (e.g. those responsible for staff and educational development, internationalisation, widening participation, knowledge transfer etc).

The HEER database is maintained by the Centre for Higher Education Research and Information of the Open University. The summaries are written by CHERI researchers, not the authors or publishers of the research upon which the summaries are based.

For more information about the database please contact: CHERI at: [Cheri-Heer@open.ac.uk](mailto:Cheri-Heer@open.ac.uk).

# Previous CHERI projects

The above current and recently completed projects build on a substantial programme of higher education research undertaken by CHERI over more than a decade. Some other projects are listed below. Details of these and other CHERI projects can be found on the Centre's website at [www.open.ac.uk/cheri](http://www.open.ac.uk/cheri).

## International

### **The Role of Universities in the Transformation of Societies**

This project aimed to increase understanding of the roles played by universities and other higher education institutions in generating social, economic and political change. It did so through an examination of the special case of countries and regions where recent changes can be claimed to have been 'transformative'. Research teams from several countries in Africa and Central and Eastern Europe contributed to the project and there were contributions from Brazil and Mexico. The project was led by CHERI and the Association of Commonwealth Universities and funded by the Ford, Rockefeller and STINT foundations and the Open Society Institute. A report of the project is available on the CHERI website at

[www.open.ac.uk/cheri/documents/transf-final-report.pdf](http://www.open.ac.uk/cheri/documents/transf-final-report.pdf)

### **Higher Education and Graduate Employment in Europe**

This project, funded through the EC's Targeted Socio-Economic Research (TSER) programme commenced in December 1997. Nine different European countries were involved in the project which was co-ordinated by the researchers at the University of Kassel in Germany. The project aimed to provide a comparative account of employment and work of graduates from institutions of higher education in Europe. CHERI was responsible for the UK part of the study.

### **Quality Management in Central and Eastern Europe**

CHERI was the lead partner in a European-wide consortium, which undertook this Phare Multi-Country project (part of the assistance provided by the European Union to the countries of central and eastern Europe) and involved 26 universities in 13 central and eastern European countries. The project

activities supported the development of institutional management capabilities in the participating universities in the areas of quality assurance, academic recognition and European policies.

### **Legislation and Accreditation of Open and Distance Learning in Central and Eastern Europe**

This project was part of the Phare Multi-Country Programme for Distance Education which aimed to promote co-operation and support the process of accession of central and eastern Europe countries to the European Union. The specific objective of this project was 'to promote and support a joint policy dialogue on open and distance learning among the Phare countries themselves and with the EU Member States'. Eleven central and eastern European countries were involved.

### **Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Central and Eastern Europe**

For this EC Phare project, CHERI led a consortium of consultants from national quality assurance agencies and research centres in Denmark, France, Lithuania, The Netherlands and Slovenia. The purpose of the project was to promote co-operation among eleven central and eastern European countries in order to establish quality assurance mechanisms for higher education.

### **Quality Management, Quality Assessment and the Decision-making Process in 15 Countries**

This project was funded by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) with support from the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the European Union. It investigated the purposes, methods and intended outcomes of different national systems of quality assurance and their impact on institutional management and decision-making. Over 30 universities from different parts of the world undertook case studies of the impact of external quality assurance on their own institutions.

### **An International Study of Peer Review in Higher Education**

This project was undertaken jointly with the American Council on Education and was based on a questionnaire survey of the main processes and practices of peer review in the assessment of quality in both teaching and research in higher education. Over 20 quality assessment agencies, mainly in Europe and the United States but also including one in Hong Kong, took part in the project.

## **United Kingdom**

### **Higher Education Futures**

Jointly with the UK Higher Education Policy Institute, and supported by the Open University, CHERI organised a series of seminars to bring research and policy perspectives together on some of the major issues facing the future of higher education in the United Kingdom. Nationally and internationally, higher education is experiencing a period of radical change, the scale of which – despite considerable public debate – is scarcely appreciated by many of those who will be most affected by it. Debate has been driven largely by practitioner and policy interests and has often paid insufficient attention to the increasing knowledge base provided by research into knowledge societies and economies, globalisation, social justice and higher education itself.

The series of four seminars, held during 2008:

- addressed higher education futures over a 5 to 10 year time period
- were research based
- combined international, national and regional perspectives
- brought together researchers, key opinion formers and decision-makers

Each seminar was informed by a specially-written report from one or more researchers with recognised international expertise on the seminar theme. Reports drew on ongoing or recent major international research projects. In addition, an expert commentary was provided from a UK perspective.

The themes and speakers for the seminars were:

- 1 Globalised learning and earning (Ulrich Teichler and Mala Singh)
- 2 Higher education and the achievement of democracy and social justice (John Brennan, Rajani Naidoo and Craig Calhoun)
- 3 ICT and 'openness' (Paul Clark)

- 4 Learning in the knowledge economy: who needs universities (Jussi Valimaa and Brenda Little)

### **The Transformative Impact of Higher Education on Disadvantaged Groups and Communities**

Funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the aim of this project was to review the research literature and undertake a gap analysis of our knowledge about 'cross regional perspectives on the transformative impact of higher education on disadvantaged groups and communities'.

A research 'network' was led by CHERI researchers who, along with researchers at the Universities of East London, Salford and Stirling, reviewed existing research literatures under four sub-themes:

- local and regional partnerships to extend participation in higher education to socially disadvantaged groups;
- the 'cultural presence' of higher education institutions in disadvantaged communities;
- the civic role of higher education institutions and their constituencies;
- local employment opportunities provided by the higher education institutions.

The project was part of a larger initiative by the ESRC, and supported by the higher education funding councils, on the role of higher education in regional development.

Read the report at

[www.open.ac.uk/cheri/documents/esrc-crossregional-final-report.pdf](http://www.open.ac.uk/cheri/documents/esrc-crossregional-final-report.pdf)

### **Impact of Debt and Term-Time Working on Higher Education**

The aim of this project, funded by Universities UK and HEFCE, was to investigate the extent and impact of debt and term-time working on higher education in the UK. This study was commissioned by Universities UK and was undertaken in collaboration with Professor Claire Callender of the Social Science Research Centre, South Bank University.

### **Responding to Student Needs in the First Year of Study**

This project was funded by QAA Scotland and SHEFC as part of the enhancement work on students' needs. It focused on the support needs of students through the first year of study and the areas to be targeted for improved student support. It aimed to gain an overall picture of issues facing institutions,

practitioners and students in relation to student support, to ensure that further development work reflects the needs of the sector.

Read the report at

[www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/documents/student\\_needs/CHERIREPORT.doc](http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/documents/student_needs/CHERIREPORT.doc)

### **Towards a Research Strategy on Learning and Teaching**

This was a project to assist HEFCE in the development of a long-term research and evaluation plan to underpin its policies on learning and teaching. The project involved a review of HEFCE research reports and an extensive series of interviews with HEFCE officers and Committee members and staff from other higher education policy bodies, both in the UK and elsewhere in Europe.

Read the report at

[www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rdreports/2005/rd02\\_05](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rdreports/2005/rd02_05)

### **Student Feedback**

This project was funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England and resulted from the recommendations of the Task Group on Information on Quality and Standards in Higher Education (the 'Cooke Report') concerning the use of student (and graduate) feedback in quality assurance, especially with regards to the provision of better information to intending students and employers. It led directly to the establishment of the National Student Survey. It resulted in a *Guide for Good Practice* for collecting and using student feedback, which is available from the Higher Education Academy.

Read the report on the HEFCE website at

[www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rdreports/2003/rd08\\_03](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rdreports/2003/rd08_03)

Read the *Guide* on the Higher Education Academy website at:

[www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/Collecting\\_and\\_using\\_student\\_feedback](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/Collecting_and_using_student_feedback)

### **Student Feedback in Scottish Higher Education Institutions**

This project was funded by QAA Scotland and SHEFC as part of the enhancement work on students needs. The project aimed to determine the main issues and barriers to improving practice in collecting and using student feedback and the extent to which the findings of a HEFCE study are reflected in the current practice and experience of Scottish HE institutions.

### **Greater Manchester Strategic Alliance**

CHERI led a team of higher and further education experts to test out the feasibility of a proposal for a Greater Manchester Strategic Alliance of further and higher education institutions. The aim of the Alliance was to widen participation in higher education within Greater Manchester. As a result of the project, the Alliance was established and led to the successful development of a Lifelong Learning Network.

Read the report at

[www.open.ac.uk/cheri/documents/gmsa-final-report.pdf](http://www.open.ac.uk/cheri/documents/gmsa-final-report.pdf)

### **Access to What? Improving Employment Prospects for Graduates from Socially Disadvantaged Groups**

This project used survey data on graduates from a previous CHERI project to look into the relationships between social disadvantage, educational opportunity and employment of graduates from socially disadvantaged groups. The project also explored the strategies employed by universities to improve the employment prospects of such students. The project was funded by several UK higher education policy bodies.

Read the various reports from the HEFCE website at

[www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rdreports/2002/rd14\\_02/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rdreports/2002/rd14_02/) and [www.open.ac.uk/cheri/documents/access-final-report.pdf](http://www.open.ac.uk/cheri/documents/access-final-report.pdf)

### **The Employment of English Studies Graduates**

This project was supported by the English Studies Centre of the Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN), and reviewed the available evidence about the employability of graduates in English Studies.

Read the report at

[www.english.heacademy.ac.uk/archive/publications/reports/gradcareers.pdf](http://www.english.heacademy.ac.uk/archive/publications/reports/gradcareers.pdf)

### **The Role of Vocational Higher Education in Meeting the Present and Future Needs of the Economy**

This project was funded by the Learning and Skills Council, the Department for Education and Skills, the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the Council for Industry and Higher Education. It focused on employers' views on the value of vocational sub-degree higher education, and compared provision in further education colleges and higher education institutions in meeting employers' needs, using existing data sources.

Read the report at  
[www.lsda.org.uk/files/PDF/1538.pdf](http://www.lsda.org.uk/files/PDF/1538.pdf)

### **Work-Based Progression to Higher Level Knowledge and Skills**

CHERI worked with the Learning and Skills Development Agency to undertake this study on the role of level 3 vocational qualifications and work-based learning, in particular modern apprenticeships, as progression routes to higher education (HE) and higher level knowledge and skills. The study was funded by the Learning and Skills Council.

Read the report at  
[www.lsda.org.uk/pubs/dbaseout/download.asp?code=041702RS](http://www.lsda.org.uk/pubs/dbaseout/download.asp?code=041702RS)

### **Making Progress on Progress Files**

This was a study undertaken on behalf of Universities UK to assess the progress of UK universities in implementing the new policy on 'progress files' – consisting of transcripts of student performance and the introduction of personal development planning (PDP). At the time of the study, most institutions had introduced a system of transcripts but progress varied considerably between institutions in the implementation of personal development planning.

### **Part-time Students and Employment**

A feasibility study of obtaining employment data on part-time students and graduates was funded by the UK Department for Education and Employment as part of its Higher Education and Employment Development Programme. Working with national statistics and careers services, and with six partner universities, CHERI collected information from 6000 part-time students and graduates and explored how institutions can best make use of this information in their institutional planning and course development.

### **The Impact of Teaching Quality Assessment in England**

Teaching Quality Assessment was introduced into British higher education in 1993. This project, funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), evaluated the extent to which recommendations made by assessors had been acted upon by institutions. This was achieved through 12 institutional case studies and covered all of the first 15 subjects assessed by HEFCE during 1993-95.

### **The UK External Examiner System: Possible Futures**

This project was sponsored by the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC). The project investigated the future of external examiners' roles and their management, and the implications of any change in these roles.

### **A Technical Review of Work Based Learning**

This project, funded by the then Department for Education and Employment, took the form of a literature review of progress and issues in work based learning and its recognition in higher education.