

REPORT



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# The Response of Higher Education Systems and National Governments to the Pandemic



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The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on many areas of society, and the higher education sector is no exception. The activities of higher education systems and individual educational institutions have faced tangible transformations. The report analyzes the consequences of the pandemic for the development of higher education in the world, as well as the reactions of higher education systems in response to the emerging challenges and threats. At the same time, the impact that the coronavirus pandemic has had on the higher education system is specific in different regions of the world. This paper provides an overview of the measures taken by national governments to support higher education. Practical recommendations are given for improving support measures for higher education organizations during the crisis caused by a pandemic.

The views and opinions of authors expressed herein do not necessarily state or reflect those of RIAC.

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## Summary

This report analyzes the consequences of the pandemic for the development of higher education in the world and the responses of higher education systems and national governments response to emerging challenges and threats. At the moment, it is difficult to predict what the long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic will be on higher education. The effect of the coronavirus pandemic on the higher education system is a poorly understood issue, which is partially due to a lack of both information and representative data. Nevertheless, the authors attempted to systematize the information available in open sources. The impact of the pandemic on the following aspects of higher education was assessed – accessibility for different social groups, digitalization, international academic mobility, inter-university and international cooperation, maintaining the quality of higher education.

Recommendations are given regarding the return of higher educational institutions to teaching and learning in the traditional, full-time format. The characteristics of the distribution of infrastructure and students' opportunities in higher education, problems of socio-economic nature are given. Besides, a cautious forecast is made about how the functions and forms of higher education will transform soon, and how the trends in student recruitment will change. The key challenges and risks associated with the survival of universities in the current epidemiological conditions and the reproduction of scientific personnel are also determined.

Separately, the authors of the report collected, systematized, and analyzed data on measures to support higher education by national governments in the context of a pandemic in different regions of the world. The objects of analysis were the higher education systems of the U.S., Canada, Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Finland, China, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, India, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Brazil. The study found that few countries had ready-made operational plans to coordinate large-scale efforts to prevent the spread of coronavirus and transfer educational institutions to the online format. In some countries, restrictive measures could not be adopted and entered into force for objective reasons, including, among other things, the form of management and financing of universities and the limited funds available in the federal budget. In many cases, the only thing that the state could implement for its part was to determine the minimum standards, the observance of which is necessary for the institutions to continue educational activities, and to prepare a series of recommendations. However, there are also opposite examples, when the measures taken were comprehensive and expressed in the adoption of a national plan. OECD countries generally show greater diversification in the forms and directions of support, as well as the level of such support.

The study made it possible to draw some conclusions and provide recommendations for improving support measures for higher education organizations during the crisis, caused in this case by the pandemic. They relate to areas such

as information support, sanitary and epidemiological measures, administrative measures to maintain the functioning of the system, flexibility in reporting requirements and accreditation of programs, organization of distance education and online learning in the higher education sector, financial support, support for international education and academic mobility, support for university research.

# Chapter 1. Consequences of the Pandemic for the Development of Higher Education in the World

This part of the report is devoted to analyzing the consequences of the pandemic for the development of higher education in the world and the reactions of higher education systems in response to the emerging challenges and threats. It is worth noting that the pandemic only began about eight months ago in most countries. Thus, it is possible to make more reasoned theories about the pandemic's longer-term effect than was in the early weeks. Nonetheless, it is still too early to define the lasting changes clearly. The primary constraint in the preparation of this report was a lack of adequate hard data. Necessarily, the report's approach is more judgment-based than evidence-based.

At the time of writing, there were two available attempts at a comprehensive approach to the topic of higher education and the pandemic. In May 2020, the International Association of Universities published an early international survey conducted at the beginning of April 2020<sup>1</sup> followed by an annex with regional reports that was published in August 2020.<sup>2</sup> The survey included 424 full replies from individual higher education institutions in 109 countries and two Special Administrative Regions of China. This included 28 replies from institutions in Russia.<sup>3</sup> Africa and Europe are over-represented, the Americas, Asia and the Pacific are underrepresented.<sup>4</sup> Of the responses, 36 per cent were completed by institutional leaders, 20 per cent by faculty and 16 per cent by international office heads with the remainder mostly by administrators and academic middle managers.<sup>5</sup> Though the data was gathered early in the pandemic, initially during first lockdowns worldwide, the survey coverage was limited, and the data is not representative. Some of the survey findings are referred to in the present report. Those findings should be considered as illustrative rather than authoritative.

In October 2020, Jamil Salmi, former World Bank Coordinator for Tertiary Education and now a consultant who advises many governments on higher education-related issues, completed a 117-page report for the U.S.-based Lumina Foundation titled "*Learning from the Past, Coping with the Present, Ready for the Future: Impact of COVID-19 on higher education from an equity perspective.*" Dr Salmi is probably the leading expert on higher education at the world level.

<sup>1</sup> Marinoni G., van't Land H., Jensen T. The Impact of COVID-19 on Higher Education Around the World: IAU global survey report // International Association of Universities. 05.2020.  
URL: [https://www.iau-aiu.net/IMG/pdf/iau\\_covid19\\_and\\_he\\_survey\\_report\\_final\\_may\\_2020.pdf](https://www.iau-aiu.net/IMG/pdf/iau_covid19_and_he_survey_report_final_may_2020.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Regional/National Perspectives on the Impact of COVID-19 on Higher Education // International Association of Universities. 08.2020. URL: [https://iau-aiu.net/IMG/pdf/iau\\_COVID-19\\_regional\\_perspectives\\_on\\_the\\_impact\\_of\\_COVID-19\\_on\\_he\\_july\\_2020\\_.pdf](https://iau-aiu.net/IMG/pdf/iau_COVID-19_regional_perspectives_on_the_impact_of_COVID-19_on_he_july_2020_.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Marinoni G., van't Land H., Jensen T. The Impact of COVID-19 on Higher Education Around the World: IAU global survey report // International Association of Universities. 05.2020.  
URL: [https://www.iau-aiu.net/IMG/pdf/iau\\_covid19\\_and\\_he\\_survey\\_report\\_final\\_may\\_2020.pdf](https://www.iau-aiu.net/IMG/pdf/iau_covid19_and_he_survey_report_final_may_2020.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Regional/National Perspectives on the Impact of COVID-19 on Higher Education // International Association of Universities. 08.2020. URL: [https://iau-aiu.net/IMG/pdf/iau\\_COVID-19\\_regional\\_perspectives\\_on\\_the\\_impact\\_of\\_COVID-19\\_on\\_he\\_july\\_2020\\_.pdf](https://iau-aiu.net/IMG/pdf/iau_COVID-19_regional_perspectives_on_the_impact_of_COVID-19_on_he_july_2020_.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

He has extensive contacts across the world, especially in government, and the resources of the World Bank and its tertiary education division. Nevertheless, while the global reach is significant and Dr Salmi's careful and balanced judgments are appreciated, like the present report, he relies on scattered evidence, much of it from media sources, rather than comprehensive data. Principal findings of the Salmi report for the Lumina Foundation will be referred to below.

## Digitalization

In the early stages of the pandemic, most higher education institutions worldwide were substantially disrupted. The early April 2020 IAU survey stated that 59 per cent fully closed and 30 per cent were “partially open” but with “major disruptions.”<sup>6</sup> In total, 91 per cent reported that they were able to “easily communicate” with students in this period.<sup>7</sup> Only 7 per cent of institutions had cancelled teaching, 24 per cent stated that activities were largely suspended but digital or self-study learning was being developed, and in 67 per cent of cases “classroom teaching has been replaced by distance teaching and learning.”<sup>8</sup>

The last group, clearly the institutions most able to manage the early transition to online learning, comprised 85 per cent of respondents in Europe, 72 per cent in the Americas, 60 per cent in Asia and Pacific, but only 29 per cent in Africa.<sup>9</sup> The later IAU report noted that according to a European University Association (EUA) survey, 95 per cent of institutions “pivoted to distance learning throughout the institution,” with 4 per cent providing it only in some faculties.<sup>10</sup>

Elite universities have often moved impressively to develop online courses and systems. Tsinghua University in China decided to proceed with teaching as usual but in full online mode, and secured the full development of 4,000 courses in rapid time. These were then made available widely in China.<sup>11</sup> The Chinese Ministry of Education has funded elite universities to develop and disseminate online programmes through China.

## Digital Coverage

U-Multirank's van Vught states that, “There is a very harsh reality in global higher education: some systems take high-speed internet connectivity for granted while in many developing countries this remains a major challenge.”<sup>12</sup> Salmi remarks,

<sup>6</sup> Marinoni G., van't Land H., Jensen T. The Impact of COVID-19 on Higher Education Around the World: IAU global survey report // International Association of Universities. 05.2020.  
URL: [https://www.iau-aiu.net/IMG/pdf/iau\\_covid19\\_and\\_he\\_survey\\_report\\_final\\_may\\_2020.pdf](https://www.iau-aiu.net/IMG/pdf/iau_covid19_and_he_survey_report_final_may_2020.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Regional/National Perspectives on the Impact of COVID-19 on Higher Education // International Association of Universities. 08.2020. URL: [https://iau-aiu.net/IMG/pdf/iau\\_COVID-19\\_regional\\_perspectives\\_on\\_the\\_impact\\_of\\_COVID-19\\_on\\_he\\_july\\_2020\\_.pdf](https://iau-aiu.net/IMG/pdf/iau_COVID-19_regional_perspectives_on_the_impact_of_COVID-19_on_he_july_2020_.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

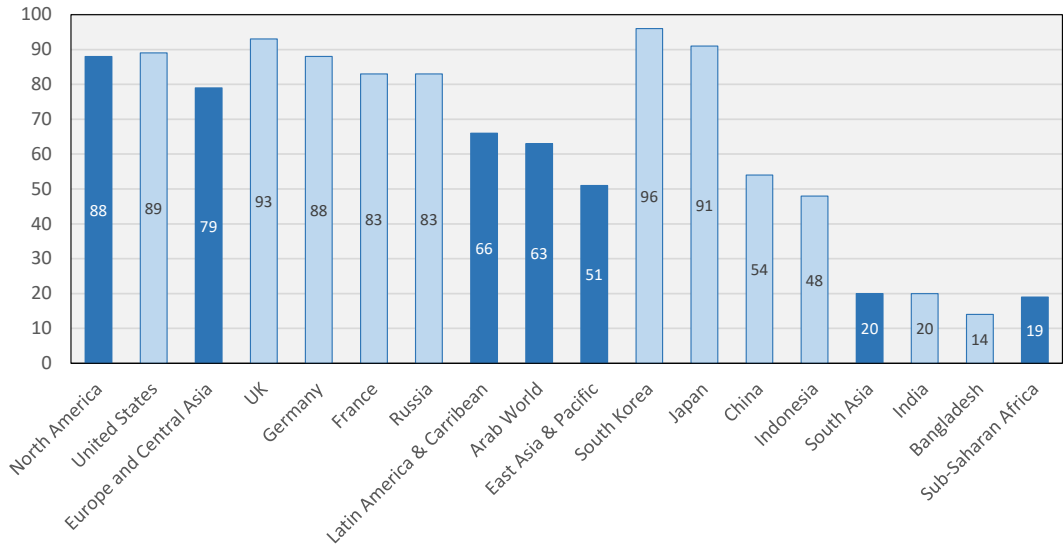
<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Coates H., Wen W., Shi J. Crisis is making online education economy go mainstream // University World News. 02.03.2020.  
URL: <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20200302091409436>

<sup>12</sup> Regional/National Perspectives on the Impact of COVID-19 on Higher Education // International Association of Universities. 08.2020. URL: [https://iau-aiu.net/IMG/pdf/iau\\_COVID-19\\_regional\\_perspectives\\_on\\_the\\_impact\\_of\\_COVID-19\\_on\\_he\\_july\\_2020\\_.pdf](https://iau-aiu.net/IMG/pdf/iau_COVID-19_regional_perspectives_on_the_impact_of_COVID-19_on_he_july_2020_.pdf)



**THE RESPONSE OF HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEMS AND NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS TO THE PANDEMIC**



**Figure 1. Proportion of the population with access to the Internet, 2019 or nearest year.**

Source: Individuals using the Internet // The World Bank.

URL: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.ZS?view=chart>

“In low-income countries, students from under-represented groups have faced greater challenges due to more severe resource and capacity constraints. Furthermore, in countries with limited Internet deployment and low broadband capacity, opportunities for online learning have been drastically constrained, especially in rural areas. In addition to the digital gap challenges, colleges and universities in low-income nations have struggled to put in place quality distance education programs for lack of experienced academics, adequate educational resources, and strong institutional capacity.”<sup>13</sup> Salmi provides numerous individual items of evidence about poor or non-existent digital connections and/or education in Africa and South Asia, especially but not only in rural areas, e.g.:

- 24-hour electricity supply is not guaranteed in many Sub-Saharan countries, war-affected parts of the Middle East, parts of South Asia, and rural Latin America;<sup>14</sup>
- broadband access is also highly variable on the world scale. The proportion of the population connected to the Internet ranges from 88 per cent in North America to 30 per cent in South Asia and 25 per cent in Sub-Saharan Africa. In Sub-Saharan Africa, people living in rural areas are 58 per cent less likely to have access to the Internet;<sup>15</sup>
- in Kenya, institutions closed completely, with only 30 per cent of public institutions commencing online teaching by September 2020. Others were

<sup>13</sup> Salmi J. Learning from the Past, Coping with the Present, Ready for the Future: Impact of COVID-19 on higher education from an equity perspective // Lumina Foundation. 22.10.2020. URL: <https://www.luminafoundation.org/?s=Salmi>

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

expected to remain closed until January 2021, meaning those students would lose a year of education;<sup>16</sup>

- a survey by the University of Hyderabad in India found that 63 per cent of students could not access online classes regularly, with 40 per cent reporting unreliable connectivity, 30 per cent citing the cost of data, and 10 per cent reporting unreliable electricity supply;<sup>17</sup>
- in Sri Lanka, a large-scale survey found that more than two-thirds of faculty and students reported poor Internet connections and only 55 per cent of students in state sector institutions owned a laptop;<sup>18</sup>
- the Education Ministry in Indonesia has stated that more than a third of students have limited or no Internet access.<sup>19</sup>

Not all students have devices that can connect and many such devices are unsatisfactory for the full range of learning functions. Access to digitally-based education is mediated by social factors as well as national location and geography within nations, and affects wealthier countries as well as poor countries. “Accessibility of higher education to different social groups” is reviewed in the next section of this report.

### The Digital Classroom

There is broad agreement that in the middle-income and high-income countries many institutions managed well a rapid transition to solely digital forms, and better than many observers had expected. An earlier EUA survey in 2013 found that most institutions already offered some kind of digitally enhanced learning, and “on the eve of the crisis most institutions reported that they had online repositories for educational materials in place.”<sup>20</sup> UMultirank states that prior to COVID-19, 60 per cent of its participating institutions had made provision in their strategic plan for online education, though less than a third offered online courses, including just 7 per cent of courses in economics and 3 per cent in engineering.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, the early universalization of online learning was followed in many places by further rapid digital development, with later term and academic year breaks used to retool the new systems. This indicates the widespread prior distribution of information and communications (ICT) infrastructure, systems and expertise; plus the internal organizational capabilities of institutions.

<sup>16</sup> Salmi J. Learning from the Past, Coping with the Present, Ready for the Future: Impact of COVID-19 on higher education from an equity perspective // Lumina Foundation. 22.10.2020. URL: <https://www.luminafoundation.org/?s=Salmi>

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Regional/National Perspectives on the Impact of COVID-19 on Higher Education // International Association of Universities. 08.2020. URL: [https://iau-aiu.net/IMG/pdf/iau\\_COVID-19\\_regional\\_perspectives\\_on\\_the\\_impact\\_of\\_COVID-19\\_on\\_he\\_july\\_2020\\_.pdf](https://iau-aiu.net/IMG/pdf/iau_COVID-19_regional_perspectives_on_the_impact_of_COVID-19_on_he_july_2020_.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> van Vught F. About 60% of universities reported online learning provisions in their strategic planning pre-COVID-19, but only few appeared to be prepared for a quick shift to full online programmes // U-Multirank media release. 09.06.2020. URL: <https://www.umultirank.org/press-media/press-releases/about-60-percent-of-universities-reported-online-learning-provisions-in-their-strategic-planning-pre-COVID-19/>

In the immediate crisis, exceptionally heavy responsibilities fell on executive leaders of education provision, academic middle managers, especially those responsible for organizing teaching programmes and managing student or faculty relations, and ICT personnel at all levels, especially course developers. At the outset, many teachers also carried a spike in workload.

Salmi notes that “the experience of the first six months of the COVID-19 crisis has revealed ... that teaching online is not about recording a traditional lecture and posting it on the institutional website, or using a videoconference platform to deliver the same lecture online as the instructor would give on campus. Effective online education requires teaching and learning methods that engage the students dynamically in an enjoyable and stimulating education experience. The present crisis has been a great opportunity to scale up innovations allowing for a more active, interactive and experiential education delivery mode that few higher education institutions had tried before the pandemic. Among these student-focused approaches are problem-based learning, self-learning, peer-learning, team-learning, the flipped classroom, and the use of simulations and games, which can be used separately or in a complementary manner.”<sup>22</sup> Perhaps this underestimates the extent to which the educational benefits of such practices were already understood prior to the pandemic. It appears that many teachers and students are aware of the benefits of interactive classrooms and one to replicate those benefits in online mode.

There is no doubt that the experience of online learning during the pandemic will enhance online capability long term, and lift the expected level of quality in online education. The 2020 EUA survey found that the vast majority of institutions have plans beyond the crisis to explore new ways of teaching (87%) and enhance digital capacity (70%).<sup>23</sup>

### **Assessment**

Salmi notes that the transition to fully online education poses “the need to fully align learning-assessment procedures and criteria with online curricular and pedagogical practices,” and that “higher education institutions all over the world have explored various forms of alternative assessment: pass/fail approach, open internet / open book exams, self-certification of online exams based on trust, collaborative forms, portfolios, next-generation assessments, etc.”<sup>24</sup> It appears that in most countries, few institutions have substantially changed their essential approaches to assessment. In the early stages, there was some suspension or reduction in assessment requirements, but the norm is now for stable systems, but with a low level of attention to the fact that standardized conditions of assessment for all students have been replaced by variable conditions in which because

<sup>22</sup> Salmi J. Learning from the Past, Coping with the Present, Ready for the Future: Impact of COVID-19 on higher education from an equity perspective // Lumina Foundation. 22.10.2020. URL: <https://www.luminafoundation.org/?s=Salmi>

<sup>23</sup> Regional/National Perspectives on the Impact of COVID-19 on Higher Education // International Association of Universities. 08.2020. URL: [https://iau-aiu.net/IMG/pdf/iau\\_COVID-19\\_regional\\_perspectives\\_on\\_the\\_impact\\_of\\_COVID-19\\_on\\_he\\_july\\_2020\\_.pdf](https://iau-aiu.net/IMG/pdf/iau_COVID-19_regional_perspectives_on_the_impact_of_COVID-19_on_he_july_2020_.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> Salmi J. Learning from the Past, Coping with the Present, Ready for the Future: Impact of COVID-19 on higher education from an equity perspective // Lumina Foundation. 22.10.2020. URL: <https://www.luminafoundation.org/?s=Salmi>

assessment is digital, some students are studying under relatively disadvantaged conditions. “It is difficult if not impossible to ensure similar conditions for all students in terms of broadband, computer speed and screen size.”<sup>25</sup>

As one would expect, there is a greater reliance on continuous assessment than prior to the pandemic<sup>26</sup> given the health risks posed by large groups in examination rooms.

The shift to greater reliance on digital assessment, and the reliance on online systems in all areas of higher education activity, is associated with enhanced security risks and concerns.

### **Problem Course Areas**

As the IAU survey notes, in all countries, there are specific courses and course-related activities that cannot be fully provided in online mode, such as clinical medicine, veterinary studies, laboratory-based science and many courses requiring work-site activities.<sup>27</sup> The potential for internship and work-based clinical practice opened up again in countries that returned to on-site work and higher education in the second half of 2020, though subject to social health protocols (e.g. distancing, masking) and the potential for sudden lockdowns.

### **Partial Return to in-Place Classrooms**

After the common initial lockdown early in the pandemic, and after the first wave had subsided, countries diverged in the timing of and the extent of the returns to face to face higher education. There were mixed practices in some systems, with certain institutions remaining solely digital in the second half of 2020. In some other countries, for example, in the United States (US) and United Kingdom (UK), opening for face to face activity and then closing again amid flare-ups of the pandemic on campus and/or in the local area near the campus. The different experiences and approaches in various countries after the first wave of the pandemic are discussed further below.

Because of the need to maintain social health protocols at the time of reopening, many institutions have attempted hybrid provision, combining face to face classes and activities with online classes, seminar-style discussion and other communication. Some classes combine people present in the classroom with people linked to the classroom online. These modes can be more difficult to work well than solely online teaching and learning. There are no established prototypes – unlike the existing modes of solely online learning – and there has been much improvisation. Often the online part of the work emerges as both more limited but also more satisfactory.

<sup>25</sup> Salmi J. Learning from the Past, Coping with the Present, Ready for the Future: Impact of COVID-19 on higher education from an equity perspective // Lumina Foundation. 22.10.2020.  
URL: <https://www.luminafoundation.org/?s=Salmi>

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Marinoni G., van't Land H., Jensen T. The Impact of COVID-19 on Higher Education Around the World: IAU global survey report // International Association of Universities. 05.2020.  
URL: [https://www.iau-aiu.net/IMG/pdf/iau\\_covid19\\_and\\_he\\_survey\\_report\\_final\\_may\\_2020.pdf](https://www.iau-aiu.net/IMG/pdf/iau_covid19_and_he_survey_report_final_may_2020.pdf)

## **Accessibility of Higher Education to Different Social Groups**

The effects of the pandemic on access to and retention in higher education, and its differentiating effects on social groups, is much discussed but hard data on the problems are mostly lacking.

In some countries, the pandemic is associated with a decline in domestic student numbers that have fallen disproportionately on students from poorer backgrounds. In mid-October 2020, the National Student Clearinghouse in the U.S. stated that on return to campuses for the 2020-21 academic year, there had been a drop of 4 per cent overall, and 16 per cent in first-year enrolments compared to the previous year. While undergraduate enrolments in four-year colleges showed little change, community college enrolment was down 9 per cent and first-year community college enrolment had dropped by a massive 23 per cent. Community colleges are traditionally used by many students from poorer backgrounds, many of whom face difficulties in accessing the technology necessary for remote learning. The difficulty of translating vocational programmes into online mode may also have contributed to the decline in participation.<sup>28</sup>

### **Students Most Affected**

Everywhere, the disruption and income losses engendered by the pandemic and the sudden changes between closure, online learning and attenuated return to face to face learning fall most heavily on those already vulnerable. Student populations that were especially affected negatively include:

- Economically poor students, including those lacking adequate technology for online access. Many will have had an inadequate learning experience in 2020, some will have done no learning and some will have dropped out. For poorer students required to work at home, lack of quiet study space can be an issue also<sup>29</sup>;
- All students who would normally support themselves by working while studying and have now lost their jobs. This includes many students from poorer backgrounds, and in some countries such as Germany and Brazil includes a large majority of the total student population<sup>30</sup>;
- Rural students who are especially disadvantaged by inadequate access to technology and, through it, pedagogical and welfare support;
- Students who are first in their family to attend higher education, for whom additional support may be required, and who are especially disadvantaged by the loss of face to face contact either with staff, or with students with whom they might develop a community;
- Students from disadvantaged ethnic minorities who also are less likely to have

<sup>28</sup> St Amour M. Report: Enrolment continues to trend downward // Inside Higher Education. 15.10.2020. URL: <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/10/15/worrying-enrollment-trends-continue-clearinghouse-report-shows>

<sup>29</sup> Salmi J. Learning from the Past, Coping with the Present, Ready for the Future: Impact of COVID-19 on higher education from an equity perspective // Lumina Foundation. 22.10.2020. URL: <https://www.luminafoundation.org/?s=Salmi>

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

access to technology and like first in family students may face greater than average hurdles.

- In some countries, especially in parts of Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, female students who have less access to technology than male students<sup>31</sup>;
- International students, especially those unable to travel, trapped offshore and experiencing financial hardship; and those in the first year of their programmes who arrived successfully but then face lockdown (see next section);
- Disabled students, who when working from home may not have equivalent access to aids available on campus;
- Immunocompromised students who are required to return to campus while the danger of infection continues in their vicinity.

Salmi notes that Professor Schrock of Emporia State University has proposed a notion of Years of Potential Intellectual Lives Lost (YPILL) to measure the education damage resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>32</sup>

### Social Differentiation of Online Access

The differentiated access to online learning on the world scale has been discussed, but it should be emphasised that there is differentiated access within every country. At the University of Sao Paulo, Brazil's leading university, 30 per cent of students are from low-income families, and many report lack of Internet access, lack of study space and mental health issues.<sup>33</sup>

Digital connectivity issues are not confined to the emerging (“developing”) countries. On one hand, in high-income countries, “the great majority of students adapted easily to these new teaching practices,” as Verillaud (2020) notes in relation to France, including the use of email, partly closed linkages such as Whatsapp, dedicated institutional platforms, audio and video. On the other hand, some students in rural areas face poor connections or cannot afford to use the Internet.<sup>34</sup> A June 2020 survey in France found that 50,000 students had withdrawn because of poor internet access.<sup>35</sup> In the UK, a survey by the National Union of Students in the UK found that in July 2020, 27 per cent of enrolled university students said that they could not access online learning during lockdown. Some reported frequent technical issues and lack of communication from their universities about these problems.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Salmi J. Learning from the Past, Coping with the Present, Ready for the Future: Impact of COVID-19 on higher education from an equity perspective // Lumina Foundation. 22.10.2020. URL: <https://www.luminafoundation.org/?s=Salmi>

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Verillaud F. How French universities responded to COVID-19 // Institut Montaigne blog. 25.05.2020. URL: <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/en/blog/how-french-universities-responded-COVID-19>

<sup>35</sup> Salmi J. Learning from the Past, Coping with the Present, Ready for the Future: Impact of COVID-19 on higher education from an equity perspective // Lumina Foundation. 22.10.2020. URL: <https://www.luminafoundation.org/?s=Salmi>

<sup>36</sup> Packham A. One in four students unable to access online learning during lockdown — survey // The Guardian. 08.09.2020. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/sep/08/third-of-students-unable-to-access-online-learning-during-lockdown-survey>

In Australia, 13 per cent of households do not have a high-speed connection, and 6 per cent in the U.S.<sup>37</sup>

### **Welfare**

“Many institutions have found it indispensable to establish, increase, or strengthen their academic and psychological support systems for the students who have been personally impacted by the health and economic crisis and have struggled to adjust to new teaching and learning approaches,” states Salmi.<sup>38</sup> This includes students with mental health problems. However, resources for adequate support systems are not available to all higher education institutions.

### **Graduate Labour Market**

Today’s students who complete will enter an especially difficult graduate labour market. In which it will be harder to get a job than prior to the pandemic, and levels of pay will be lower than before. In that highly competitive environment students from poorer backgrounds, with less social capital (less potent networks) will again be at a disadvantage.

### **International Academic Mobility**

For academic staff, the loss of international mobility has reduced opportunities for professional networking and eliminated travel for research purposes, but faculty have been able to maintain and enhance online communication, except in those countries where Internet connectivity or access to technology are impaired. However, it is students who have been the most affected.

### **Early Effects**

The IUA survey in early April 2020 found that at the beginning of the pandemic international student mobility was completely halted in 89 per cent of institutions.<sup>39</sup> In 47 per cent of all institutions surveyed international students were grounded locally, and in 37 per cent local students were grounded in foreign institutions.<sup>40</sup> In all 60 per cent moved immediately to online international education and others were developing the option.<sup>41</sup> NAFSA in the U.S. noted that U.S. institutions overall lost nearly USD 1 billion in cancelled or shortened study abroad programmes and “spent approximately USD 683 million in financial support for international students, scholars, faculty and staff who remained on

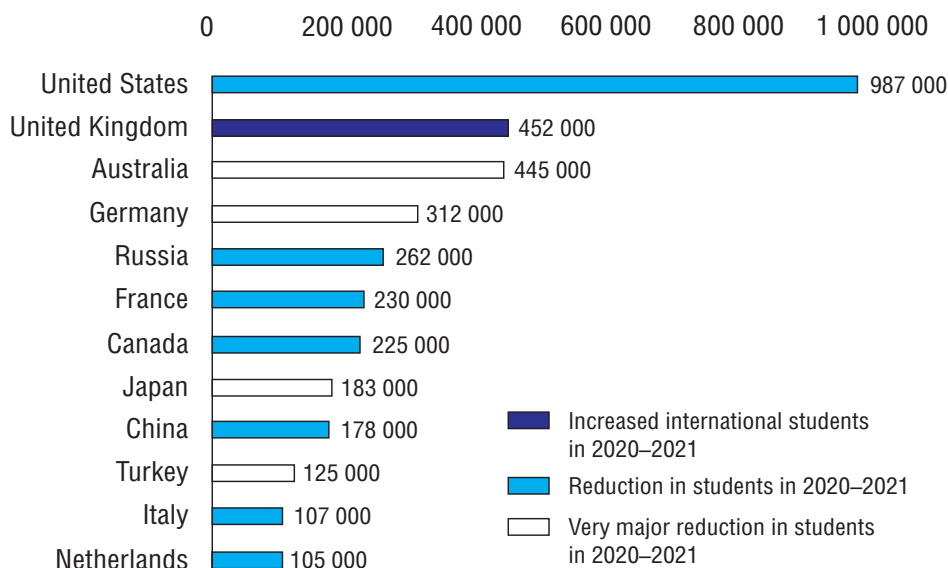
<sup>37</sup> Salmi J. Learning from the Past, Coping with the Present, Ready for the Future: Impact of COVID-19 on higher education from an equity perspective // Lumina Foundation. 22.10.2020.  
URL: <https://www.luminafoundation.org/?s=Salmi>

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Marinoni G., van't Land H., Jensen T. The Impact of COVID-19 on Higher Education Around the World: IAU global survey report // International Association of Universities. May 2020. URL: [https://www.iau-aiu.net/IMG/pdf/iau\\_covid19\\_and\\_he\\_survey\\_report\\_final\\_may\\_2020.pdf](https://www.iau-aiu.net/IMG/pdf/iau_covid19_and_he_survey_report_final_may_2020.pdf)

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.



**Figure 2. International student mobility in 2020 (and number of students in 2018).**

Source: Data // UNESCO Institute of Statistics data. URL: <http://data.uis.unesco.org/#>

campus when courses moved online.”<sup>42</sup> It is not known how much other countries allocated to support international students stranded by the pandemic. The commitments of money, time and energy were considerable. However, not all international students were supported. Some experienced severe financial and emotional hardship.<sup>43</sup>

The OECD notes that “international students were particularly badly hit at the start of the lockdown as they have had to sort out the implications of university closures on their status on campus and within their host country. Students have had to decide whether to return home (funding permitting) with limited information of when they might return, or remain in their host country with restricted employment and education opportunities, all while sorting out their visa status.” While some countries, such as Canada and the UK, “offered leniency around visa rules,” this was not always the case. As cross-border persons international students do not have the full support of their country of citizenship; nor do they experience support and rights equivalent to those of citizens in the country of education. “The varying approach across institutions and countries has captured the complexity of ensuring accountability over the well-being and safety of international students in a globalized higher education market.”<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Regional/National Perspectives on the Impact of COVID-19 on Higher Education // International Association of Universities. 08.2020. URL: [https://iau-aiu.net/IMG/pdf/iau\\_COVID-19\\_regional\\_perspectives\\_on\\_the\\_impact\\_of\\_COVID-19\\_on\\_he\\_july\\_2020\\_.pdf](https://iau-aiu.net/IMG/pdf/iau_COVID-19_regional_perspectives_on_the_impact_of_COVID-19_on_he_july_2020_.pdf)

<sup>43</sup> Salmi J. Learning from the Past, Coping with the Present, Ready for the Future: Impact of COVID-19 on higher education from an equity perspective // Lumina Foundation. 22.10.2020. URL: <https://www.luminafoundation.org/?s=Salmi>

<sup>44</sup> Education at a Glance 2020 // Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. URL: <https://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance/>



International student pursuing online education from home lack linguistic-cultural immersion, networking and job experience in the country of education. This has reduced international education for many families and students in 2020. Together with reduced capacity to pay, concerns about health and safety around campuses (e.g., in the U.S., UK and Australia where social protocols are not sustained consistently), and incidences of racism in some locations (especially in the U.S.), this may have reduced demand for international higher education, all else equal.

### **Decline in Incoming Student Numbers**

However, the main downward pressure on international student mobility in the period of the pandemic has been on the supply side. Following the initial period of closure in the first wave of the pandemic, continued supply-side factors have included reduced inward flights or abolition of those flights (e.g., into Australia, Germany, Japan and Turkey), quarantine requirements, problems with student accommodation and welfare, and restriction of visas (e.g., in the U.S., though partly triggered by geopolitics rather than regulation of the pandemic). All the factors together have led to a dramatic overall reduction in the number of mobile students. Country by country numbers are not available for 2020, but there are early indications of student numbers in 2020-21 in the U.S. and UK, the two countries that enroll the largest number of onshore international students.

In the U.S., the largest provider of international education in terms of total student numbers, the Global Alliance for International Student Advancement reported in late September an estimated decline of 13.7 per cent in international students compared to the position in 2019-20. A further data check will occur in November.<sup>45</sup>

International students are students who have crossed the national border for education of one year or more in duration.

In Germany, it was reported in September 2020 by Uni-assist, the organization that handles preliminary assessments of international student applications, that applications from international students had fallen by 20 per cent in 2020-21 compared to the previous year.<sup>46</sup> The number enrolled was likely to have fallen further because of restrictions on inward travel. Less reliable reports indicated a 50 per cent fall in international student applications in the Netherlands, though this figure has been disputed.

Both China and Japan were still closely limiting international arrivals in early October 2020.<sup>47</sup> In Japan, universities opened again in 2020-21, but only one fifth returned to full face to face teaching, with most using blended learning and a significant expansion of online provision.<sup>48</sup> Restrictions of educational delivery,

<sup>45</sup> Fanara D. and Stephens R. What to do about falling international student enrolment // University World News. 21.10.2020.  
URL: <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20201021152045352>

<sup>46</sup> Gardner M. International applications down by 20% on last year // University World News. 26.09.2020.  
URL: <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20200926040212787>

<sup>47</sup> Lau J. Overseas students frustrated as China and Japan restrict entry // Times Higher Education. 05.09.2020.  
URL: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/overseas-students-frustrated-china-and-japan-restrict-entry>

<sup>48</sup> Lau J. Japan's campuses open, but classes stay firmly online // Times Higher Education. 18.09.2020.  
URL: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/japans-campuses-open-classes-stay-firmly-online>

**Table 1. Deaths attributed to COVID-19 by October 31, 2020, compared to the population in 2019, and international student numbers, 12 largest international student populations<sup>49-51</sup>**

Country	Deaths attributed to COVID-19, 31.10.20	National population 2019 (million)	COVID-19 deaths per 10,000 of 2019 national population	International students 2018 (approx.)	NOMINAL deaths of international students if the population death rate is applied* (approx.)
United States	229,708	328.240	7.00	987,000	691
United Kingdom	46,229	66.834	6.92	452,000	313
Australia	907	25.364	0.36	445,000	16
Germany	10,452	83.133	1.26	312,000	39
Russia	27,656	144.734	1.91	262,000	50
France	36,565	67.060	5.45	230,000	125
Canada	10,110	37.589	2.69	225,000	61
Japan	1,755	126.265	0.14	183,000	3
China	4,739	1,397.715	0.03	178,000	1
Turkey	10,177	83.430	1.22	125,000	15
Italy	38,321	60.297	6.36	107,000	68
Netherlands	7,335	17.333	4.23	105,000	44

\* Death rates of international students will be significantly lower than those of the population as a whole because COVID-19 mortality is age-related. Nevertheless, the final column does provide an indication of the weight of numbers at risk on a country by country basis.

social movement and inward travel were expected to lead to a marked drop in total international student numbers.

In Australia, the third-largest international education provider in 2018, inward travel of international students has been largely blocked since the pandemic began. For the most part, onshore international education has been confined to students already in the country at the commencement of the pandemic and to online provision.

Only the UK has seen a clear increase in the number of international students in 2020-21. Prior to the 2020-21 academic year, the UK government announced that higher education would open on a blended learning basis despite the virulence of the pandemic. The UK government considered and rejected the option of financially compensating the universities for the expected drop in international

<sup>49</sup> Data // UNESCO Institute of Statistics data. URL: <http://data.uis.unesco.org/#>

<sup>50</sup> COVID-19 Situation Update Worldwide // European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC, 2020). URL: <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/geographical-distribution-2019-ncov-cases>

<sup>51</sup> Per capita GDP in Purchasing Power Parity terms // World Bank. Data and statistics. URL: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.PP.KD?view=chart>

student numbers in the next academic year in 2020-21,<sup>52</sup> though it brought forward some research funding.<sup>53</sup> It was apparent that if the universities were to maintain revenues, they would have to persuade students to enroll regardless of the dangers and uncertainties.

The UK institutions marketed vigorously to both domestic and international students, eventually achieving substantial increases in numbers in both categories, differing from overall international trends. In contrast to other countries that were blocking inward travel under pandemic conditions, at least one UK university, Queens in Belfast, chartered a plane load of students from China. In the outcome, although incoming EU student admissions fell because Brexit had increased the tuition cost for EU citizens, in the first term of 2020-21, the number of international student admissions into UK institutions increased by 7 per cent. The increase was stratified, with 15 per cent growth in high-status institutions, including the Russell Group universities, and declines of 7-8 per cent in other categories.<sup>54,55</sup> However, there is a danger that high drop-out rates will erode student numbers, especially after the imposition of a national lockdown on October 31.

The UK experience suggests that in the case of high demand countries at least, while survey evidence and education agent testimony may suggest that prospective international students in large numbers will refuse to enroll in, or will drop out of, Internet-only courses, in practice, students behave differently. It is true that in the UK the waters were muddied this year by the fact that universities implied a higher level of face to face provision than they were subsequently able to provide, but it was notable that in the first weeks of the 2020-21 academic year, sudden shifts from blended learning to online-only learning, induced by pandemic conditions in particular institutions, did not trigger large scale student withdrawals.

### **Longer-Term Patterns**

The longer-term question posed by the pandemic is whether there are likely to be shifts in student mobility patterns once the pandemic is over. In the pandemic period, China and Japan have emerged as relatively safe destinations, and higher education in those countries has recovered more surely than in Europe and North America; Germany has looked after its population better than France and Italy; and the high death tolls in U.S. and UK are obvious. Canada's death toll has been less than half that of the U.S. on a population basis, and Australia's much lower. Salmi asserts that "patterns of international student flows are likely to change significantly as a result of the pandemic," partly because of the negative experiences of students in 2020; and that survey evidence suggests that students from

<sup>52</sup> Drayton E. and Waltmann B. Will Universities Need a Bailout to Survive the COVID-19 Crisis? // London: Institute for Fiscal Studies. 07.2020.  
URL: <https://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/BN300-Will-universities-need-bailout-survive-COVID-19-crisis-1.pdf>

<sup>53</sup> Adams R. Government refuses multi-billion pound bailout for universities // The Guardian. 04.05.2020. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/may/04/government-refuses-multi-billion-pound-bailout-for-universities>

<sup>54</sup> Staton B. UK universities see record admissions, despite the pandemic // Financial Times. 14.09.2020.  
URL: <https://www.ft.com/content/8f3ab80a-ec2b-427d-80ae-38ad27ad423dA>

<sup>55</sup> McKie. UK numbers boost masks uncertainty over international students // Times Higher Education. 12.09.2020.  
URL: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/uk-numbers-boost-masks-uncertainty-over-international-students>

China and Hong Kong will shift from Western destinations to East Asian regional destinations in large numbers.<sup>56</sup>

The OECD expects that after the pandemic, international student mobility will take some years to return to 2019 levels because of the experience of student vulnerability and a reduced benefit to cost ratio during the pandemic<sup>57</sup>. Notably, the two largest providers, U.S. and UK, are associated with relatively high COVID-19 death tolls (Table 1), and in the U.S., there has been widespread racial tension. To those factors can be added a shrinking middle class and reduced family capacity to pay during a post-pandemic recession.

However, in the judgment of the author, both these conclusions overstate the likely outcome. Salmi over-estimates a reactive consumer survey as a guide to action; and both Salmi and the OECD over-estimate the extent to which student demand is shaped by the experience of prior cohorts, i.e., “word of mouth” reputational factors, as distinct from other drivers of international education including the desire for career advantage within a status hierarchy of educational countries and institutions, and the opportunity for personal growth offered by the linguistic, social and educational experiences that international study provides. Those latter drivers have not disappeared during the pandemic. Student mobility is likely to spring back quicker than the OECD suggests. The momentum of the international education industry will continue to be sustained by families that see gains through mobility, universities that want revenue and education agents that foster both demand and supply. Further, the two leading Anglophone countries will retain their dominant position in the global student market, despite their poor management of the pandemic.

The position of the U.S. and UK within global student flows is sustained by the economic attractiveness of the U.S. as a destination, the stellar global reputations of both sets of universities, sustained by their research performance, and the cultural hegemony of the English language. English will remain the only global language of science and technology and by far the strongest language in business and media/popular culture. The English language-based hegemony of the U.S. and UK in international higher education will outlast the economic and even political dominance of the U.S. The two strongest English-speaking countries have always had excess demand from international applicants – their markets in international education are essentially supply regulated with total numbers controlled by the regulation of student visas, not market forces – and this situation is likely to continue. Canada and Australia are not as prestigious, and despite a better outcome in the pandemic, are unlikely to gain significantly in relation to the U.S. and UK. Canada is now promoting international education more vigorously, and its proximity to the U.S. as a potential career pathway to that country and its large graduate labor market may be an advantage. Its numbers are likely to grow. Australia has long had a more commercial approach than the North American

<sup>56</sup> Salmi J. Learning from the Past, Coping with the Present, Ready for the Future: Impact of COVID-19 on higher education from an equity perspective // Lumina Foundation. 22.10.2020.  
URL: <https://www.luminafoundation.org/?s=Salmi>

<sup>57</sup> Education at a Glance, 2020 // Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.  
URL: <https://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance/>

countries. It is geographically well placed in the Southeast of China and India and has built the second-largest intake of students from China after the U.S. However, given that its very sharp reduction in international student numbers in 2020 is likely to have deterred education agents, plus sharply worsening Australia-China relations, recovery of its international student enrolment may be slower than in the other English-speaking countries.

Nevertheless, after the pandemic, it seems almost certain that there will be increased mobility into East and Southeast Asian destinations from other countries in the same region. All East Asian countries had exceptionally low death tolls during the pandemic as Table 1 shows, including 460 persons by October 31 in Korea, 27 in Singapore and only nine in Taiwan, a country of 23 million people. The October 31 death toll in another international education provider, Malaysia in Southeast Asia, was only 236.<sup>58</sup> It can be expected that international students entering Japan, China and South Korea - and if their governments want to grow the education export sector, Taiwan and Singapore - will increase. It is possible also that China could see a significant increase in numbers from Sub-Saharan Africa, Pakistan and later, India. At the same time, the growth of international education in East and Southeast Asia will have only a marginal impact on flows into the Anglophone zone and Europe which, in the case of the U.S. and U.S., as noted, are primarily supply not demand determined. With China and Korea expected to recover more quickly than the other large economies the growth of the middle class will re-emerge there, and over time, this will sustain increased numbers of regional students moving in all directions.

Whether student movement into Russia from Central Asia, other post-Soviet countries and China will resume its pre-pandemic growth trajectory will in part depend on the continued role of Russian as a regional language and the attractiveness of Russian higher education institutions.

## **Inter-Universities and International Cooperation in Higher Education Sector**

Higher education institutions were early adopters of the Internet in the 1990s and research-intensive universities, especially, are effectively networked worldwide. Online communication has become more active during the pandemic period. Forms of cooperation that depend on, or can be sufficiently pursued on the basis of, online networks have flourished in 2020. Forms of cooperation that depend on in-place activity, such as cross-border student exchange and location-based events, have been held in abeyance. International research cooperation has continued and in the specific field of COVID-19 related investigations, collaboration has flourished.

### **University Research**

Research is a predominantly cooperative activity. Most papers indexed in Web of Science and Scopus are authored by scientists from more than one institution,

<sup>58</sup> COVID-19 Situation Update Worldwide // European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control.  
URL: <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/geographical-distribution-2019-ncov-cases>

with almost one in five co-authored across national boundaries. In the pandemic, “emphasis has shifted from cross-border movements of people and equipment to a focus on cross-border flows of data, information and knowledge. Conferences and meetings have been cancelled or postponed, with many moved to online platforms. Transfers to virtual spaces have increased the inclusivity, accessibility, cost-efficiency and environmental friendliness of such events, but also trigger concerns over digital equality, security and privacy.”<sup>59</sup>

Following the early closure of many laboratories and other facilities, most institutional sites of research have now reopened. Though field work continues to be restricted, natural sciences have been more affected than the social sciences,<sup>60</sup> and emphasis on COVID-19 related research has put some other activity on hold,<sup>61</sup> research has been disrupted less than the education function. However, with hiring freezes and staffing reductions in many countries, there are widespread concerns about the maintenance and reproduction of research capacity. With less posts available for doctoral graduates<sup>62</sup>,<sup>63</sup> the next generation is likely to be depleted, reducing the quantity and quality of future research outputs.

In Australia, because of the loss of most international student fees, the financial impact of the pandemic in 2020 is expected to be USD 2.7 billion. Until the pandemic, more than half of all resources for university research were derived from international student revenues. It is expected that one staff position in ten will be lost, including many research jobs.<sup>64</sup> Australia is an extreme case. No other country is as dependent on commercial income for funding basic science, which is a public good in economic terms. However, once governments move from high deficit financing to reduce their debts, research funding may be in jeopardy in many systems. Funding cuts to research fall especially heavily on outputs in the emerging countries.

There is some evidence of an increase in journal submission during the pandemic<sup>65</sup> though it is disproportionately confined to male researchers.<sup>66</sup> Likewise,

<sup>59</sup> Xu X. How can we reimagine future global research post COVID-19? // University World News. 24.10.2020. URL: <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20201021034340242>

<sup>60</sup> Primack R. COVID-19 is eroding scientific field work — and our knowledge of how the world is changing // The Conversation. 19.05.2020. URL: <https://theconversation.com/COVID-19-is-eroding-scientific-field-work-and-our-knowledge-of-how-the-world-is-changing-137045>

<sup>61</sup> Verillaud F. How French universities responded to COVID-19 // Institut Montaigne blog. 25.05.2020. URL: <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/en/blog/how-french-universities-responded-COVID-19>

<sup>62</sup> Salmi J. Learning from the Past, Coping with the Present, Reaching for the Future: Impact of COVID-19 on higher education from an equity perspective // Lumina Foundation. 22.10.2020. URL: <https://www.luminafoundation.org/?s=Salmi>

<sup>63</sup> Regional/National Perspectives on the Impact of COVID-19 on Higher Education // International Association of Universities. URL: [https://www.iau-aiu.net/IMG/pdf/iau\\_COVID-19\\_regional\\_perspectives\\_on\\_the\\_impact\\_of\\_COVID-19\\_on\\_he\\_july\\_2020\\_.pdf](https://www.iau-aiu.net/IMG/pdf/iau_COVID-19_regional_perspectives_on_the_impact_of_COVID-19_on_he_july_2020_.pdf)

<sup>64</sup> Tjia T., Marshman I., Beard J., Bare E. Australian University Workforce Responses to COVID-19 Pandemic // University of Melbourne. 25.09.2020. URL: [https://melbourne-cshe.unimelb.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0006/3501987/HE-Response-to-COVID-19-2020-09-25-Final-rev.pdf](https://melbourne-cshe.unimelb.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/3501987/HE-Response-to-COVID-19-2020-09-25-Final-rev.pdf)

<sup>65</sup> Verillaud F. How French universities responded to COVID-19 // Institut Montaigne blog. 25.05.2020. URL: <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/en/blog/how-french-universities-responded-COVID-19>

<sup>66</sup> Xu X. How can we reimagine future global research post COVID-19? // University World News. 24.10.2020. URL: <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20201021034340242>

where the pandemic is negatively impacting research productivity, this falls disproportionately on female researchers (e.g., the U.S. cases cited by Salmi<sup>67</sup>), who under work-at-home conditions on average have had less time than their male counterparts because women carry a larger proportion of family support and household maintenance.

### **COVID-19 Related Activity**

Early bibliometric evidence shows that during the pandemic, there has been continued cross-border and inter-disciplinary collaboration in research,<sup>68</sup> including a higher level of cross-border authorship in COVID-19 papers than in research as a whole.<sup>69</sup>

The IAU survey reported by Marinoni et al.<sup>70</sup> list the early engagement of universities in COVID-19 related activity, including the provision of policy advice to governments by university leaders or scientific researchers in almost three-quarters of institutions. For just under half of all survey respondents, the initial crisis increased their level of engagement in their communities overall, and nearly half had already stepped up science communication.<sup>71</sup>

With a longer time span to work with, Salmi summarizes the many social contributions of higher education in the pandemic time, especially via research and medical expertise: “A positive development in the short term has been the dynamic and generous responses of universities worldwide in contributing their scientific knowledge and resources to help in the fight against the pandemic. Within a few weeks after the onslaught of the virus, universities developed a faster and cheaper COVID-19 test, donated surplus equipment to help the national and local hospitals, and laboratories within universities have been busy producing medical supplies, sanitizing equipment and medicines. Universities all over the world have helped with genome sequencing, coronavirus testing, production of low-cost ventilators, and have been at the forefront of epidemiological research and communication. The public information role of universities during the pandemic is all the more important as many people across the world have fallen prey to fake news disseminated in the social media, often with dangerous or even fatal consequences.”<sup>72</sup> The Hungarian Rectors’ conference has a long list of COVID-19 related activities in that country.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Salmi J. Learning from the Past, Coping with the Present, Ready for the Future: Impact of COVID-19 on higher education from an equity perspective // Lumina Foundation. 22.10.2020. URL: <https://www.luminafoundation.org/?s=Salmi>

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Lee J., Haupt J. Scientific globalism during a global crisis: Research collaboration and open access publications on COVID-19 // Higher Education. 24.07.2020.  
URL: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10734-020-00589-0#citeas>

<sup>70</sup> Marinoni G., van't Land H., Jensen T. The Impact of COVID-19 on Higher Education Around the World: IAU global survey report // International Association of Universities. 05.2020.  
URL: [https://www.iau-aiu.net/IMG/pdf/iau\\_covid19\\_and\\_he\\_survey\\_report\\_final\\_may\\_2020.pdf](https://www.iau-aiu.net/IMG/pdf/iau_covid19_and_he_survey_report_final_may_2020.pdf)

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Salmi J. Learning from the Past, Coping with the Present, Ready for the Future: Impact of COVID-19 on higher education from an equity perspective // Lumina Foundation. 22.10.2020.  
URL: <https://www.luminafoundation.org/?s=Salmi>

<sup>73</sup> Regional/National Perspectives on the Impact of COVID-19 on Higher Education // International Association of Universities. 08.2020. URL: [https://iau-aiu.net/IMG/pdf/iau\\_COVID-19\\_regional\\_perspectives\\_on\\_the\\_impact\\_of\\_COVID-19\\_on\\_he\\_july\\_2020\\_.pdf](https://iau-aiu.net/IMG/pdf/iau_COVID-19_regional_perspectives_on_the_impact_of_COVID-19_on_he_july_2020_.pdf)

## Approaches to Sustaining Quality in Higher Education

At this stage, there is no consensus among the pan-national agencies (UNESCO, OECD, World Bank) on approaches to sustaining quality under the conditions of the pandemic. It is possible to detect certain patterns at the national level, however.

First, during the pandemic, the normal regulation of quality has been lightened or withdrawn in many countries, to enable flexible responses at institutional and sub-institutional levels, including the quick implementation of innovations such as new online programmes.<sup>74</sup>

Second, the systems that have travelled best during the pandemic period have been those organized on the principle that higher education is a public good and should be predominantly publicly funded (e.g. Germany, France, the Nordic countries, China, Singapore)<sup>75</sup> or partly private but closely publicly regulated in the public interest (Japan, Korea). In these public good systems, with the exception of private sector institutions, all institutions have maintained stable funding, helping them to make the necessary adjustments to learning programmes and to step up their roles as scientific advisers and community resources. In several such systems government played a significant role in support the upgrading of online education<sup>76</sup> rather than simply expecting institutions to do so in their own interest.

The market-based systems, and also systems in which quality is less closely regulated, have struggled. The Anglo-American market systems are discussed immediately below. India and Russia combine a centralized policy framework – stronger in Russia than India – with market elements, and the maintenance of quality partly delegated de facto to the regional or state level. It is likely that in both countries, provision has deteriorated under the pressure of increased responsibilities coupled with static or declining resources. For example, it is likely that in the March–June period, the transition to online higher education was inadequate or incomplete. But without effective central monitoring and standardized data collection in key areas, it is not possible to reach firm judgments. In India, the burgeoning state-based private sector has never been effectively regulated by the union government, although quality issues are universally acknowledged.

### Anglo-American Market Systems

A high level of dependence on student tuition payments, especially international student fees (e.g. Australia, UK), has been destabilizing. In competition-based systems (e.g. U.S., UK, Australia) government has refused to provide guarantees of institutional survival and individual institutions have been forced to pursue strategies that have maximized their self-interest. This, in conjunction with the determination of the U.S. and UK governments to keep higher education open

<sup>74</sup> Salmi J. Learning from the Past, Coping with the Present, Ready for the Future: Impact of COVID-19 on higher education from an equity perspective // Lumina Foundation. 22.10.2020. URL: <https://www.luminafoundation.org/?s=Salmi>

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Salmi J. Learning from the Past, Coping with the Present, Ready for the Future: Impact of COVID-19 on higher education from an equity perspective // Lumina Foundation. 22.10.2020. URL: <https://www.luminafoundation.org/?s=Salmi>



despite the incidence of COVID-19 cases in the community, has led to decisions by universities that, arguably, have placed in jeopardy the health and safety of students and staff.<sup>77,78</sup>

US campuses returned to face-to-face higher education because the federal government insisted on keeping them open and individual institutions had to maintain their competitive position and their revenues. In a high individualist culture, there is no consensus on the need for social discipline, and many state and university authorities have been unable to maintain a consistent regulatory regime able to contain the virus. U.S. campuses have been plagued by large-scale COVID-19 outbreaks since the return to classes, compounded by student breakouts. For example, at the beginning of October, police in Tallahassee in Florida used a helicopter to shut down a 1000-strong student party near Florida State University where 1,400 had already tested positive.<sup>79</sup>

Salmi states that: “The debate on whether colleges and universities can reopen safely at the beginning of the new academic year 2020-21 has been shaped, in each country, by a mix of two factors: the evolution of the pandemic, and political priorities. In nations where the peak of COVID-19 cases was reached after a few months, the government authorities and the leaders of higher education institutions have decided that it would be mostly safe to reopen the campuses, although with specific precautionary measures (testing, tracing and social distance). But in countries where the pandemic is still raging, such as most of Latin America and the United States, the outlook is uncertain and decisions may have been heavily influenced by political and economic considerations ranging from denial to various coping strategies and the level of resources that individual universities and colleges can afford to dedicate to protective health measures. In several countries, including the United States, the threat of economic difficulties may have led many higher education institutions to take chances with the health of their students.”<sup>80</sup>

The situation in the UK has been broadly similar. The UK government’s official scientific advisors on the pandemic opposed the reopening of universities and urged the sole use of online learning “unless face-to-face teaching is absolutely essential.”<sup>81</sup> The return to face to face learning has also been criticized by some university leaders.<sup>82</sup> It not only created health risks and difficult problems of stu-

<sup>77</sup> Marginson S. The relentless price of high individualism in the pandemic. [Higher Education Research and Development], 2020, vol. 39, no.7, pp. 1392-1395.

<sup>78</sup> Marginson S. Postcards from the pandemic // Thesis Eleven. 21.10.2020.  
URL: <https://thesiseleven.com/2020/10/21/postcards-from-the-COVID-19-pandemic/>

<sup>79</sup> Reimann N. Party with more than 1,000 people near Florida State University broken up by police helicopter // Forbes. 28.09.2020. URL: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/nicholasreimann/2020/09/28/party-with-more-than-1000-people-near-florida-state-university-broken-up-by-police-helicopter/>

<sup>80</sup> Salmi J. Learning from the Past, Coping with the Present, Ready for the Future: Impact of COVID-19 on higher education from an equity perspective // Lumina Foundation. 22.10.2020.  
URL: <https://www.luminafoundation.org/?s=Salmi>

<sup>81</sup> Dickinson J. Three weeks ago, SAGE said close universities // Wonkhe. 12.10.2020.  
URL: <https://wonkhe.com/wonk-corner/three-weeks-ago-sage-said-close-universities/>

<sup>82</sup> Hutton W. I saw up close the trials of university life in a pandemic. We should have done better... // The Guardian. 04.10.2020. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/oct/04/i-saw-up-close-the-trials-of-university-life-in-a-pandemic-we-should-have-done-better>

dent management, it created pedagogical expectations that could not be satisfied. All of the professional associations that represented the staff in education institutions opposed the resumption of face to face classes, on grounds of public, staff and student health. The government decided not to implement any of this advice.

Inevitably, when the universities reopened in late September and early October, the student residences, which combined people from all over the country and abroad, became incubation chambers for the pandemic. By the first week of October, over 80 UK university campuses had reported a spike in cases, a number which had doubled by the end of the month. Many student residences were in full lockdown<sup>83</sup> and the promised face to face classes were shutting down. “How universities tricked students into returning to campus,” said one commentary. Students have been sold the lie that they are able to have a full university experience. They can’t, said another.<sup>84</sup> At the same time, instances of students defying COVID-19 disciplines were rife, as had been happening in the U.S. For example, on October 3, police in Manchester broke up a “Covid Positive” party where the entry requirement was a positive test.<sup>85</sup> On October 12, *The Guardian* reported that at the universities of Manchester, Sheffield and Birmingham, the COVID-19 infection rate among students was between five and seven times that found in the surrounding population. At Manchester, there were 1,155 cases. One university union official said, “We are in a nightmare situation where large numbers of asymptomatic people may be spreading the virus to higher risk groups in the local community.”<sup>86</sup> The UK government, freed of funding obligations, sat back and watched.

The UK government had passed down to universities the responsibility for managing the pandemic. For their part, the universities had called on the students to behave to rule - but without the support of East Asian style common ethical frameworks. In East Asia, university campuses have triggered no special problems. As in the U.S., the system-market framework has proven especially inappropriate for management of the pandemic in higher education. First, by enabling government to pass down responsibility for the management of the pandemic, it takes out of the picture the one agency that could have sustained a consistent response based on the common good. Second, it encourages individuals and institutions to pursue self-interest without regard for the common good. Third, it places the institutions under pressure to pursue economic interest at the expense of the health of persons and the general community. The result in both U.S. and UK has been institutions in turmoil, with substantial resources absorbed by con-

<sup>83</sup> Mueller B. 'It really was abandonment' // *The New York Times*. 06.10.2020.  
URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/06/world/europe/virus-UK-universities.html>

<sup>84</sup> Grady J. Students have been sold the lie that they are able to have the full university experience. They can't // *The Guardian*, 20.09.2020. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/sep/20/students-have-been-sold-the-lie-they-are-able-to-have-a-full-university-experience-they-cant>

<sup>85</sup> Pidd H. Manchester students organizing 'Covid Positive' parties // *The Guardian*. 06.10.2020.  
URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/oct/06/manchester-students-organising-covid-positive-parties>

<sup>86</sup> McIntyre N., Batty D., Duncan P. Fears grow student Covid infections will spread into local areas in England and Wales // *The Guardian*. 12.10.2020. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/oct/12/fears-grow-student-covid-infections-england-wales-will-spread-into-local-communities>

tinued improvisation and changes in learning modes, and the management of public health, and the quality of education impaired by continual distractions and issues additional to learning, such as a range of welfare issues, problems in student residences and potential drop out.

### **Future Funding**

However, it is early days yet on the question of quality. As noted in the previous section, at some point governments will need to shift from loans-based financing designed to support economies and societies during the pandemic period, to reducing debt. At the same time, economies are likely to be in deep recession. To address the economic and social problems of the recession, governments will need to make new allocations at a time when they are simultaneously attempting to minimize their debt. This could place enormous pressure on higher education budgets. Salmi argues that “The higher education sector has been hit by both the health emergency and the economic recession, as universities, their students and most households have suffered substantial income loss. The rapid transition from face-to-face to online education has caused unplanned expenditures during the spring semester. The preparation for the fall semester has involved additional spending on health prevention measures. Altogether, the outlook for the 2020-21 academic year and beyond is highly worrisome, forcing difficult questions about the long-term viability and the need for substantial changes.”<sup>87</sup>

No factor is more important in determining quality than the level of public funding, though it is not the only factor. Higher education faces potential reductions in the potential for both public and private support. As Salmi states, in countries where there is “substantial cost-sharing,” institutions will face “diminished resource envelopes.”<sup>88</sup> In tuition fee-based systems, there is the option of increasing fees, but this will be resisted at a time when the family capacity to pay is on average reduced under recession conditions. Under these circumstances, elite universities are likely to be relatively well protected, but in many countries, some mass higher education institutions will struggle to survive. “It would not be unrealistic to expect a wave of mergers in the public and private sub-sectors, and see significant numbers of private colleges and universities close their doors for good.”<sup>89</sup> Private higher education institutions are already struggling in many countries and public institutions with a partly marketized basis will also be challenged. Salmi calls for ‘a new economic model’ with less reliance on tuition, especially from international students, and more diverse income streams, including endowment. He notes that “systems with higher proportions of public funding are less vulnerable to health and economic crises,”<sup>90</sup> and urges the adoption of income-contingent student loans in place of time-regulated mortgage style loans. In income-contingent systems, graduates do not repay until they have the capacity to do so.

<sup>87</sup> Salmi J. Learning from the Past, Coping with the Present, Ready for the Future: Impact of COVID-19 on higher education from an equity perspective // Lumina Foundation. 22.10.2020. URL: <https://www.luminafoundation.org/?s=Salmi>

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

The longer that pandemic conditions persist, ensuring the most learning takes place online, the stronger will be pressured to differentiate in tuition fees between primarily face to face learning, and online only learning. On June 22 2020, OECD Director for Education and Skills, Andreas Schleicher, urged that tuition for online only provision should be discounted.<sup>91</sup> The English Office for Students has also suggested that universities offer “discounts” or “refunds.”<sup>92</sup> In both U.S. and UK, students who were provided with online learning only have prepared petitions or taken legal action to secure tuition refunds.<sup>93</sup> In advocating discounts, the Office for Students was responding politically to student pressure, and in circumstances where migration from face to face or hybrid provision to online delivery is forced suddenly on institutions, it is unlikely that unit cost will be much reduced. However, it can be argued that face to face and online higher education are structurally distinct products in terms of both benefits and costs. Face to face higher education provides key activities that online learning does not, including the organic benefits of in-place classrooms, direct contact between students and lecturers, fuller benefits of site and extra-curricular activities, and socialization with other students. There is no good reason to treat the two modes as equivalent unless the movement of student learning between them is solely short-term in nature, forced by circumstances.

## Long Lasting Strategic Conclusions

This foregoing analysis suggests the following conclusions about the longer-term strategic implications of the experience of higher education in the COVID-19 pandemic.

There is no good reason to open institutions to normal business until it is clearly safe to do so. Most, though not all, learning and research functions can be conducted online.

The distribution of infrastructure and student capacity in digital higher education is highly uneven and unjust, on the global scale and within countries. Given that online provision will remain primary until the pandemic has ended, every effort must be made to address this problem. An important function of governments is to ensure that capabilities in digital learning are distributed through all institutions in higher education systems.

In the pandemic, there are special problems facing students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds in all countries, rural backgrounds, women and students from ethnic minorities, especially in some countries, and others. Normal disadvantages are exacerbated and it is vitally important to identify and address them.

<sup>91</sup> Matthews D. OECD education head: Pandemic disruption should mean lower fees // Times Higher Education. 22.06.2020. URL: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/oecd-education-head-pandemic-disruption-should-mean-lower-fees>

<sup>92</sup> Havergal C. English universities told to consider refunds as Covid cases rise // Times Higher Education. 28.09.2020. URL: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/english-universities-told-consider-refunds-covid-cases-rise>

<sup>93</sup> Salmi J. Learning from the Past, Coping with the Present, Ready for the Future: Impact of COVID-19 on higher education from an equity perspective // Lumina Foundation. 22.10.2020. URL: <https://www.luminafoundation.org/?s=Salmi>

Beyond the pandemic, the core functions and forms of higher education will be essentially unchanged. Face to face learning will return in full when it is safe, but online learning will become more prominent as an adjunct of normal programmes and an alternate mode for particular groups of students. The quality bar for online higher education has been lifted permanently, worldwide.

While the “recession shelter” role of higher education suggests that domestic enrolments will continue to grow, international student mobility will take time to recover. However, it will recover, and eventually, pre-pandemic patterns of demand and supply will largely return, except that there is likely to be a more rapid than average growth of mobility within East and Southeast Asia.

The pre-pandemic funding base of most higher education institutions has been fundamentally destabilized. Both public and private sources of funding face severe downward pressures. In many countries, a new funding model will be needed that provides for student income support as well as the costs of institutions, wherever possible provides income contingent tuition loans in tuition fee-based systems, and differentiates in cost between face to face courses and solely online courses.

Elite universities will survive, and most will prosper in this difficult period, but many mass higher education institutions face existential challenges because of insufficient resources.

While research seems to be more stable than the education function, given the lack of present opportunities for young researchers, problems of the reproduction of the research labor force will need close attention. There is a danger of a lost generation of scientists.

## Chapter 2. Measures That National Governments Can Take to Support Higher Education in the Context of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to an unprecedented socioeconomic crisis, the consequences of which are evident today and will continue to be in the years to come. One of the areas that has been hit particularly hard by COVID-19 is the higher education system. Not a single region or country has been able to sidestep the serious challenges now standing in the way of the development of higher education. The pandemic has severely disrupted almost all aspects of the functioning of higher education institutions – from attracting and enrolling new students, maintaining the quality of teaching and learning and ensuring the safety of students and instructors inside the walls of the university to grading midterm papers, organizing examinations, conducting research, developing academic mobility and receiving international students. Expert discussions on the prospects for the development of higher education invariably focus on the digital development of universities, the transition to hybrid forms of education (including online learning), ensuring universal access to education, and helping the most vulnerable groups and those who have been the hardest hit by the pandemic, as well as on general issues relating to the future of internationalization, the independence of universities, etc.

Very few states, regardless of region or GDP, had plans to deal with a situation that would involve shutting down their entire education systems. In most cases, governments had to take measures to solve specific problems related to the teaching and research activities of universities (including, but not limited to, the poorly developed infrastructure for continuing the learning process either entirely online or in a hybrid format) and the financial stability of educational institutions and students quickly and with no real idea of what they were doing, because nothing like this had ever happened before.

The aim of this study is to collect, systematize and analyze data on measures taken to support the learning process around the world in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. A general understanding of the range of efforts taken by national governments to prop up their higher education systems and mitigate the consequences of the corona crisis will allow us to select the optimal measures for preserving the quality of, and accessibility to, higher education, should a similar situation arise again in the future. It will also make it possible to ensure that scientific and technological development continues uninterrupted in, and with due account for, the new conditions.

Those who specialize in higher education development insist that a number of the changes that the current crisis has already brought to education systems are here to stay and will affect the future of higher education around the world in the long term. Most education systems will find it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to return to their pre-crisis state. This is where the government's understanding of what it can do to facilitate the transformation process is of fundamental

importance. We hope that the international experience described in this paper will allow Russia and other countries at this new stage in the development of their higher education systems to take effective measures to prevent and mitigate new crises; to quickly implement a package of measures to support higher education systems and help them adapt to new threats; to ensure that the learning process continues uninterrupted and that the quality of education is not adversely affected; and to guarantee the financial stability of universities, their digitization and the development of educational technologies.

In light of the scale of the pandemic and its global effects, it is important that this study be international in nature. For this reason, we studied the measures taken by governments to support higher education in leading developed countries, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) member states, and countries with developing economies in different regions in the world. *The education systems of the following countries were analyzed: the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Finland, China, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, India, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Brazil. The timeframe for the study was January–October 2020.*

In order to understand the difficulties that higher education faces in terms of state regulation and government policy, attention should be paid to the fact that, with rare exceptions, higher education has significant autonomy from national governments when it comes to determining educational policy, choosing the forms of education, student support, etc. Thus, a number of countries found themselves in a situation where, for objective reasons, they could not adopt or introduce restrictive measures. The only thing the governments could do was to set minimum standards for universities to continue their educational activities and draw up a series of recommendations. But there are exceptions. The New Zealand Parliament, for example, took control of all schools and higher education institutions in the country – public and private. The Minister of Education was given extraordinary powers to issue decrees that were binding on all institutions that provide higher education services<sup>94</sup>

We should also remember that models of higher education differ in their forms of management, university financing, focuses, values and strategies, which leaves a significant imprint on government policy. Under normal conditions, political decisions in higher education require certain procedures based on a broad consensus, and it takes a great deal of time to reach such a consensus. This somewhat explains why most governments around the world found it difficult to develop and adopt a national plan. That said, it should be noted that the measures that were adopted were mostly welcomed by university councils. Higher education institutions were actively involved in the work of coordinating committees set up to determine what exactly universities would need in the event that unforeseen circumstances should arise, exchange information, and work towards a consensus on government support measures.<sup>95</sup>

<sup>94</sup> Education Secretary given emergency powers during lockdown // School News. 31.03.2020.  
URL: <https://www.schoolnews.co.nz/2020/03/education-secretary-given-emergency-powers-during-lockdown/>

<sup>95</sup> COVID-19 and higher education: Today and tomorrow. Impact analysis, policy responses and recommendations // UNESCO IESALC. 13.05.2020.  
URL: <https://www.iesalc.unesco.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/COVID-19-EN-130520.pdf>

The range of measures adopted by national governments to support higher education can be divided into the following categories:

- Information support of the higher education system.
- Sanitary and epidemiological recommendations for the higher education sector.
- Administrative measures to support the functioning of the higher education system.
- Flexible programme reporting and accreditation requirements, as well as requirements for online programmes.
- The creation of a favourable environment for providing distance and online learning services in the higher education sector.
- Financial support.
- Support for study abroad programmes and academic mobility.
- Support for university research.
- Initiatives to support the psychological wellbeing of students and teachers.

Let us now study each of the categories in greater detail.

### **Information Support of the Higher Education System**

This group of measures involves providing up-to-date information about the changes taking place in higher education and the decision-making process that lie at the heart of the measures being taken by the government. Good examples of this include England, France, New Zealand, Finland and India.

In *France*, *New Zealand* and *Finland*, the websites of the higher education authorities have been updated to include sections that explain the measures taken by the government to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and mitigate the negative effects of the pandemic. The website of the Directorate-General for Higher Education and Professional Insertion of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation of *France* publishes all regulatory acts, elucidations, recommendations and instructions, as well as answers to frequently asked questions and examples of “best practices” used by universities during the pandemic. There is also an email address for any questions about maintaining regular universities’ curricula.<sup>96</sup>

The website of the Ministry of Education of *New Zealand* provides information on a wide range of issues, including the mental health and psychological wellbeing of students, what to do in the event that an infection is detected at a university, and recommendations for an action plan during a pandemic (together with guidelines on how to draw up such a plan).<sup>97</sup> The website provides the contact details of crisis support services, including separate contact details for international students, as well as links to change of education status application forms to be filed with the migration service.<sup>98</sup> In addition, the Ministry of Education of New

<sup>96</sup> Covid-19 // Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. URL: [https://services.dgesip.fr/T712/covid\\_19](https://services.dgesip.fr/T712/covid_19)

<sup>97</sup> Influenza pandemic planning guide for early childhood education services, schools and tertiary organisations // Ministry of Education. 08.2020. URL: <https://www.education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Ministry/Initiatives/Health-and-safety/PandemicPlanningGuideForEdSectorAug2011.doc>

<sup>98</sup> Planning for an epidemic/pandemic event (quick guide) // Ministry of Education. URL: <https://www.education.govt.nz/school/health-safety-and-wellbeing/emergencies-and-traumatic-incidents/pandemic-planning-guide/#Pandemic>



Zealand has been publishing special bulletins for students and educational institutions since the start of the pandemic.<sup>99</sup> These newsletters contain up-to-date information on the spread of COVID-19, measures taken by the government, and recommendations on all areas of university activities. The measures that have been announced by the government are being adapted to the higher education sector, and useful contacts and/or links to information regarding developments in the COVID-19 situation, as well as answers to frequently asked questions (visa extensions, accommodation, student loan repayments, scholarships, special allowances, etc.), are provided.

*India* has launched the *Young India Combating COVID with Knowledge, Technology and Innovation* website, which contains information on Ministry of Education initiatives, as well as measures taken by universities themselves, to combat the coronavirus pandemic. This allows educational institutions to exchange experience in solving problems caused by the COVID-19 situation.<sup>100</sup>

The *Office for Students in England* publishes briefing notes highlighting the best practices of universities and companies during the pandemic.<sup>101</sup> These materials cover such areas as student accommodation, supporting student mental health, guidance for prospective students, and assistance for students without family support, international students, students with disabilities, graduates and postgraduates.<sup>102</sup> The Office holds public consultations, collects information on approaches to regulating important aspects of the higher education system during the pandemic, specifically with regard to ensuring the stability of the higher education sector,<sup>103</sup> assists universities that are in danger of losing their status,<sup>104</sup> and helps develop online learning.<sup>105</sup>

## **Sanitary and Epidemiological Recommendations for the Higher Education Sector**

On the whole, governments turned to sanitary and epidemiological recommendations and/or directives in response to the pandemic threat in higher education institutions. This means measures to prevent the spread of the disease:

- compliance with strict personal hygiene rules (use of hand sanitizers, etc.);

<sup>99</sup> COVID-19 bulletins for tertiary education providers and students // Ministry of Education.  
URL: <https://www.education.govt.nz/further-education/covid-19-bulletins-for-tertiary-providers-and-students/>

<sup>100</sup> Young India Combating COVID with Knowledge, Technology and Innovation // Ministry of Education.  
URL: <https://www.mhrd.gov.in/en/yukti>

<sup>101</sup> The Office for Students is a non-departmental government body that regulates higher education in England. It is not a part of the central government and is accountable to Parliament through the Department for Education.

<sup>102</sup> Briefing notes // Office for Students. 22.04.2020.  
URL: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/coronavirus/briefing-notes/>

<sup>103</sup> Consultation on the integrity and stability of the English higher education sector // Office for Students. 04.05.2020.  
URL: [https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/aad2441c-6fd5-43f9-a2d7-f07e0f517ce2/consultation\\_reg\\_condition\\_finalforweb.pdf](https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/aad2441c-6fd5-43f9-a2d7-f07e0f517ce2/consultation_reg_condition_finalforweb.pdf)

<sup>104</sup> Provider guide to coronavirus // Office for Students. 04.05.2020. URL: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/coronavirus/provider-guide-to-coronavirus/time-limited-condition-of-registration/>

<sup>105</sup> Digital teaching and learning in English higher education during the coronavirus pandemic: Call for evidence // Office for Students. 03.09.2020. URL: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/digital-teaching-and-learning-in-english-higher-education-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic-call-for-evidence/>

- wearing masks;
- practicing social distancing (regulating the distance between people, placing special markings on floors, restricting the number of people allowed in a premises);
- regularly cleaning and airing out premises;
- monitoring the health status of students and instructors (checking temperature, COVID-19 testing, isolation or exclusion from class or work if cold symptoms appear or if the person has had contact with an infected individual).

Most countries have adopted a list of mandatory and recommended sanitary rules. The Ministry of Education of the *People's Republic of China*, for example, has developed detailed regulations,<sup>106, 107</sup> in addition to a coronavirus prevention guide for students that has been translated into eight languages.<sup>108</sup> Noteworthy is the fact that special attention was paid to the safety of Chinese students abroad: PPE distribution points were set up at Chinese embassies to deliver “health packages” to Chinese nationals studying abroad; embassies set up *WeChat* groups to facilitate communication with and among students; and a monitoring and reporting system to track the health status of students was introduced.<sup>109</sup>

In the *United States*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention regulate the use of social distancing measures on campus and ensure cleaning and disinfection of classrooms and frequently touched areas after class.<sup>110</sup> Detailed sanitary and epidemiological recommendations have been introduced in the *United Kingdom*, including general provisions on face coverings in education<sup>111</sup> and special guidelines on reopening buildings and campuses at higher education institutions.<sup>112</sup> Universities are responsible for turning these guidelines and provisions into specific measures. The *Italian* Government Scientific and Technical Committee has published a number of documents regulating the functioning of higher education institutions in the 2020/21 academic year.<sup>113</sup> The *United Arab Emirates* has sub-

<sup>106</sup> MOE issues guidance for protection and support of teachers during COVID-19 outbreak // Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. 17.02.2020.  
URL: [http://en.moe.gov.cn/news/press\\_releases/202002/t20200217\\_421838.html](http://en.moe.gov.cn/news/press_releases/202002/t20200217_421838.html)

<sup>107</sup> MOE requests educational institutions to take prevention and control measures against 2019 novel coronavirus // Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. 23.01.2020.  
URL: [http://en.moe.gov.cn/news/press\\_releases/202001/t20200128\\_416706.html](http://en.moe.gov.cn/news/press_releases/202001/t20200128_416706.html)

<sup>108</sup> MOE releases COVID-19 prevention and control handbook in foreign languages // Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. 12.03.2020.  
URL: [http://en.moe.gov.cn/news/press\\_releases/202003/t20200313\\_430548.html](http://en.moe.gov.cn/news/press_releases/202003/t20200313_430548.html)

<sup>109</sup> Tian Xuejun speaks at press conference on safety of Chinese students studying abroad during COVID-19 outbreak // Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. 06.04.2020.  
URL: [http://en.moe.gov.cn/news/press\\_releases/202004/t20200413\\_442991.html](http://en.moe.gov.cn/news/press_releases/202004/t20200413_442991.html)

<sup>110</sup> Considerations for Institutions of Higher Education // Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.  
URL: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/colleges-universities/considerations.html#other-resources>

<sup>111</sup> Guidance Face coverings in education // Government of the United Kingdom.  
URL: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-in-education/face-coverings-in-education>

<sup>112</sup> Higher education: reopening buildings and campuses // Government of the United Kingdom.  
URL: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-reopening-buildings-and-campuses/higher-education-reopening-buildings-and-campuses>

<sup>113</sup> Masks and online booking: How Italy's universities plan to reopen after lockdown // The Local. 25.08.2020. URL: <https://www.thelocal.it/20200825/half-empty-lectures-and-booking-requires-how-italys-universities-plan-to-reopen-after-lockdown>

mitted recommendations on sanitary and epidemiological measures to the country's Ministry of Education.<sup>114</sup> The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation of *France* issued a special circular spelling out in detail the sanitary requirements for the 2020/21 academic year.<sup>115</sup> Universities are also adopting their own health and sanitary protocols.<sup>116</sup> Special rules have been put in place for sitting oral and written exams.<sup>117</sup>

There are widespread restrictions on the number of people allowed on university premises. The activities of student associations have been restricted and large-scale events, including sports competitions, have been banned.

One interesting development is that students in Italy are able to attend a class in person if they have booked a place through the *EasyRoom* or *AppPosto* apps. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of *Japan* publishes examples of successful solutions for the problem of studying during a pandemic. Most of the recommendations are to do with limiting the number of people allowed in classrooms and on campuses.

Special preventive measures are being developed for student halls of residence. A section of the United Kingdom's "Guidance on Isolation for Residential Educational Settings" requires students displaying symptoms of infection to self-isolate, and universities and building managers of private halls must ensure that self-isolating students can receive the food and medicines they need.<sup>118</sup> A number of countries have introduced sanitary requirements that relate specifically to the provision of food: for example, in the United Arab Emirates, personal disinfectants must be used in university canteens and at food kiosks, and bans on water coolers and vending machines have been introduced.

In many countries, universities have developed detailed regulations on how to respond to confirmed cases of COVID-19. For example, in September 2020, the National Health Service in the United Kingdom published a Test and Trace Handbook for the higher education system.<sup>119</sup> In Italy, universities are obliged to notify

<sup>114</sup> United Arab Emirates Ministry of Education. Operation of Educational Establishments during the Pandemic: Protocols & Procedures. Fourth Release, 2020.

<sup>115</sup> Guidelines for MESRI operators relating to preparation for the start of the academic year (Orientations pour les opérateurs du MESRI relatives à la préparation de la rentrée universitaire) // Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. 07.09.2020.  
URL: [https://services.dgesip.fr/fichiers/circulaire\\_orientations\\_rentree\\_MESRI\\_20200907.pdf](https://services.dgesip.fr/fichiers/circulaire_orientations_rentree_MESRI_20200907.pdf)

<sup>116</sup> Covid-19: health measures at the university (Covid-19: mesures sanitaires à l'université) // University of Paris 1 Pantheon-Sorbonne.  
URL: <https://www.pantheonsorbonne.fr/covid-19-mesures-sanitaires-lunivsite>

<sup>117</sup> Sanitaire Protocol. Organization of examination areas and competitions dedicated to students. May 2020 - Updated to October 30, 2020 (Protocole Sanitaire. Organization des espaces d'examens et concours dédiés aux étudiants. Mai 2020 — Actualisé au 30 octobre 2020) // Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation.  
URL: <https://services.dgesip.fr/fichiers/ProtocoleSanitaireConcoursExamen-Mai20-Actualise30oct20.pdf>

<sup>118</sup> Coronavirus (COVID-19): guidance on isolation for residential educational settings // Government of the United Kingdom.  
URL: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-isolation-for-residential-educational-settings/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-isolation-for-residential-educational-settings#university-or-college-halls-of-residence-for-students-aged-18-or-over>

<sup>119</sup> Higher Education coronavirus (COVID19) NHS Test and Trace handbook // Government of the United Kingdom. 09.2020.  
URL: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/916655/HE\\_Test\\_and\\_Trace\\_Handbook\\_10.9.20.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/916655/HE_Test_and_Trace_Handbook_10.9.20.pdf)

the health authorities if students or teachers display symptoms of COVID-19. Confirmed cases are subject to contact tracing, and the local authorities decide whether or not it is necessary to close the university or individual university buildings for quarantine.<sup>120</sup> In Japan, universities are required to inform the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in the event of an infection.

New Zealand and the United Arab Emirates have developed interesting practices in this respect. The National Emergency Crisis and Disaster Management Authority in the United Arab Emirates commissioned the development of the *Al Hoshn* app, which identifies persons who are located in the immediate vicinity of those confirmed to be infected with COVID-19 and provides access to test results. All university staff and students are required to download and activate the app.<sup>121</sup> In *New Zealand*, the Ministry of Health commissioned the development of the *COVID Tracer* app that allows users to create a digital diary of places they visit by scanning the official QR code. The Ministry of Education has instructed universities to implement the app.

The *United States* believed that mass testing for COVID-19 was the answer. According to the recommendations of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, U.S. universities should work with the Department of Health & Human Services to independently determine the strategy for testing students and teachers.<sup>122</sup> The need to inform students and teachers about known cases within the university and set up hotlines for COVID-related questions is also noted.<sup>123</sup>

A number of countries, for example, Australia, the United Kingdom, France, New Zealand and South Africa, have a phased plan for introducing and lifting the restrictions at universities depending on the epidemiological situation. France and England had such plans in place at the start of the 2020/21 academic year. They involve starting with in-person tuition that can quickly be transitioned to online learning in the event of an increase in the number of infections. Both countries have introduced a four-tier system of restrictions: tier 1 is full-time face-to-face education (in compliance with the relevant sanitary standards), while tier 4 is the wholesale transition to online learning and remote work (in the United Kingdom, only essential university workers and researchers will be allowed to continue their activities under a tier 4 lockdown, while members of student residences will need to be identified and listed). A similar system has been introduced by the New Zealand Ministry of Education as part of its Guidelines for Tertiary Education Organizations on How to Operate under Different Alert Levels.<sup>124</sup> For example, exams

<sup>120</sup> Masks and online booking: How Italy's universities plan to reopen after lockdown // *The Local*. 25.08.2020.  
URL: <https://www.thelocal.it/20200825/half-empty-lectures-and-booking-requires-how-italys-universities-plan-to-reopen-after-lockdown>

<sup>121</sup> United Arab Emirates Ministry of Education. Operation of Educational Establishments during the Pandemic: Protocols & Procedures. Fourth Release, 2020. P. 28.

<sup>122</sup> Testing, Screening, and Outbreak Response for Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) // Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. URL: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/colleges-universities/ihe-testing.html>

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> Guidelines for Tertiary Education Organizations on how to operate under different Alert Levels // Ministry of Education. URL: <https://www.education.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/final-final-detailed-tertiary-guidelines-for-alert-levels.pdf>

can be taken on-site at Alert Levels 1, 2 and 3.<sup>125</sup> In addition to the standard restrictive measures, the Guidelines also recommend that a room be allocated for isolating sick staff or students. At Level 4, meetings and practical activities, with the rare exception of activities related to the fight against COVID-19 and the work of medical facilities, are completely prohibited.

*Australia's* Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency has prepared guidelines for safely lifting the restrictions on universities based on the results of recommendations from the federal and state governments, and as part of the *COVIDSafe Australia* phased lifting plan.

The Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation of *South Africa* has established a four-level system for lifting the restrictions on student attendance at the country's universities.<sup>126</sup> Under Level 4 (which started on May 1, 2020), the controlled return of final year students in medical programmes was allowed. Under Level 3 (launched on June 1, 2020), a maximum of 33 per cent of the student population was allowed to return to campuses on the condition that they can be safely accommodated and supported. This number was increased to 66 per cent under Level 2 (which started on August 18, 2020). There is a two-week transition period between the different stages of lifting the restrictive measures, during which time the universities must make sure that the change in level has produced the desired results.

## **Administrative Measures to Support the Functioning of the Higher Education System**

Most governments, that have the authority to do so, have taken administrative measures to ensure that the higher education system has continued to function, and to regulate its activities during the pandemic. The governments of many developed countries have come up with their own recommendations on transitioning to distance learning while maintaining the quality of education.

The *United States* has introduced the Distance Learning and Innovation regulations.<sup>127</sup> The *United Kingdom* has adopted the Guidance for Providers about Quality and Standards During the coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic<sup>128</sup> and the Guidance for Providers about Student and Consumer Protection During the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic.<sup>129</sup> *France* has passed an updated Lifelong Learning Plan containing recommendations and clarifications on the provisions of

<sup>125</sup> Requirements for on-site tertiary exams at Alert Level 3 // Ministry of Education. URL: <https://www.education.govt.nz/covid-19/advice-for-tertiary-providers/whare-wananga/requirements-for-on-site-tertiary-exams-at-alert-level-3/>

<sup>126</sup> Education — Coronavirus COVID-19 // Government of South Africa. URL: <https://www.gov.za/Coronavirus/education>

<sup>127</sup> Secretary DeVos Issues New Distance Learning Regulations to Spur High-Quality Distance and Competency-Based Programs, Better Serve Diverse Population of Higher Education Students // U.S. Department of Education. 24.08.2020. URL: <https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/secretary-devos-issues-new-distance-learning-regulations-spur-high-quality-distance-and-competency-based-programs-better-serve-diverse-population-higher-education-students>

<sup>128</sup> Maintain good courses and credible qualifications for students during pandemic, says regulator // Office for Students. 03.04.2020. URL: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/press-and-media/maintain-good-courses-and-credible-qualifications-for-students-during-pandemic-says-regulator/>

<sup>129</sup> Guidance for providers about student and consumer protection during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic // Office for Students. 09.06.2020. URL: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/62c88493-70bd-47fb-851e-f9b13e15f767/guidance-for-providers-about-student-and-consumer-protection-during-coronavirus.pdf>

regulatory acts for instructors and university administrative staff on issues such as approaches to developing distance learning programmes, assessment, interaction with students, possible resources for distance learning, student grants, university management, etc.<sup>130</sup> In order to maintain the level of education in the country, the Ministry of Education of *Saudi Arabia* has developed detailed guidelines for how universities should operate during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>131</sup> The *New Zealand* Ministry of Education has published Guidelines for Tertiary Education Organizations on How to Operate under Different Alert Levels,<sup>132</sup> as well as a Guidance for Addressing Students' Concerns about Course Changes.<sup>133</sup> *Australia's* Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency has published the Distance Learning Adaptation Guide, which sets out the key considerations for education providers when changing the mode of delivery.<sup>134</sup> It was also noted that the transition to online education should not infringe upon the obligations of universities set forth in the country's key regulatory documents on higher education.

It is worth noting that in most developing countries (and even in some developed ones), educational institutions did not receive detailed instructions on how to continue teaching in the context of the pandemic. Recommendations have mostly been limited to publishing lists of apps that have been adapted for distance learning. This is precisely what happened in the United Arab Emirates<sup>135</sup> and India.<sup>136</sup> China and Japan, major countries when it comes to implementing higher education programmes, have not published any documents of this kind.

The measures taken by governments have mostly concerned three key issues: the mode of delivery in the context of the pandemic; changes in the admissions procedures and holding of entrance exams; and changes in the system for holding mid-term and final exams.

While some of the countries that have been hardest hit by the pandemic, for example *China*, took the decision to close down all educational institutions and postponed the start of the spring semester,<sup>137</sup> most have limited themselves to adjusting the educational process itself. Particular attention has been paid to informing students and prospective students about the new mode of instruction. In accordance with the recommendations put forward in the plan adopted by

<sup>130</sup> Educational continuity plan (Plan de continuité pédagogique) // Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. 19.05.2020. URL: [https://services.dgesip.fr/fichiers/PlanContinuitePedagogiqueDGESIP\\_19052020.pdf](https://services.dgesip.fr/fichiers/PlanContinuitePedagogiqueDGESIP_19052020.pdf)

<sup>131</sup> Guide to Exams and Evaluation Arrangements Covid-19 // Ministry of Education – Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. URL: <https://www.moe.gov.sa/en/HigherEducation/governmenthighereducation/Pages/GuidetoEXandEV.aspx>

<sup>132</sup> Guidelines for Tertiary Education Organizations on how to operate under different Alert Levels // Ministry of Education. URL: <https://www.education.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/final-final-detailed-tertiary-guidelines-for-alert-levels.pdf>

<sup>133</sup> Guidance for addressing students' concerns about course changes // New Zealand Qualifications Authority. URL: <https://www.nzqa.govt.nz/about-us/covid-19/students-concerns/>

<sup>134</sup> Online delivery — key considerations for providers // Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency. 04.2020. URL: <https://www.teqsa.gov.au/sites/default/files/online-delivery-key-considerations-for-providers-v1-0.pdf>

<sup>135</sup> Zainab Mansoor. UAE's TRA shares list of additional apps for distance learning // Gulf Business. 04.03.2020. URL: <https://gulfbusiness.com/uaes-tra-shares-list-of-additional-apps-for-distance-learning/>

<sup>136</sup> Digital Learning Initiatives of Ministry of HRD // Ministry of Education. 20.03.2020. URL: [https://www.mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload\\_files/mhrd/files/Covid%2019\\_0.pdf](https://www.mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/Covid%2019_0.pdf)

<sup>137</sup> MOE postpones start of 2020 spring semester // Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. 29.01.2020. URL: [http://en.moe.gov.cn/news/press\\_releases/202001/t20200130\\_417069.html](http://en.moe.gov.cn/news/press_releases/202001/t20200130_417069.html)

the Government of *France*, department heads must draw up weekly electronic schedules in advance that have wiggle room for any necessary adjustments or revisions. The French response to the COVID situation was marked by the expansion of opportunities for collegial bodies and public organizations, including trade unions, to hold meetings remotely.

In some countries, state examinations and university entrance examinations have been cancelled or simplified during the pandemic. Countries that have electronic admission systems (such as *Clearing* in the United Kingdom and *Parcoursup* in France) have adopted more flexible requirements in terms of submission deadlines and documents, introduced a more favorably disposed verification and evaluation system and increased the number of available places on high-demand courses. In *Saudi Arabia*, the teaching and assessment formats have been revised (to include interactive teaching methods, as well as various technologies and software programs),<sup>138</sup> as has the procedure for sitting exams (more flexible time-frames, the introduction of different methods for sitting exams, including the use of distance learning technologies, mock exams and staggering exam start times to reduce the load on servers).<sup>139</sup> In an unprecedented move, *China* postponed its notoriously grueling National College Entrance Examination by one month.

Important changes have also taken place in the grading systems. The focus here is on getting students to feel comfortable taking exams in new formats. In the *United Kingdom*, universities can reduce the number of tests, change their format or postpone them to a later date. In *France*, higher education institutions may, in exceptional circumstances, adjust the format of tests so that they both ensure the quality of education and protect the rights of students in emergency situations. Examinations for certain types of technical degrees were cancelled and diplomas were awarded on the basis of completed coursework. If a student's average coursework grades were not good enough to be awarded a degree (or they were not envisaged at all), then these students were given the opportunity to sit an exam at a later date. Changes also affected academic posts in *France*. Thus, universities and research institutes have been granted permission to prolong the research activities and extend the contracts of graduate students and post-doctoral researchers for up to one year, if necessary. The academic recruitment process has also been affected (in particular with regard to positions as instructors and researchers): applications are currently submitted remotely and deadlines have been extended.

### **Flexible Programme Reporting and Accreditation Requirements, as well as Requirements for Online Programmes**

This group of measures has to do with ensuring greater flexibility when applying quality assurance criteria. In practice, this means suspending deadlines for the accreditation and registration of programmes, postponing accreditation visits (or

<sup>138</sup> MOE postpones start of 2020 spring semester // Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. 29.01.2020. URL: [http://en.moe.gov.cn/news/press\\_releases/202001/t20200130\\_417069.html](http://en.moe.gov.cn/news/press_releases/202001/t20200130_417069.html)

<sup>139</sup> MOE postpones start of 2020 spring semester // Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. 29.01.2020. URL: [http://en.moe.gov.cn/news/press\\_releases/202001/t20200130\\_417069.html](http://en.moe.gov.cn/news/press_releases/202001/t20200130_417069.html)



switching to “virtual visits”), and removing certain requirements and restrictions on online education. The latter is particularly important, as many countries have strict rules regarding online learning. Some even impose additional restrictions, which speaks to the generally negative perception of distance learning. For example, the Law on Higher Education adopted in *Peru* in 2014 disqualifies professors who have obtained their doctoral degrees through online education from becoming faculty deans.<sup>140</sup> In *Japan*, only a limited amount of the credits required for graduation can be acquired through online classes. However, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology has made the exceptional decision to not apply this cap to credits in 2020.<sup>141</sup>

The regulatory authorities in many countries have adapted their quality assurance rules to be more flexible, taking the new online educational delivery model, as well as the blended curricula and the challenges faced by universities in restructuring their activities, into account. Some of them issued recommendations for universities. Most fully approved the new approaches and delegated responsibility for the quality of online programmes to the universities themselves. Bureaucratic and regulatory barriers were revised in order to help universities adapt in a quick fashion to the new realities of the educational process and research activities.

In late March 2020, the Office for Students in *England* lowered a number of regulatory requirements for universities and issued a corresponding Guidance.<sup>142</sup> Enhanced monitoring requirements have been placed on individual education providers, certain control procedures have been suspended and various reporting requirements have been relaxed or put on hold. The new provisions also apply to the obligation for education providers to report certain events in their activities to the Office for Students: providers are asked to report in relation to a reduced set of issues, although new grounds were added. For example, reportable events now include short-term financial risks and the cessation or suspension of the delivery of higher education. At the same time, there is no need during the pandemic to inform the Office for Students about transitioning to online learning or the closure of a campus if the educational process continues. A special Guidance for Providers about Reportable Events During Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic has been drawn up to clarify the effects of the new grounds.<sup>143</sup> Starting in June 2020, the Office for Students starting reinstating the administrative requirements through the publication of additional regulatory and explanatory documents.<sup>144</sup>

<sup>140</sup> Courtney Brown, Jamil Salmi. Putting fairness at the heart of higher education // University World News. 18.04.2020.  
URL: <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20200417094523729>

<sup>141</sup> Education in Japan beyond the crisis of COVID-19 // Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. 09.2020. URL: [https://www.mext.go.jp/en/content/20200904\\_mxt\\_kouhou01-000008961\\_1.pdf](https://www.mext.go.jp/en/content/20200904_mxt_kouhou01-000008961_1.pdf)

<sup>142</sup> Regulatory requirements during the coronavirus (COVID19) pandemic // Office for Students. 25.03.2020.  
URL: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/3147f6f5-e399-4bb0-b623-bb84f31534eb/covid-19-accountable-officer-letter-25-march.pdf>

<sup>143</sup> Guidance for providers about reportable events during coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic // Office for Students.  
URL: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/5b874e9b-5588-4bec-b386-d83d59a20401/covid-19-reportable-events-guidance.pdf>

<sup>144</sup> Update on the Office for Students' approach to regulation and information about deadlines for data return // Office for Students. 30.07.2020.  
URL: [https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/8d49fac7-5757-4b9f-9c29-4ce0d95da50d/update\\_office\\_for\\_students\\_approach\\_to\\_regulation\\_and\\_information\\_about\\_deadlines\\_for\\_data\\_returns.pdf](https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/8d49fac7-5757-4b9f-9c29-4ce0d95da50d/update_office_for_students_approach_to_regulation_and_information_about_deadlines_for_data_returns.pdf)



There is no plan to return to the system that was in place before the pandemic, and more flexible approaches will be used, thus reducing the administrative burden on institutions.

On March 26, 2020, the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) in *Australia* announced a series of measures aimed at reducing the administrative burden on the higher education sector as it adapts to the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>145</sup> These include extending the period of provider registration and course accreditation to three years. Provider information request submission dates were deferred until June.<sup>146</sup> The requirements for online education and the attendance of offshore students were relaxed, as was the policy for notifying TEQSA of changes in the mode of delivery. TEQSA has acknowledged the right of providers to rapidly shift to online delivery modes in response to COVID-19 to ensure students can continue their studies. It is assumed that, for most providers, online delivery will be a temporary arrangement until students are able to return to face-to-face and other established forms of delivery. TEQSA has temporarily relaxed its Material Change Notification Policy to give universities the opportunity to focus on key changes, including changes to the mode of delivery.<sup>147</sup> Since changes in the mode of delivery may affect the compliance of universities with the requirements of the 2015 Higher Education Standards Framework (HES Framework), universities are obliged to inform TEQSA of such changes and whether the transition to online learning is a temporary measure or a new business model. Universities are also required to notify TEQSA of steps taken to ensure that the quality of instruction is maintained, that staff have adequate resources and that the wellbeing and safety of students can be guaranteed.

### **The Creation of a Favourable Environment for Providing Distance and Online Learning Services in the Higher Education Sector**

On the whole, higher education systems around the world reacted similarly to the pandemic: they continued to operate using teaching methods that did not require students to be physically present in classrooms and lecture halls.

In some countries, for example *Italy* and *England*, the governments left the issue of distance learning to the universities themselves, which made full use of the educational tools that were already at their disposal.<sup>148</sup> The governments of many countries have supported universities and worked with them to develop recommendations and guidelines for transitioning to online delivery.

<sup>145</sup> Reducing the administrative burden of regulation // Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency. URL: <https://www.teqsa.gov.au/reducing-administrative-burden-regulation-frequently-asked-questions-faqs>

<sup>146</sup> Provider Information Request submission dates deferred until June // Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency. URL: <https://www.teqsa.gov.au/provider-information-request-submission-dates-deferred-until-june>

<sup>147</sup> Material change notification policy // Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency. 11.08.2017. URL: <https://www.teqsa.gov.au/sites/default/files/material-change-notification-policy-3-5.pdf>

<sup>148</sup> Reda V., Kerr R. Moocs have helped Italy keep teaching during the pandemic // Times Higher Education. 31.04.2020. URL: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/blog/moocs-have-helped-italy-keep-teaching-during-pandemic>

The temporary suspension of the normal activities of universities seriously undermined their functioning. The consequences of this disruption vary greatly from institution to institution and depend, first of all, on their ability to continue carrying out academic activities and, secondly, on their financial sustainability. The need to switch almost immediately to online delivery meant that certain technologies had to be introduced, processes had to be created or modified, and people with the appropriate skills to institute these technologies and processes had to be found.

The main guiding principle of state policy was to ensure that educational activities were not interrupted. Initiatives in four areas thus emerged: the creation of specialized platforms; the development of teacher training; the transition to digital content; and making digital resources available to all students.

The main support measure here was the introduction of emergency technological solutions to ensure that learning could continue uninterrupted. Efforts were primarily channeled into providing universities that do not have their own online learning platforms or the requisite technology and software to teach courses remotely with everything they needed, thus guaranteeing a bare-bones digital infrastructure.

In February 2020, the Ministry of Education of the *People's Republic of China* published its Guiding Opinions on the Management of Higher Education Online Education to support the transition to online learning, listing 22 digital resources and offering 24,000 free online courses for use in Chinese universities.<sup>149</sup> The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority in the *United Arab Emirates* published a list of apps recommended for distance learning programmes across the country.<sup>150</sup>

In *China*, the National Virtual Simulation Experimental Teaching Platform ([www.ilab-x.com](http://www.ilab-x.com)) was opened for widespread use at the request of the Ministry of Education, offering over 2000 experimental courses in simulation. Private institutions have been encouraged to provide universities with free online resources and offer bespoke solutions for organizing online learning, while online educational institutions have been tasked with providing technical assistance and resources to facilitate online learning at universities. *Brazil* has expanded the capabilities of its *National Rede of Ensino e Pesquisa* (RNEP) in order to increase the number of online classes at federal universities and institutes. Bandwidth has been increased by 50 per cent, meaning that up to 10,000 people can access the platform at the same time.

In some countries, the governments have allocated funds to universities to develop their digital infrastructures. On April 21, 2020, a total of USD 6.2 billion was made available for *U.S.* universities, half of which could be used to cover costs associated with significant changes due to the coronavirus pandemic. Spe-

<sup>149</sup> Guiding Opinions of the MoE's leading group on responding to the COVID-19 outbreak on the management of higher education online education during the epidemic outbreak period (教育部应对新型冠状病毒感染肺炎疫情工作领导小组办公室关于在疫情防控期间做好普通高等学校在线教学组织与管理工作的指导意见) // Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. 24.02.2020. URL: [http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A08/s7056/202002/t20200205\\_418138.html](http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A08/s7056/202002/t20200205_418138.html)

<sup>150</sup> Zainab Mansoor. UAE's TRA shares list of additional apps for distance learning // Gulf Business. 04.03.2020. URL: <https://gulfbusiness.com/uaes-tra-shares-list-of-additional-apps-for-distance-learning/>

cifically, the funds could be used to introduce distance learning programmes and update the digital infrastructure of universities.<sup>151</sup> *France* has developed a stimulus package for higher education in the context of COVID-19, which involves allocating 35 million euros for the development of IT.<sup>152</sup> The funds have been earmarked for various purposes – from purchasing equipment to developing distance learning programmes. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of *Japan* has allocated USD 95 million for the creation of an IT environment that would allow universities to organize a distance learning system and provide high-quality educational services using digital technologies.<sup>153</sup> These funds can be used to purchase equipment for universities (cameras, audio equipment, etc.), as well as devices that can provide internet access for students.

The second support measure for guaranteeing the continuity of teaching and learning during the pandemic is ensuring that teachers and instructors have the necessary skills to navigate the technologically complex digital environment. Here, government measures are aimed at helping instructors adjust to online teaching: recommendations on teaching methods, curricula, the speed at which material is introduced, interaction models and assessment in the new reality.

The Ministry of Education of the *People's Republic of China* has published a guide on how to better protect and support teachers during the COVID-19 outbreak. Courses were held on working with massive open online courses (MOOCs) and other resources.<sup>154</sup> Lecturers were advised to set up “mock classrooms” to help them improve their online teaching skills. The Ministry of Education of the *United Arab Emirates* has certified over 42,000 schoolteachers and university instructors through a free e-training course entitled “How to be an online tutor in 24 Hours.”<sup>155</sup> The idea is to give teachers new knowledge at IT skills that they can then use in their professional activities. In *France* and the *United States*, funds have been allocated to universities to train faculty and staff to operate in a remote learning environment.<sup>156</sup>

The third measure is support in providing (or in the preparations for providing) broad access to didactic materials. The Ministry of Universities of *Spain*, in conjunction with the National Distance Education University (Universidad Nacional

<sup>151</sup> Secretary DeVos Delivers \$6 Billion in Additional Grant Funding to Support Continued Education at America's Colleges, Universities // U.S. Department of Education. 21.04.2020.  
URL: <https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/secretary-devos-delivers-6-billion-additional-grant-funding-support-continued-education-americas-colleges-universities>

<sup>152</sup> Press release (Communique de presse) // Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. 07.09.2020.  
URL: <https://services.dgesip.fr/fichiers/CP-PlanRelanceImmo-7sept20.pdf>

<sup>153</sup> Education in Japan beyond the crisis of COVID-19 // Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. 09.2020. URL: [https://www.mext.go.jp/en/content/20200904\\_mxt\\_kouhou01-000008961\\_1.pdf](https://www.mext.go.jp/en/content/20200904_mxt_kouhou01-000008961_1.pdf)

<sup>154</sup> MOE issues guidance for protection and support of teachers during COVID-19 outbreak // Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. 17.02.2020.  
URL: [http://en.moe.gov.cn/news/press\\_releases/202002/t20200217\\_421838.html](http://en.moe.gov.cn/news/press_releases/202002/t20200217_421838.html)

<sup>155</sup> Ministry of Education certifies over 22,000 teachers with e-training course // Emirates24/7. 16.03.2020.  
URL: <https://www.emirates247.com/news/emirates/ministry-of-education-certifies-over-22-000-teachers-with-e-training-course-2020-03-16-1.693355>

<sup>156</sup> Secretary DeVos Delivers \$6 Billion in Additional Grant Funding to Support Continued Education at America's Colleges, Universities // U.S. Department of Education. 21.04.2020.  
URL: <https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/secretary-devos-delivers-6-billion-additional-grant-funding-support-continued-education-americas-colleges-universities>

de Educación a Distancia, UNED) and the Open University of Catalonia (Universitat Oberta de Catalunya), has created the *Connected*: platform that includes resources for out-of-class learning and guidelines for teachers transitioning from the traditional mode of delivery to online teaching.<sup>157</sup>

The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency in Australia has created a resource registry to assist the higher education sector's rapid transition to online learning during COVID-19 without negatively affecting the quality of instruction and meeting Australian higher education standards.<sup>158</sup> The listed resources cover a range of online learning topics, from getting started and enabling staff to work with online learning to the student experience and guaranteeing assessment integrity. In *France*, the Lifelong Learning Programme, which was updated in May 2020, contains recommendations for teachers on how to develop a distance learning programme, interact with students and carry out assessments.<sup>159</sup> It also includes resources for, and practical advice on, distance learning and related practices. The recommendations list apps and useful educational resources that instructors can use for teaching and assessment with practical explanations. These include an official resource for higher education distance learning<sup>160</sup> and a public platform of online courses.<sup>161</sup>

The fourth and final support measure is providing students with the technical means for learning, access to the internet and strengthening the network infrastructure of university campuses. The move to online study laid bare the huge gap between and within countries in terms of access to digital resources. In this regard, the measures taken by governments have been designed to narrow the digital divide between rich and poor students and ensure equal access to education.

On March 23, the Government of *New Zealand* launched the NZD 20-million Technology Access Fund for Learners (TAFL) initiative to help support learners to continue to access tertiary education and training that has been disrupted due to COVID-19. This includes access to: suitable devices which enable learners to access technology-enabled learning; adequate internet connections; additional operating systems and/or programs which are essential for the learner to be able to participate in technology-enabled learning; and appropriate technical support.

In *South Africa*, it became clear during preparations for the transition to online learning that there was a massive shortage of laptops among students. The decision was made to purchase over 700,000 laptops through the *National Student Financial Aid Scheme* (NSFAS) for university and college students across the country who did not have the technical means to study

<sup>157</sup> COVID-19 and higher education: Today and tomorrow. Impact analysis, policy responses and recommendations // UNESCO IESALC. 09.04.2020.

URL: <http://www.iesalc.unesco.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COVID-19-EN-090420-2.pdf>

<sup>158</sup> Online learning good practice // Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency.

URL: <https://www.teqsa.gov.au/online-learning-good-practice>

<sup>159</sup> Educational continuity plan (Plan de continuité pédagogique) // Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. 19.05.2020

<sup>160</sup> [Sup-numerique.gouv.fr](http://www.sup-numerique.gouv.fr) // [Sup-numerique.gouv.fr](http://www.sup-numerique.gouv.fr). URL: <http://www.sup-numerique.gouv.fr/>

<sup>161</sup> FUN-MOOC // FUN-MOOC. URL: <https://www.fun-mooc.fr>

online.<sup>162</sup> In addition, the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation of *South Africa* reached an agreement with the country's mobile operators to provide favourable rates for students.<sup>163</sup> In Japan, USD 95 million was allocated for the creation of an IT environment at universities.<sup>164</sup> Part of this money went to the purchase of devices that can provide internet access for students.

One country that used almost all of these support measures is *India*, where the COVID-19 pandemic has served as a catalyst for reforming the entire higher education system, as well as the technical and technological components of the education system. The set of measures developed by the Indian Government to improve the quality of education in the country has been called the National Education Policy 2020, which mentions, among other things, the need to increase the availability of computing devices and create a public digital infrastructure in the education sector.<sup>165</sup> Distance learning programmes are in the works. The assumption is that online courses will be integrated into university curricula, with blended models of learning being predominant. Existing platforms and tools for online learning, including those for monitoring student progress, will be developed further. Existing e-learning platforms will also be leveraged for creating virtual labs. The reform also involves training university staff in effective methods of distance teaching. Steps will be taken to enhance the online accessibility of library books and further expand the collections of digital libraries. The programme involves pilot studies to determine how the benefits of online education can be reaped while mitigating the downsides. A National Educational Technology Forum (NETF) will also be created to provide a platform for the free exchange of ideas on the use of technology to improve the quality of education.

## **Financial Support**

The majority of countries – including the United States, Australia, New Zealand, France and Germany – have approved economic support packages for higher education. The support provided in various countries differs in terms of the forms and mechanisms of delivery. Measures taken include support for university staff and students to purchase technologies to facilitate the quick and painless transition to online education (as we have discussed above) and safeguard student scholarships, loans and study grants.

On March 27, 2020, the *United States* passed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, which included a tranche of approximately USD 14 billion to support higher education.<sup>166</sup> On April 9, 2020, it was announced

<sup>162</sup> NSFAS on the distribution of laptops to funded students // Government of South Africa. 26.08.2020. URL: <https://www.gov.za/speeches/nsfas-distribution-laptops-funded-students-26-aug-2020-0000>

<sup>163</sup> Minister Blade Nzimande: Implementation of measures by the post school education sector in response to Coronavirus Covid-19 pandemic // Government of South Africa. 23.05.2020. URL: <https://www.gov.za/speeches/minister-blade-nzimande-implementation-measures-post-school-education-sector-response>

<sup>164</sup> Education in Japan beyond the crisis of COVID-19 // Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. 09.2020. URL: [https://www.mext.go.jp/en/content/20200904\\_mxt\\_kouhou01-000008961\\_1.pdf](https://www.mext.go.jp/en/content/20200904_mxt_kouhou01-000008961_1.pdf)

<sup>165</sup> National Education Policy 2020 // Ministry of Human Resource Development. URL: [https://www.mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload\\_files/mhrd/files/NEP\\_Final\\_English\\_0.pdf](https://www.mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf)

<sup>166</sup> CARES Act: Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund // U.S. Department of Education. URL: <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/caresact.html>

that students who had been impacted by the coronavirus outbreak would receive financial assistance.<sup>167</sup> The money could be used to purchase course materials, hardware, software and food, or to pay for childcare, housing and medical services. The universities themselves were responsible for determining the recipients.<sup>168</sup> Notably, overseas students, students with federal loan arrears, students who do not have a high school diploma and students who do not meet academic progress standards were not eligible for assistance.<sup>169</sup> Additional financial aid was later allocated to Minority Serving Institutions.<sup>170</sup> In addition, the United States Department of Education provided student loan relief for those attending U.S. universities, setting interest rates to zero per cent and allowing borrowers to defer payments for 60 days without interest. Students were also allowed a six-month grace period for repaying loans.<sup>171</sup>

*France* has developed a coronavirus recovery plan that includes a 35-million-euro tranche to support university IT projects.<sup>172</sup> This money can be used to purchase equipment, train staff and develop special distance learning programmes. In addition, the plan covers the renovation of university buildings, the development of a system of state guarantees for student loans and the creation of 30,000 additional university places. Considerable attention was paid to student welfare during the COVID-19 pandemic. Students who were able to leave their halls of residence were exempt from paying for their accommodation from April 1, 2020, despite the fact that they did not give the proper notice as required by the general rules. Additionally, the grounds for using the Student and Campus Life Contribution were expanded.<sup>173</sup> Now, these funds can be used to provide students with food (in the form of ration cards, public food banks, etc.), the technical means for distance learning and cash bursaries. Moreover, the Ministry of National Edu-

<sup>167</sup> Secretary DeVos Rapidly Delivers More Than \$6 Billion in Emergency Cash Grants for College Students Impacted by Coronavirus Outbreak // U.S. Department of Education. 09.04.2020.  
URL: <https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/secretary-devos-rapidly-delivers-more-6-billion-emergency-cash-grants-college-students-impacted-coronavirus-outbreak>

<sup>168</sup> Secretary DeVos Rapidly Delivers More Than \$6 Billion in Emergency Cash Grants for College Students Impacted by Coronavirus Outbreak // U.S. Department of Education. 09.04.2020. URL: <https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/secretary-devos-rapidly-delivers-more-6-billion-emergency-cash-grants-college-students-impacted-coronavirus-outbreak>

<sup>169</sup> U.S. Department of Education Issues Rule to Protect American Taxpayers from Waste, Fraud, and Abuse, Ensure COVID-19 Relief Funds Get to Eligible Students // U.S. Department of Education. 11.06.2020.  
URL: <https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/us-department-education-issues-rule-protect-american-taxpayers-waste-fraud-and-abuse-ensure-covid-19-relief-funds-get-eligible-students>

<sup>170</sup> Secretary DeVos Delivers Nearly \$1.4 Billion in Additional CARES Act Relief Funds to HBCUs, Minority Serving Institutions, and Colleges and Universities Serving Low-Income Students // U.S. Department of Education. 30.04.2020.  
URL: <https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/secretary-devos-delivers-nearly-14-billion-additional-cares-act-relief-funds-hbcus-minority-serving-institutions-and-colleges-and-universities-serving-low-income-students>

<sup>171</sup> Secretary DeVos Delivers Nearly \$1.4 Billion in Additional CARES Act Relief Funds to HBCUs, Minority Serving Institutions, and Colleges and Universities Serving Low-Income Students // U.S. Department of Education. 30.04.2020.  
URL: <https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/secretary-devos-delivers-nearly-14-billion-additional-cares-act-relief-funds-hbcus-minority-serving-institutions-and-colleges-and-universities-serving-low-income-students>

<sup>172</sup> Press release (Communiqué de presse) // Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. 07.09.2020.  
URL: <https://services.dgesip.fr/fichiers/CP-PlanRelanceImmo-7sept20.pdf>

<sup>173</sup> The Student and Campus Life Contribution (French: *Contribution Vie Etudiante et de Campus*, or CVEC) is an annual fee that can be spent on a limited number of purposes, including organizing sports events, the activities of student associations, student health care, etc. Contributions are collected by Regional Centres for University and School Affairs (French: *Centre régional des œuvres universitaires et scolaires*, CROUS) – administrative organizations that deal with student welfare (scholarships, accommodation, etc.).

cation has allocated an additional 10 million euros to provide targeted financial assistance to students, primarily from vulnerable groups. A one-time payment of 200 million euros was introduced alongside the usual scholarships and other forms of financial assistance. Students could not be stripped of their living allowances during the lockdown period for violating attendance requirements or failing to complete internships. What is more, scholarships continued to be paid out until the end of July 2020, even if final exams were scheduled for June 2020. Living allowances were indexed by 1.2 per cent on account of the corona crisis, and university registration fees were frozen.

On April 12, 2020, the *Australian* Government announced the Higher Education Relief Package to subsidize study during COVID-19.<sup>174</sup> The new package will provide funding for staff development and retraining in priority sectors, as well as assistance for universities and students. Its objectives include: (1) dramatically reducing the cost of short online courses; (2) providing funding for universities at the previous level, regardless of the number of students, and allowing greater flexibility in the use of allocated funds; (3) exempting universities with high numbers of international students from paying TEQSA registration fees (the government has covered the costs, which amount to USD 100 million); and (4) compensating universities for loans issued under the FEE-HELP scheme. The Minister for Education of Australia announced the introduction of the Job-Ready Graduates Package, which aims to create new university places and provide additional support for students in regional and remote Australia. The measure is supposed to provide better funding mechanisms for universities, greater integration with the higher education system and targeted investments in national priorities. Round 2 of the Destination Australia Program was announced on May 12, 2020, as part of the government's Planning for Australia's Future Population initiative.<sup>175</sup> The Australian Government provides funding through the Program to help eligible tertiary education providers offer scholarships to domestic and international students to study and live in regional Australia.<sup>176</sup> The initiative is expected to help regional and remote Australian tertiary education providers get back on their feet following the COVID-19 pandemic by attracting students to and stimulating economic activity in the country's regions.

In *New Zealand*, the *Education and Training Act* was amended to help the country's education sector recover from the crisis. The amendments concerned, among other things, exemptions from paying the Export Education Levy for students enrolled in 2020 and 2021. On September 11, 2020, the New Zealand Government announced that it would be providing financial aid to educational institutions that attract international foreign students and offer something unique in their courses. On May 2, 2020, the New Zealand Government introduced a package of measures to support university students that had been impacted by

<sup>174</sup> Higher Education Relief Package // Ministers Media Centre. 12.04.2020.  
URL: <https://ministers.dese.gov.au/tehan/higher-education-relief-package>

<sup>175</sup> Destination Australia // Australian Government. Department of Education, Skills and Employment.  
URL: [https://www.education.gov.au/destination-australia\\_](https://www.education.gov.au/destination-australia_)

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.



COVID-19.<sup>177</sup> Key measures include temporary student loan increases; continued financial aid for students who are unable to study online (up to eight weeks); the possibility of applying for an increase in student allowances should parental income decrease due to COVID-19; a partial refund of 2020 tuition fees if a course is cancelled; and the right to free tuition for students who were unable to complete their course in 2020. On May 14, 2020, the government created the Hardship Fund for Learners (HSFL), which helps universities provide temporary financial assistance for students impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The funds can be used to cover living expenses, including food, utilities, rent, etc.<sup>178</sup> The COVID-19 *Income Relief Payment* (CIRP) programme was announced on May 25, 2020. CIRP is a tax-free payment of NZD 250 or NZD 490 per week (depending on the number of working hours lost) for up to 12 weeks.<sup>179</sup>

On August 1, 2020, amendments to *Germany's* Federal Training Assistance Act (*Bundesausbildungsförderungsgesetz*, BAföG) came into effect, providing students with tuition fee payments. The procedure for providing financial assistance to eligible persons was also simplified, especially those in need of help due to changes in income or the income of their parents.<sup>180</sup> Starting in May, students who have lost their jobs due to the pandemic have been allowed to apply to the Credit Institute for Reconstruction (*Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau*, KfW) for an interest-free loan of up to 650 euros per month until March 31, 2021. The loan (*Studienkredit*) has also been made available during the period from July 2020 to March 2020 for international students who have been particularly hard hit by the crisis and have not received other financial support, including scholarships and grants under the Erasmus programme. In addition, the German National Association for Student Affairs (*Deutsches Studentenwerk*, DSW) will receive 100 million euros to set up emergency funds for local student services.<sup>181</sup> This money will be used to help students who can prove that they need immediate assistance and do not have access to other forms of aid.

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of *Japan* has introduced a USD 500 million emergency financial support programme for students in the form of cash grants.<sup>182</sup> It has also recommended that universities be flexible when it comes to tuition payment deadlines, requesting that students in financial difficulty be exempt from tuition fees entirely. The Ministry has allocated USD 150 million to reimburse universities.<sup>183</sup>

<sup>177</sup> COVID-19: Support for tertiary students to learn online // New Zealand Government. 02.05.2020.  
URL: <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/covid19-support-tertiary-students-learn-online>

<sup>178</sup> Hardship Fund for Learners // Tertiary Education Commission.  
URL: <https://www.tec.govt.nz/funding/funding-and-performance/funding/fund-finder/hardship-fund-for-learners/>

<sup>179</sup> COVID Income Relief Payment // New Zealand Government. 25.05.2020. URL: <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2020-05/COVID%20Income%20Relief%20Payment%20fact%20sheet%20FINAL.pdf>

<sup>180</sup> The most important changes (Die wichtigsten Änderungen) // Federal Ministry of Education and Research.  
URL: <https://www.bmbf.de/de/bafoeg-reform-welche-aenderungen-sind-geplant-7319.html>

<sup>181</sup> Michael Gardner. Hardship payouts to university students further delayed // University World News. 25.06.2020.  
URL: <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20200625083157931>

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Education in Japan beyond the crisis of COVID-19 // Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. 09.2020. URL: [https://www.mext.go.jp/en/content/20200904\\_mxt\\_kouhou01-000008961\\_1.pdf](https://www.mext.go.jp/en/content/20200904_mxt_kouhou01-000008961_1.pdf)



## Support for Study Abroad Programmes and Academic Mobility

The pandemic has dealt a significant blow to international student exchanges. Many countries have been forced to temporarily suspend university admission for international students and send a number of international students home. Border closures have meant that most students have been cut off from their places of study. A sizeable portion of international students have found themselves in difficult situations because of the changes introduced at halls of residence and student houses, the inability to work, other financial difficulties, visa issues, etc. In this context, a number of countries have introduced federal laws regulating the provision of support to overseas students and academic mobility.

On March 1, 2020, the Ministry of Education, University and Research of *Italy* announced the reimbursement of expenses in connection with the suspension of student exchanges and the cancellation of study trips.<sup>184</sup> In late July, Federal Minister of Education and Research of *Germany* Anja Karliczek announced the launch of the *IP Digital scheme* to boost digitization in international programmes.<sup>185</sup> The German Academic Exchange Service (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst, DAAD) will receive 5 million euros over two years under the programme.<sup>186</sup>

In the *United Kingdom*, international students have been mostly affected by changes to immigration requirements. First, the regulations were eased for international students whose visas expired after January 24, 2020, and who could not leave the country due to the pandemic.<sup>187</sup> Second, the conditions for obtaining student visas were changed in response to the pandemic and the widespread transition to distance learning. In particular, international students who already have a student visa were allowed to study online and even leave the country without affecting its validity. Students who are studying in the United Kingdom in distance or hybrid mode may also apply for a visa for the 2020/21 academic year, provided that they plan to return to full-time education as soon as the opportunity arises. The changes also affect the guidelines for student visa sponsors: sponsors cannot file complaints against international students or withdraw support for students who are continuing their studies through distance learning or are unable to attend classes for more than 60 days due to COVID-19. Sponsorship should only be withdrawn if a student abandons his or her studies entirely or stops engaging with their distance learning for more than 30 days. Third, more flexible requirements have also been adopted for extending student visas in the United Kingdom in cases where students cannot complete their studies in time and cannot leave the country in order to renew their visas because of the pan-

<sup>184</sup> Coronavirus, from school year protection to education travel reimbursements: the latest measures in the field of school and university (Coronavirus, da salvaguardia anno scolastico a rimborsi viaggi istruzione: le ultime misure in materia di scuola e università) // Ministry of Education, University and Research. 01.03.2020.  
URL: <https://www.miur.gov.it/web/guest/-/coronavirus-da-salvaguardia-anno-scolastico-a-rimborsi-viaggi-istruzione-le-ultime-misure-in-materia-di-scuola-e-universita>

<sup>185</sup> Michael Gardner. More digital teaching and learning in international programmes // University World News. 03.08.2020.  
URL: <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=2020080311435360>

<sup>186</sup> Internationale Programme Digital (IP Digital) // German Academic Exchange Service. URL: <https://www.daad.de/de/infos-services-fuer-hochschulen/weiterfuehrende-infos-zu-daad-foerderprogrammen/ip-digital/>

<sup>187</sup> Studying in the UK and Coronavirus (COVID-19) // Study in UK.  
URL: <https://www.studyin-uk.com/studying-in-the-uk-coronavirus/>

demic.<sup>188</sup> The Office for Students views international students as a vulnerable group, and educational institutions have been ordered to give special priority to housing them and providing them with the basic necessities and emergency financial assistance. Specific measures, however, remain at the discretion of the universities themselves.<sup>189</sup> A review of the International Education Strategy in light of the coronavirus was discussed at a meeting of the Education Sector Advisory Group, although comprehensive solutions to facilitate the export of UK education have not yet been developed.<sup>190</sup>

The rules for awarding grants and study loans for UK students studying abroad as part of their courses have been clarified or adjusted. Students in receipt of grants for study trips abroad who were forced to return home early due to the pandemic and stayed at least 50 per cent of the term abroad can submit claims for travel claims as normal, and payments already made do not need to be returned. Transitioning from studying abroad to distance learning does not affect student the provision of student finance. However, the amount of funding for students who were planning to study abroad in the 2020/21 academic year but will now be staying at home to study online with their overseas provider may be adjusted.<sup>191</sup>

International students studying in *France* received general support measures as well as assistance in resolving visa issues. Long-term student visas that expired between March 16 and June 15, 2020, were automatically extended for six months. Short-term visas were extended on an individual basis for students who could not return to their home countries. Given the new situation, universities have been advised to tell students to apply for visas well in advance.<sup>192</sup> French students participating in international exchange programmes were allowed to return to France and not face any academic sanctions for cutting their trips short. Returning students who were already in the country but could not make it back to their place of permanent residence were put up in hostels. At the same time, students who had already begun their course abroad and were considered to be in a stable position were advised to continue their studies as normal. Additional funds to promote international mobility (*aide à la mobilité internationale*)<sup>193</sup> may be provided during the 2020/21 academic year to complete programmes that were interrupted the previous year.<sup>194</sup>

<sup>188</sup> Covid-19: Guidance for Student sponsors, migrants and for Short-term students // Government of the United Kingdom. URL: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-tier-2-4-and-5-sponsors>

<sup>189</sup> Coronavirus (Covid-19): info for international students // UK Council for International Student Affairs. URL: <https://www.ukcisa.org.uk/Information--Advice/Studying--living-in-the-UK/Coronavirus-Covid-19-info-for-international-students>

<sup>190</sup> Education Sector Advisory Group minutes 7 July 2020 // Government of the United Kingdom. URL: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-sector-advisory-group-minutes/education-sector-advisory-group-minutes-7-july-2020>

<sup>191</sup> Guidance for students from England, Wales and Northern Ireland // Government of the United Kingdom. URL: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/guidance-for-students-from-england-wales-and-northern-ireland>

<sup>192</sup> International students flyer (Circulaire étudiants internationaux) // Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. 17.08.2020. URL: [https://services.dgesip.fr/fichiers/Circulaire\\_etudiants\\_internationaux\\_V2.pdf](https://services.dgesip.fr/fichiers/Circulaire_etudiants_internationaux_V2.pdf)

<sup>193</sup> A payment that universities can make to students to participate in exchange programmes or internships abroad as part of their degree programmes in France.

<sup>194</sup> Erasmus + and AMI scholarships (Bourses Erasmus+ et AMI) // Etudiant.gouv.fr. 18.06.2020. URL: <https://www.etudiant.gouv.fr/cid96349/bourses-erasmus-et-ami.html>

The *New Zealand* Government has set up a Foreign Nationals Support Programme to help foreign students who are struggling because of the pandemic. The programme includes direct financial and other assistance, including food or household goods and rent and utilities relief.<sup>195</sup> The New Zealand Government has also introduced changes with regard to visa restrictions. For example, international students working in the food or health sectors were allowed to work more than the standard 20 hours per week between April 3 and July 3, 2020. The Government of *Canada* also lifted the restriction on the number of hours international students are allowed to work per week (from the usual 20 hours), provided that they work in the food or health sectors.<sup>196</sup>

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of *Japan* has asked universities to consider the possibility of holding additional lectures for overseas students, extending the enrolment period and (in consultation with partner universities) providing special conditions such as student loan deductions. Students who could not make it to Japan or whose studies were postponed have been offered grants for this period. Japanese students in receipt of government study abroad scholarships who were forced to return home to continue their studies remotely or who overstayed their visas also continued to receive bursaries. Overseas students studying in Japan are eligible for social security reductions or exemptions (subsidized by the regional budget) and may defer payments for housing and communal services and rent.<sup>197</sup> Approximately USD 1 million has been allocated to cover the necessary costs to combat the coronavirus when holding entrance exams to Japanese universities for international students.<sup>198</sup>

Chinese students studying abroad during the COVID-19 pandemic were faced with the problem that qualifications obtained in part through online study might not be validated by the Ministry of Education-affiliated Chinese Service Center for Scholarly Exchange (CSCSE). On April 3, 2020, the CSCSE announced that online learning should not affect the verification of foreign qualifications.<sup>199</sup> This was the first time that the CSCSE had made an exception with regard to qualifications obtained through online study.

## **Support for University Research**

The governments of a number of countries have provided funding to support research activities at universities. In the *United Kingdom*, the government has set up the University Research Sustainability Taskforce under the chairmanship

<sup>195</sup> Foreign Nationals Supported Application // New Zealand Red Cross. URL: <https://foreignnationals.services.govt.nz>

<sup>196</sup> Government Financial Measures // McGill University.  
URL: <https://www.mcgill.ca/gps/covid-19-updates/government-financial-measures>

<sup>197</sup> To All International Students Studying in Japan «List of Programs Available to International Students» (Updated August 18) // Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology.  
URL: [https://www.mext.go.jp/a\\_menu/koutou/ryugaku/1405561\\_00007.htm](https://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/koutou/ryugaku/1405561_00007.htm)

<sup>198</sup> FY 2020 First Supplementary Budget: 276.3 billion yen (approved by the Diet on April 30, 2020) // Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology.  
URL: [https://www.mext.go.jp/en/content/20200721-mxt\\_kokusai-000005414\\_1.pdf](https://www.mext.go.jp/en/content/20200721-mxt_kokusai-000005414_1.pdf)

<sup>199</sup> A few notes on verification service for foreign degree qualification of returning students influenced by COVID-19 pandemic (关于新冠肺炎疫情影响下留学归国人员学位认证工作的几点说明) // Chinese Service Center for Scholarly Exchange. 03.04.2020. URL: [www.cscse.edu.cn/publish/portal0/tab38/info16162.htm](http://www.cscse.edu.cn/publish/portal0/tab38/info16162.htm)

of the Minister of State for Universities and the Minister for Science, Research, and Innovation. The Taskforce also includes representatives from various English, Scottish, Welsh, Irish and local authorities, as well as from universities, associations and other organizations.<sup>200</sup> The UK Government has allocated GBP 100 million for university research activities, which includes a contribution to university research groups in the fight against the novel coronavirus.<sup>201</sup> In May 2020, Prime Minister of *Canada* Justin Trudeau announced a CAD 450-million support package for Canadian researchers. The money was used, among other things, to compensate educational institutions and research centers up to 75 per cent of research staff salaries (capped at CAD 847 per week).<sup>202</sup> Financial support was also used to cover up to 75 per cent of research expenses (storage of hazardous substances, updating databases, etc.).<sup>203</sup> On April 22, 2020, an additional CAD 291.6 million was allocated to support interns (students and doctoral students) and researchers at Canadian universities in receipt of federal grants who are in financial straits because of the pandemic.

Universities in Germany,<sup>204</sup> the Netherlands,<sup>205</sup> Canada,<sup>206</sup> and Poland<sup>207</sup> have also received targeted funding for carrying out research into the early detection, containment, causes, consequences and management of epidemics. Social sciences departments have received grants for studying and mitigating the social impact of the pandemic (for example, in the United States,<sup>208, 209</sup> Finland,<sup>210</sup> and the United Kingdom<sup>211</sup>), overcoming the social and economic ramifications (Ire-

<sup>200</sup> Universities research taskforce draws on large membership // ResearchProfessional News. 13.05.2020.

URL: <https://www.researchprofessionalnews.com/tr-news-uk-2020-universities-research-taskforce-draws-on-large-membership/>

<sup>201</sup> Government support package for universities and students // Government of the United Kingdom.

URL: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-support-package-for-universities-and-students>

<sup>202</sup> Canada's COVID-19 Economic Response Plan // Government of Canada.

URL: <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/economic-response-plan.html>

<sup>203</sup> Prime Minister announces support for research staff in Canada // Prime Minister of Canada. 15.05.2020.

URL: <https://pm.gc.ca/en/news/news-releases/2020/05/15/prime-minister-announces-support-research-staff-canada>

<sup>204</sup> Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) — Call for Multidisciplinary research into Epidemics and Pandemics in Response to the Outbreak of SARS-CoV-2 // Catalyze.

URL: <https://www.catalyze-group.com/covid-19/deutsche-forschungsgemeinschaft-dfg-call-for-multidisciplinary-research-into-epidemics-and-pandemics-in-response-to-the-outbreak-of-sars-cov-2/>

<sup>205</sup> COVID-19 Programme call for proposals "Societal dynamics" now open // ZoneMw. 07.05.2020. URL: <https://www.zonmw.nl/en/news-and-funding/news/detail/item/covid-19-programme-call-for-proposals-societal-dynamics-now-open/>

<sup>206</sup> Partnership Engage Grants COVID-19 Special Initiative // Government of Canada.

URL: <https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/programs-programmes/peg-sep-covid-19-eng.aspx>

<sup>207</sup> Call announcement: EXPRESS CALL TO FUND RESEARCH ON COVID-19 // National Science Centre (Poland). 13.03.2020. URL: <http://ncn.gov.pl/ogloszenia/konkursy/covid-19?language=en>

<sup>208</sup> Request for Articles — The Social and Political Impact of COVID-19 in the United States // Russel Sage Foundation.

URL: <https://www.russellsage.org/request-articles-social-and-political-impact-covid-19-united-states>

<sup>209</sup> Notice of Special Interest (NOSI) regarding the Availability of Administrative Supplements and Urgent Competitive Revisions for Research on the 2019 Novel Coronavirus and the Behavioral and Social Sciences // National Institutes of Health USA. URL: <https://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-20-097.html>

<sup>210</sup> Impacts of the coronavirus epidemic on experiences of domestic violence and the use of services // Finnish institute for health and welfare. URL: <https://thl.fi/en/web/thlfi-en/research-and-expertwork/projects-and-programmes/impacts-of-the-coronavirus-epidemic-on-experiences-of-domestic-violence-and-the-use-of-services-kova>

<sup>211</sup> Wanted: innovative research on the understanding of and response to COVID-19 // Science|Business. 31.03.2020.

URL: <https://sciencebusiness.net/research-opportunity/wanted-innovative-research-understanding-and-response-covid-19>

land,<sup>212, 213</sup> Canada<sup>214</sup>), and research into crisis resilience (Finland<sup>215</sup>). In most cases, the funds are allocated via open tenders held by science foundations.

## **Initiatives to Support the Psychological Wellbeing of Students and Teachers**

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the governments of developed countries have been paying significant attention to the psychological wellbeing of university staff and students. Governments recognize the importance of taking measures to mitigate the negative impact of the new living conditions on mental health. The *New Zealand* Government announced an NZD 25-million package of measures to expand mental health services and support the wellbeing of all university students.<sup>216</sup> In the *United Kingdom*, the Office for Students has donated GBP 3 million to support programmes organized by the *Student Minds* charity. The *Student Space* platform has also been developed.<sup>217</sup> In *France*, the grounds for using CVEC were expanded.<sup>218</sup> Specifically, they were aimed at telemedicine programmes and providing remote psychological assistance for students.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The study allows us to make a number of conclusions and recommendations on how to improve support measures for higher education during the COVID-19 pandemic. We should bear in mind that restrictive measures could not be introduced in a number of countries for objective reasons, including, among other things, the management and financing of universities and the limited funds available in the federal budget. In many cases, the only thing the state could do was to set minimum standards that must be met in order for institutions to continue their educational activities and draw up a list of recommendations. That said, there are also examples of the exact opposite, such as the case of New Zealand, where the measures taken were comprehensive in nature and written into a national plan. The OECD countries are generally more diverse in the support they offer.

<sup>212</sup> Rapid-response call to fund research on the impacts of the pandemic on the Irish society // Science|Business. 25.03.2020.  
URL: <https://sciencebusiness.net/research-opportunity/rapid-response-call-fund-research-impacts-pandemic-irish-society>

<sup>213</sup> COVID-19 Rapid Response Funding Call // Science Foundation Ireland.  
URL: <https://www.sfi.ie/funding/funding-calls/covid19-rapid-response/>

<sup>214</sup> Partnership Engage Grants COVID-19 Special Initiative // Government of Canada.  
URL: <https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/programmes-programmes/peg-sep-covid-19-eng.aspx>

<sup>215</sup> Special funding for research into crisis preparedness and security of supply // Academy of Finland.  
URL: <https://www.aka.fi/en/research-funding/apply-for-funding/calls-for-applications/apply-now2/special-funding-for-research-into-crisis-preparedness-and-security-of-supply/>

<sup>216</sup> Bulletin — Tertiary Providers and International // Ministry of Education. 11.07.2020.  
URL: <https://www.education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Further-education/COVID-19-Bulletin/COVID-19-Bulletin-for-Tertiary-Providers-11-July-2020.pdf>

<sup>217</sup> Student Space // Student Space. URL: <https://studentspace.org.uk/>

<sup>218</sup> The Student and Campus Life Contribution (CVEC) is an annual fee that can be spent on a limited number of purposes, including organizing sports events, the activities of student associations, student health care, etc. Contributions are collected by Regional Centres for University and School Affairs (French: Centre régional des œuvres universitaires et scolaires, CROUS) – administrative organizations that deal with student welfare (scholarships, accommodation, etc.).

Summarizing the results of our study, the following recommendations can be made:

**1.** First and foremost, national governments should pursue effective information policies for the higher education system. A lack of information reduces the effectiveness of measures taken by individual educational institutions, slows down the decision-making process at universities, undermines trust in the leadership of educational institutions – sometimes causing serious damage to a university’s reputation (such as ill-conceived measures regarding international students) – and leads to discrepancies of processes within the higher education system, which, in turn, negatively affects the quality of teaching and learning and the effectiveness of measures to contain the pandemic.

Information support for higher education is intended to provide up-to-date information on the changes taking place in the sector and the government decision-making process. It can take the shape of a special section on the website of the Ministry of Education or an agency subordinate to it, as is done in France, Finland and New Zealand, where regulatory acts relating to the education sector are published along with detailed explanations, recommendations and instructions on their implementation and answers to frequently asked questions and examples of “best practices” used by universities during the pandemic. Recommendations, instructions and best practices can be used to develop an action plan for pandemics that sets out the procedures for dealing with identified cases at universities, course delivery modes, mid-term and final examinations, aid for at-risk students (those who do not receive support from their families, international students, students with disabilities, etc.), the functioning of halls of residence, protecting the mental health of staff and students, etc. Information should be provided for different audiences – both for educational institutions themselves and for staff and students, including international students.

The special bulletins published by the Ministry of Education of New Zealand for students and educational institutions containing up-to-date information on the spread of COVID-19, measures taken by the government and recommendations on all areas of university activities (sanitary and epidemiological measures, course delivery modes, the resumption of face-to-face teaching, teacher-student interaction, the functioning of halls of residence, organization of events, operation of student organizations, etc.) are a good way to get information out to the necessary audiences. The information contained in these bulletins can be being adapted to the higher education sector and useful contacts and/or links to information regarding developments in the COVID-19 situation, as well as answers to frequently asked questions (visa extensions, accommodation, student loan repayments, scholarships, special allowances, etc.), can be provided.

**2.** The most widespread government response to the threats posed by the pandemic has come in the form of sanitary and epidemiological recommendations and/or directives. This is only natural, as governments prioritize the health and safety of their citizens. In order for such measures to work, recommendations need to be comprehensive in nature, and not limited to a specific aspect of the functioning of higher education institutions. They may concern disease prevention, including restrictions on mass gatherings and sporting events, guidelines for cleaning and treating university buildings, monitoring the health of staff and

students, ensuring compliance with hygiene standards and practicing social distancing. Additionally, such measures may include recommendations on continuing or returning to a full-time learning schedule, holding exams and conducting research (working hours of laboratories, etc.), as well as the operation of halls of residence and catering and other university services. Recommendations and regulations can be published as a manual or series of manuals and/or guidance. Using specially designed apps for tracking the health status of students, instructors and administrative staff (much like in New Zealand and the United Arab Emirates) is a useful measure that can be adopted elsewhere.

It is also recommended that national governments provide an action plan for higher education institutions depending on the epidemiological situation (varying degrees of infection risk), as was done, for example, in Australia, the United Kingdom, France, New Zealand and South Africa. This could be different restriction tiers on educational activities and teaching (as in the United Kingdom and France) or recommendations for working in different alert levels that apply to all aspects of university activities: general principles of university operation, teaching and learning, examinations, research, accommodation and student services, campus operation and administrative services (as in the case of New Zealand).

**3.** As international experience has shown, most governments with the authority to do so have taken administrative measures to ensure that the higher education system has continued to function during the crisis. These measures are important in light of the need to maintain stability and the high quality of teaching at universities, while taking the rights of students into account. Such measures could be reflected in different instruments depending on the form of university management in a given country (normative acts, regulations, recommendations, guidelines). It is important that they affect all institutions in the country's higher education system and cover a wide range of issues, including course delivery modes and changes in the admissions procedures and the holding of entrance, mid-term and final exams.

Recommendations regarding the transition to distance learning should go beyond simply articulating the need for such a transition or publishing a list of apps recommended for distance learning. Experts and representatives of universities and distance learning providers should work together to develop detailed instructions on how to run courses in the new reality, as well as guidelines to help students adapt to online study that describe in detail the main things that educational institutions should take into account when changing the delivery mode. Specifically, recommendations for universities should touch upon support for students in the new learning environment, the training of faculty and staff, maintaining the quality of education and learning outcomes, and the development of other management mechanisms related to the transition to distance education. Looking to the future, provisions on distance education should be developed.

**4.** The pandemic has created serious challenges for the education system and forced it to adapt to the changes in the shortest possible time. In these conditions, government measures are needed to support universities in the restructur-



ing of their activities as far as revising bureaucratic and regulatory barriers to help them adapt to the new realities of the educational process and research activities and ensure the continuity of teaching and learning.

Enhanced monitoring of student progress and certain elements of ongoing student assessment should be suspended during the crisis, and coursework requirements should be eased or put on hold. Measures should also be taken to ensure greater flexibility when it comes to applying quality assurance criteria. Such measures could include suspending deadlines for the accreditation and registration of programmes, postponing accreditation visits (or switching to “virtual visits”), easing the requirements regarding the policy for notifying the authorities of changes in mode of delivery, and removing or relaxing certain requirements and restrictions on online education. The latter is particularly important, as many countries have strict rules regarding online learning. In such cases, governments should adapt their quality assurance regulations to be more flexible, taking online and blended courses into account.

**5.** The temporary suspension of the full-time activities of universities seriously undermined their functioning. The consequences of this disruption vary greatly from institution to institution and depend, first of all, on their ability to continue carrying out academic activities in blended and distance learning formats and, secondly, on their financial sustainability. The need to switch almost immediately to online delivery meant that certain technologies had to be introduced, processes had to be created or modified, and people with the appropriate skills to institute these technologies and processes had to be found. The governments of a great number of countries have supported this process and developed recommendations and guidelines for universities to help them transition to distance learning using new pedagogical criteria.

The guiding principle of public policy in the creation of a favourable environment for providing distance and online learning services in the higher education sector should be to ensure the continuity of teaching and learning. This is facilitated by initiatives in four main areas:

- the creation of specialized platforms (providing universities that do not have their own online learning platforms or the requisite technology and software to teach courses remotely with everything they needed, thus guaranteeing a bare-bones digital infrastructure);
- enhancing the professional competencies of instructors so that they can navigate the technologically complex digital environment (developing specialized courses for working with new educational software, and improving distance teaching skills; preparing recommendations on teaching methods, curricula, the speed at which material is introduced, student interaction models, assessment, etc.);
- support in providing (or in the preparations for providing) broad access to didactic materials (for example, creating a register of resources to help universities transition quickly to distance learning);



- reducing the gap in access to digital resources (providing students with the technical means for learning, access to the internet and strengthening the network infrastructure of university campuses).

**6.** Most countries have approved economic support packages for higher education. The support provided in various countries differs in terms of the forms and mechanisms of delivery. An analysis of international experience reveals the need for national governments to adopt a set of measures to provide financial support for the higher education system, including:

- supporting the financial sustainability of universities (providing funding for universities at the previous level, regardless of the number of students, allowing greater flexibility in the use of allocated funds, exempting universities from paying registration fees, and creating additional places at universities);
- supporting the digital development of universities (allocating funds for updating the digital infrastructure of universities, purchasing equipment, training staff and developing special distance learning programmes);
- supporting university faculty and staff (financing the purchase of courses or developing programmes to train instructors in remote working skills);
- supporting students in need, including those who have been laid off due to the pandemic (the money can be used for basic needs and to purchase course materials, hardware, software and food, or to pay for housing, medical services, etc.);
- guaranteeing student loans (lower interest rates on student loans, deferral of payments, increased loan sizes, broader access to the government student loan programme).

Special financial support measures can also be introduced. For example, funding can be used to support regional universities (in the form of student scholarships) in order to stimulate economic activity in the regions, as well as educational institutions of particular importance to the state, etc.

**7.** The pandemic has dealt a significant blow to international student exchanges. Many countries have been forced to temporarily suspend university admission for international students and send a number of international students home. Border closures have meant that most students have been cut off from their places of study. A sizeable portion of international students have found themselves in difficult situations because of the changes introduced at halls of residence and student houses, the inability to work, other financial difficulties, visa issues, etc. In this context, government measures to support international education and academic mobility are vital.

In the first case, this means providing support to international students: relaxing the requirements for extending the validity of, and changing the conditions for obtaining, student visas; developing financial aid measures or special support programmes for international students; prohibiting landlords from evicting international students from their accommodation; lifting work restrictions for

international students; reducing compulsory health insurance contributions; and providing housing and utilities relief.

In the second case, support measures may include government reimbursement for cancelled trips, the lifting of academic sanctions for cutting trips short, adjustments to the rules for obtaining grants and study loans for academic mobility programmes, relaxed requirements for qualifications obtained through online study and support for the digitalization of international programmes.

**8.** Teaching and learning are not the only university activities that have been negatively affected by the pandemic, as research work has also suffered. For objective reasons, major scientific events were cancelled or postponed, research laboratories closed, and access to certain elements of the research infrastructure temporarily restricted. Financial support measures are needed in order for research activities to continue at the same level. This could include support for research into the fight against COVID-19, the early detection, containment, causes, consequences and management of epidemics, and work in the social sciences to mitigate the social impact of the pandemic. Other measures could include the partial reimbursement of researcher salaries, as well as funding to cover research expenses (storage of hazardous substances, updating databases, etc.).

Of course, countries wishing to develop their own sets of measures to support higher education will need to adapt these recommendations to the specifics of their higher education systems, management and financing mechanisms, and so on. That said, we hope that the range of issues outlined here, the solution of which requires the active involvement of governments and an appreciation of their role in maintaining a stable and high-quality education system and ensuring the continuity of teaching and learning, will allow governments to take effective measures to prevent and mitigate new crises and introduce proposals to help the higher education sector adapt to new challenges and threats.

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