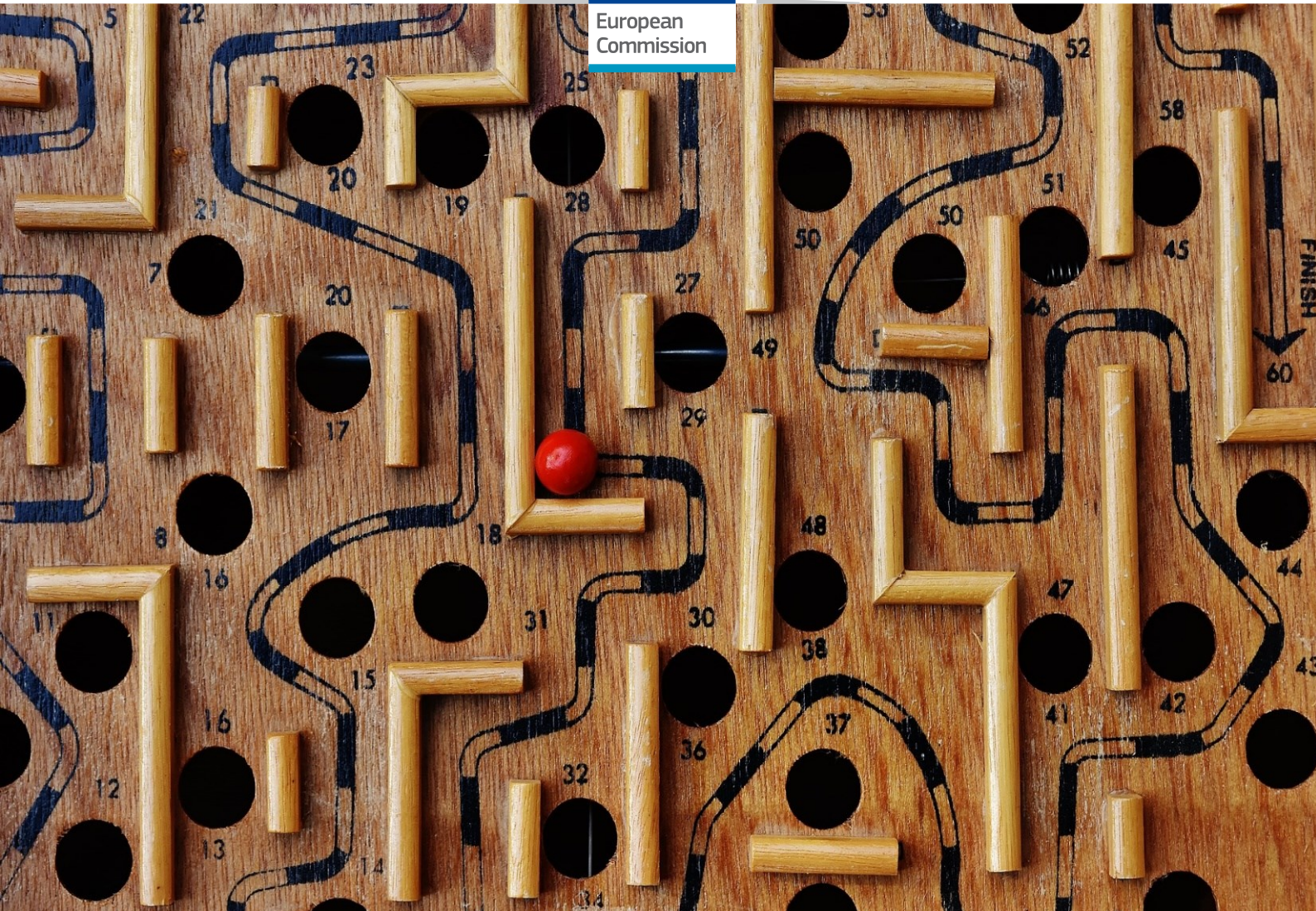




European
Commission



Study on the impact of admission systems on higher education outcomes

*Volume II:
National case studies*

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Directorate-General for Education and Culture
Directorate B — Youth, Education and Erasmus+
Unit B.1 — Higher Education

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**Study on the impact of
admission systems on higher
education outcomes**
Volume II: National case studies

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Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2017

ISBN 978-92-79-71860-1

doi: 10.2766/698050

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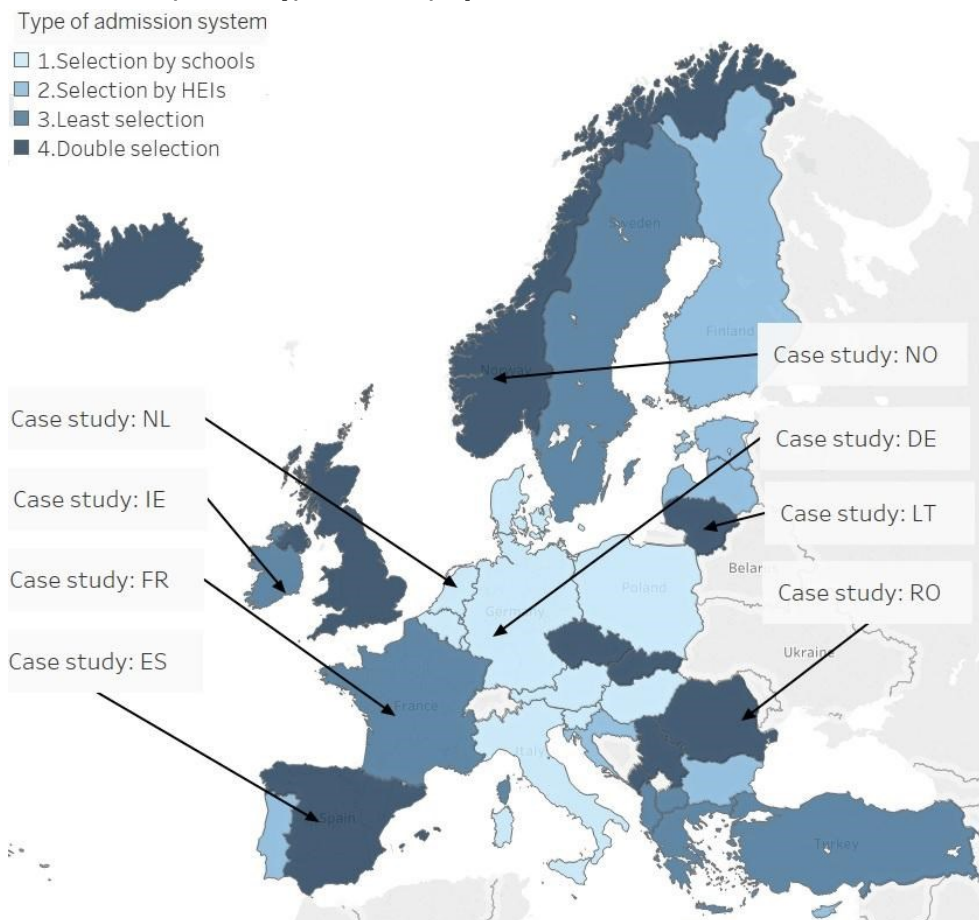
Acknowledgements

The study was commissioned by the European Commission and carried out over 18 months (January 2016 – June 2017) by an international research team. In various ways, numerous researchers from around the globe have provided input to this project, which the authors gratefully acknowledge. The authors would like to thank in particular our international advisors Patrick Clancy, Ligia Deca and Jussi Kivistö for providing their expertise at various stages of the project; it was invaluable for shaping this final report into its current form. Furthermore, the authors would like to acknowledge the support in conducting the interviews and focus groups, as well as drafting the extended case studies, provided by the national experts: Carole Waldvogel (France), Johanna Witte (Germany), Eglė Ozolinčiūtė (Lithuania), Froukje Wartenbergh-Cras (Netherlands), Elisabeth Hovdhaugen (Norway) and Ramon Llopis-Goig (Spain). The validation of the data collected internally would have not been possible without the assistance of all the national experts in the 36 European countries analysed. The authors would also like to acknowledge the contribution of Pamela Harbutt, whose editorial efforts gave the final report a coherent and unitary voice. Finally, this study would have not been possible without the constant support and guidance of the Steering Committee of the European Commission, DG Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC and its Executive Agency).

1 The national case studies

The case studies form a crucial part of this study. They provide the detailed insights into how admission systems work and the nature of the relationships between the different stakeholders which drive the differences in equity, efficiency and effectiveness between systems. The eight national case studies described below contain some cross-cutting trends but also show that each admission system is different and individual. Each one contains distinctive insights and examples of practice that could be extended elsewhere and practice that needs to be reviewed. Whilst accepting that each country is different, the goal was to use the eight case studies to try and reflect as far as possible the diversity in higher education admission in Europe in terms of participation and geography and to try and include countries who were developing new initiatives in the field of admissions. The eight countries represented are shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. The selected country case studies: France, Germany, Ireland, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Spain



Source: Authors

1.1 General methodological approach

The selection of the eight case studies was agreed with the European Commission at the start of the project. The eight countries have contrasting rates of enrolment growth over recent years and their higher education systems are of varying sizes. Table 1 below includes contextual information regarding the countries. Each case study was led by a

national expert. The details of these national experts and of their respective countries are also included in the table.

Table 1. Case study countries

Country	Geographic region ¹	Size of higher education system ²	Enrolment growth 2003-2012 ³	National experts
France	Western Europe	2.40 million	Low (+3.3%)	Dr. Carole Waldvogel, Director of the National Observatory of Students' Life (OVE), Paris, France
Germany	Western Europe	2.90 million	Medium (+17.8%)	Dr. Dominic Orr (member of Consortium), Dr. Johanna Witte, freelance educational expert, Munich
Ireland	Northern Europe (Anglo-Saxon States)	0.20 million	High (+27.5%)	Dr. Graeme Atherton (member of Consortium)
Lithuania	Eastern Europe (Baltic States)	0.15 million	Low (+4.3%)	Eglė Ozolinčiūtė, MOSTA – Research and Higher Education monitoring and analysis centre, Vilnius, Lithuania
Romania	Eastern Europe (South-eastern Europe)	0.58 million	Medium (+20.5%)	Dr. Cezar Mihai Haj (member of Consortium)
Spain	Southern Europe	1.97 million	Low (+6.7%)	Dr. Ramon Llopis-Goig, Assoc. Professor for Sociology, University of Valencia, Spain
Netherlands	Western Europe	0.67 million	Very high (+49%)	Froukje Wartenbergh-Cras, Senior Researcher, ResearchNed, Netherlands
Norway	Northern Europe (Nordic States)	0.56 million	Medium (+14%)	Dr. Elisabeth Hovdhaugen, NIFU, Norway

The case studies were delivered according to a standardised methodology based around a combination of assessment of background data, interviews and focus groups. The methodological approach is described below:

- a brief overview of the secondary and tertiary systems with an emphasis on the policies that have / have had an impact on the admission system (in greater detail than is possible in the mapping exercise)

- a series of key informant interviews with various officials at the national and institutional levels
- a series of focus groups with students.

Timing

A group seminar was undertaken in summer 2016 (with the support of the Deutsches Studentenwerk in Berlin) which brought together the national experts and the SASH project team. The purpose of the seminar was to develop the common methodological approach. The interviews and focus groups were carried out in the period October 2016 – January 2017. After the first batch of interviews and focus groups, feedback was provided to the national experts by the consortium members. The purpose of this exercise was to ensure that the case studies were following the agreed standardised methodological approach.

The case studies and the three questions

The case studies were used to provide an in-depth analysis of the admission processes in eight countries. They provided additional coverage, over and beyond the mapping exercise, of each of the three research questions (how do schools choose people that can become students; how do HEIs choose students; how do students choose HEIs). Table 2 illustrates how the stakeholder groups that were targeted in the case studies relate to these key questions.

Table 2. The relationship between the key questions and the stakeholders targeted

Key Question	Stakeholders
How do schools choose people that can become students?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Senior government policy makers responsible for secondary education - Senior official from national examinations authority - National-level officials responsible for guidance issues - Registrars (or other individuals responsible for admissions at institutions)
How do HEIs choose students they enrol?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Registrars (or other individuals responsible for admissions at institutions) - Senior government policy makers for tertiary education - Senior official at national examinations authority - Senior official at national applications centre
How do student choose HEIs and study programmes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Focus groups with secondary school pupils - Focus groups with higher education students

1.2 Interviews with key informants

The national case studies included interviews with a range of key informants. These informants included policymakers and representatives of higher education institutions (HEIs). The exact mix of interviews undertaken varied from country to country depending on the national system's characteristics. The specific individuals interviewed were identified by the respective national experts. The rationale for targeting these different stakeholder groups are described below:

- **Senior government policy makers responsible for secondary education:** the purpose of this interview was to get a better understanding of how streaming in secondary schooling impacts on the opportunity for higher education admission.
- **Senior official from a central examinations authority:** the purpose of this interview was to get a better understanding of how the national examinations are developed and how they shape access to higher education. What is the relative extent of the influence exerted by secondary school curriculum experts vs. those in higher education? This interview was conducted only in countries that have central examinations.
- **Senior official at national applications centre:** the goal of this interview was to get a better understanding of the matching process between students and institutions and how national applications centres (where these exist) work. This interview was conducted only in countries that have national applications centres.
- **Government official(s) / national expert(s) on secondary school guidance functions:** the purpose of these interviews was to get a better understanding of how the guidance function in secondary schools is organised in order to help young people in making decisions regarding their future. In countries where there were no national-level guidance administrators available, the questions associated with this interview were included in the discussion with the national-level official responsible for secondary schools.
- **Senior Government policy makers for higher education:** the purpose of these interviews was to get a better understanding of how and why each central government has designed its policies around admission, and also to understand how each government perceives the main challenges in the admission systems.
- **Officials responsible for the admission process in five to seven higher education institutions:** the purpose of these interviews was to get a better understanding of how HEIs manage their intake of students and the considerations that go into developing institutional level policy. The selection of these officials took into account the need to reflect different forms of selectivity (and, where relevant, in both public and private sectors). The choice of HEIs was agreed with core team members in advance by the national country experts, but the selection targeted at least one selective elite HEI, at least one specialist technical HEI, at least one not-very-selective HEI, at least one rural or small-town HEI and, in countries where enrolments in private HEIs are above 10%, at least one private HEI.

Table 3 below lists the key questions used during the interviews with the above-listed stakeholders. Each interview had a semi-structured approach in order to address areas of interest that emerged in the discussions. The purpose of these interviews was to give a more nuanced and detailed picture of the dynamics in the admission systems than can be provided by the quantitative approach alone. In order to achieve these goals, the methodology selected needed to be flexible.

Table 3. List of questions for interviews with each type of informant

	Interview with senior government policy makers responsible for secondary education
	<p>a) What is the rationale for placing students in streams at school? i.e. What do you aim to achieve by streaming students? Have alternative options ever been considered?</p> <p>b) What is the rationale for streaming at a particular age-level? Have earlier or later cut-off ages ever been considered?</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> c) To what extent are there targets for the number of students to be placed in each stream? To what extent are these targets (if they exist) influenced by i) policies on student numbers at higher education level and ii) any specific labour market objectives? d) In practice, how significant is being in a certain school stream to the availability of opportunities to study in higher education? Within the secondary school system, is there an implicit hierarchy, with certain schools being seen as much better than others / more likely to place students in top HEIs?
Interview with senior official from a central examinations authority:	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) How are tests in different subject areas designed, tested and chosen? Are they designed with an eye to the needs of the labour market? To the needs of the higher education system? How are these perspectives incorporated? b) Are there additional or supplementary criteria used to take account of the fact that not all applicants will have taken the same educational path or received the same quality of secondary schooling? c) What is the feedback process that leads to changes in test policy? Is it regular / episodic? d) Have there been any recent changes in examination policy and if so can you describe them? e) Is there a national discussion or debate about exams? What are the main elements of the debate? f) How do discussions of socio-economic inequality and inequality in academic results affect exams policy?
Interview with senior official at national applications centre	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) How are students matched with HEIs? b) To what extent and how does student choice play a role in the final placing of students with HEIs? c) To what extent do HEIs have discretion in choosing students and how does this process work? d) To what extent do all fields of study have the same kind of restrictions or do certain professional or in demand programmes have different procedures for admission (i.e. is there a numerus clausus approach in place in this country)? If there are restrictions in place regarding certain fields of study, how is the decision to restrict or change admission rules for different fields of study taken? e) Have any changes to policy been made recently in this respect?
Interview with government official(s) / national expert(s) on secondary school guidance functions	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Is there a national strategy on information, advice and guidance / careers information for young people and if so to what extent does applying for higher education feature in this strategy? b) To what extent is information, advice and guidance on progression to higher education offered regularly to young people through teachers and / or through specialised personnel (NB. Get them to be as specific as possible)? What is the ratio of students to specialised personnel in the system? c) Describe the typical daily tasks of specialised personnel in guidance.

	<p>d) Is guidance about labour market / careers and higher education delivered separately or together?</p>
<p>Interview with senior government policy makers for higher education</p>	
	<p>a) How are decisions about admission split between HEIs and the central government and to what extent do current regulations restrict / support HEI autonomy?</p> <p>b) What is the role of “merit” in admission systems (how does the government define merit, including ensuring that it is inclusive for students of all backgrounds)?</p> <p>c) To what extent do funding decisions drive decisions about the number of available places in different courses or streams and how does this, in turn, drive policy concerning admissions?</p> <p>d) How is labour market demand reflected in the admission system and how does this, in turn, drive policy concerning admission?</p> <p>e) What strategies and practices do you undertake to support admission for those from particular ‘equity’ groups (e.g. reserved places, outreach activities, etc.)?</p> <p>f) To what extent does the admission system impact on student outcomes in terms of completion rates, study choice, time taken to complete degree and labour market matching?</p> <p>g) How could the admission system be improved with respect to student graduation and labour market outcomes?</p> <p>h) Is the higher education admission system efficient (how does the government understand efficiency with regard to a higher education admission system)?</p>
<p>Interview with officials responsible for the admission process at the institutional level</p>	
	<p>a) How does your HEI determine the number of students it enrolls in each subject area?</p> <p>b) What criteria (if any) beyond examination results does your HEI use to choose the students it enrolls?</p> <p>c) To what extent are the admission decisions taken by your HEI influenced by national policy?</p> <p>d) To what extent do financial concerns (e.g. regarding student fee income or grant income from government) drive admission decisions?</p> <p>e) What strategies and practices do you undertake to attract and support students from particular equity groups?</p> <p>f) Is extra support and guidance (e.g. remedial courses) available to support the success of first year students? How might the progress of students receiving extra support be improved?</p> <p>g) How is labour market demand reflected in the admission system?</p> <p>h) What are the strengths and weaknesses of the current admission system?</p> <p>i) Is there any mismatch between course availability and applications? Do you receive the applicants and enrolments you want?</p> <p>j) In what ways could the admission system be improved with respect to student graduation and labour market outcomes?</p> <p>k) What would you like to be changed and / or improved regarding your institutional admission system or the national admission system?</p>

1.3 Focus groups with young people

Research shows that students make choices based both on objective information and subjective perceptions. Socio-cultural differences in the latter are often one of the causes of differences in participation rates by socio-economic group. For this reason, focus group discussions were organised with young people during their decision-making process towards entering higher education in order to help assess how various policies and practical interventions influence students' decisions. Four focus groups were organised:

- **Two focus groups with pupils at the start of their last year in secondary school** (one school with a high and one with a low rate of entry into higher education, using data for school leaving examinations in that country). The national experts were responsible for identifying these schools, based on data available in the context of their own respective country. The groups of young people targeted were a pre-existing class studying one subject strand, as working with such a group proved to be the most feasible way to secure the participation of the school in this exercise. The groups included the participation of up to 20 young people for at least 60 minutes.
- **Two focus groups with new students at the start of their first year of HEI** (one comprehensive and one specialised HEI). The national experts were responsible for identifying these HEIs. In this case the questions were more retrospective than in the previous focus group (pupils in the last year of secondary school) and were more focused on events which had actually occurred rather than on simple perceptions of an as-yet unfamiliar process. The groups included around 20 young people and lasted for around 60 minutes.

The process of selection of the secondary schools and HEIs was discussed with the national experts in the August 2016 Berlin seminar.

Each focus group was carried out by two people (facilitator and note-taker). The team targeted a balance between males and females in the focus groups and a balance between participants based on other socio-demographic criteria. At the end of each focus group the participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire and a checklist on their socio-demographic characteristics.

After a short introductory exercise to familiarise the students with the object of the focus group and the study, a list of probe questions followed, used to elicit further information. In the final part of the session each participant was asked to give some brief written answers. The tables below describe the focus group structure used by national experts.

Table 4. Questions for focus groups with pupils at the start of last year in secondary education

Part 1 (5-10 mins)

The session began with a short introductory exercise to familiarise the students with the object of the focus group and the study. Focus group leaders created an exercise that fitted with their cultural context.

For example: in pairs the students had two minutes to find out as much as they could from their partner regarding why they wished to go to higher education, including their reasons for attending higher education and their concerns regarding barriers to their success in higher education (e.g. financial concerns).

Part 2 (40-50 mins)

The aim of this part was to cover five different areas. Under each heading is a list of probe questions which the facilitators used to elicit further information.

- 1) *What information have you received about higher education; when / how did you receive it?* Have you received information about specific HEIs / courses / the

application process? When did you first receive this information? What has your school done to support you in making decisions? Have you had contact with HEIs? Have you sourced information online?

- 2) *Who influenced your decision to apply to higher education?* e.g. Parents? Friends? Teachers? Other school personnel?
- 3) *What were the most important factors that influenced your decision regarding applying for higher education?* Was it the information you received from schools or HEIs? Was it your career ambitions or interests in particular subject areas? Was it the influence of parents / teachers / friends etc.? Do any of these factors affect the way you approach the final months of schooling (e.g. working harder to get good results in a particular subject)?
- 4) *Country specific question:* Each country expert, on the basis of the outcomes of the mapping exercise and the interviews with experts, composed a question pertaining particularly to the admission to higher education context in that country.
- 5) *How much do you think you understand the admission system?* Do you know the steps necessary to progress from school to your chosen HEI and / or courses? Do you think the process is 'fair'? Are there changes you think could be made to improve the system?
- 6) *Do you have particular fears and concerns as you begin the process of preparing for higher education admission?*

Part 3 (5-10 mins)

In the final part of the session each participant was asked to give brief written answers to the following three questions. The purpose here was to capture the views of all participants.

- Did either of your parents go onto higher education? In what ethnic group would you place yourself? (a list of groups was provided) Are you male or female?
- What were the most important factors that influenced your decision regarding applying for higher education?
- How far do you think you understand the admission system?

Table 5. Questions for focus groups with pupils at the start of first year of higher education

Part 1 (5-10 mins)

The session began with a short introductory exercise to familiarise the students with the object of the focus group and the study. Focus group leaders created an exercise that fitted with their cultural context. For example, in pairs each student had two minutes to find out as much as they could from their partner regarding their reasons for applying for higher education and their initial experience of higher education and how it has differed at all from their expectations.

Part 2 (40-50 mins)

The aim was to cover five different areas. Under each area there was a list of probe questions which the facilitators used to elicit further information.

- 1) *Do you feel you had enough information regarding higher education to support you in the application process?* Did you trust the information you received? What other types of information would have been helpful?
- 2) *Who influenced you the most in applying for higher education?* In the end, how important was advice you got from parents? How important was advice received from teachers? How important was guidance e.g. from school counsellors (on academic and non-academic support)?

- 3) What were the most important factors in helping you make the decisions regarding applying for higher education? How important was the influence of parents / teachers / friends? What were the key deciding factors? How did the decision affect your last months at secondary school?
- 4) *Country specific question:* Each country expert, on the basis of the outcomes of the mapping exercise and the interviews with experts, composed a question pertaining particularly to the admission to higher education context in that country.
- 5) *What are your views on the admission system in hindsight?* Was it difficult? Was it fair? What could be improved?
- 6) *What were the biggest worries you had at the start of your studies?* Were you worried about money? Is financial aid shaping the decisions you are taking now? Are you worried about your ability to succeed academically?

Part 3 (5-10 mins)

In the final part of the session each participant was asked to give brief written answers to the following three questions. The purpose here was to capture the views of all participants.

- Did either of your parents go onto higher education? In what ethnic group would you place yourself (a list of groups was provided)? Are you male or female?
- What were the most important factors in helping you make your decision regarding applying for higher education?
- What are your views on the admission system in hindsight?

Ethical procedure – Informed consent

Prior to the interview / focus group, all participants received a statement describing the project and what will happen to the data they helped generate. They were then asked if they still wished to participate in the project.

Participants in the focus groups and interviews were informed that their responses would be anonymised. The interviewees were however asked if they were willing to have quotes included in the final report; since these would include their role titles, they may to a certain extent allow them to be identified by certain readers.

1.4 Methodological notes

Each of the cases shows two key set of information about the country and its admission system:

The admission pipeline

This shows at what stage in the education systems paths diverge, often with one or some of these being more advantageous for admission to higher education. Three countries (i.e. Germany, the Netherlands and Lithuania) begin their streaming process at the end of primary school, while the other four (i.e. France, Romania, Norway, Spain) begin at the end of the lower-secondary stage.

Key data

Key statistics are provided on each country, which show the size of their higher education system, the proportion of students who enter private higher education and where students end up following graduation. To contextualise the values for each country, they are compared to average values for all European countries for which data is available. This exercise has the aim of showing whether a country belongs to those countries with high, low or average values. To this aim, all countries' values for which data is available are ranked using quartiles showing Q1 = the highest value of those

countries with low values, Q3 = the lowest value of those countries with high values and Q2 or median = the cut-off point middle in the ranking. Next to the title of each table shown, the countries value – e.g. for share of students in private higher education – is evaluated.

2 France

2.1 Key insights

The education system

- France has a mid-level enrolment rate in higher education, with little growth over the past years.
- Pupils are divided into a general and vocational track in secondary schooling.
- There is a high share of students in private higher education in France
- There is a low representation of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds in French higher education, especially in non-university sectors (but these tend to be more, not less selective in France)

On the transition from schooling to higher education

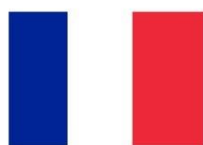
- Participation in higher education has been increasing despite streaming
- Equity issues are perceived narrowly in France, with little support for underrepresented groups
- Guidance is extensive and labour market centric, but there is lacking interaction with the higher education sector

The role of higher education institutions in admission

- The voluntary national admission system is a key element of admission and supported by HEIs
- Generally, HEIs have non-selective enrolments, but not for all subject areas – some are highly selective
- French HEIs vary in their rights and possibilities to control who enters, with private HEIs having the most autonomy
- Funding mechanisms have little impact on admission policies
- There is little focus on equitable access – apart from at the most selective HEIs

The admission system from the students' perspective

- Guidance seen as significant and effective in helping students understand pathways in upper-secondary education
- There is no one reason why students choose higher education programmes
- The *Admission Post BAC* (APB) national admission system does not help, but hinders choice making



France

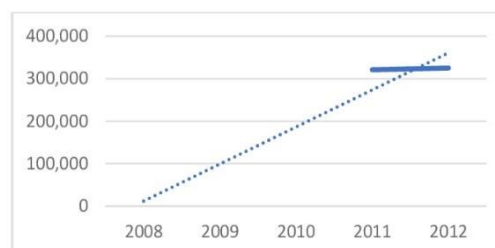
Gross enrolment rate 2014 – mid-level

Source: Eurostat, [educ_uoe_enrt08]

FR	Q1	Q2	Q3
32.4%	28.4%	33.8%	37.0%

Trend: Number of HE entrants 2008-2013 (ISCED) – increasing

Source: Eurostat, [educ_uoe_enrt01]



School context: Share of upper secondary school pupils in vocational track schools – small vocational stream

Source: Eurostat, [educ_uoe_ens04]

	FR	Q1	Q2	Q3
General track	57.3 %	34.3 %	50.8 %	60.4 %
Vocational track	42.7 %	41.5 %	50.0 %	66.0 %

Share of students in Bachelor and short-cycle programmes – high share of students in short-cycle programmes

Source: Eurostat, [educ_uoe_enrt01]

	FR	Q1	Q2	Q3
BA programme	65.6 %	78.3 %	90.7 %	98.5 %
Short-cycle programme	34.4 %	1.5 %	9.3 %	21.7 %

Share of students in private (government-independent) HEIs by programme – high

Source: Eurostat, [educ_uoe_enrt01]

... in private gov. indep. HEIs	FR	Q1	Q2	Q3
... of all tertiary enrolments	17.6 %	7.7 %	10.2 %	16.3 %
... of all BA enrolments	12.9 %	7.0 %	11.6 %	17.1 %
... of all short-cycle enrolments	21.2 %	0.0 %	6.5 %	31.8 %

Percentages of entrants & graduates from low socio-economic (underrepresented) groups, Bachelors 2014, 2011 – low representation of students from low socio-economic backgrounds, especially in the non-university sector

Source: EUROSTUDENT V, Basidata 4.2 & 4.4. Eurostat, EU-SILC ad hoc module on intergenerational transmission of disadvantages.

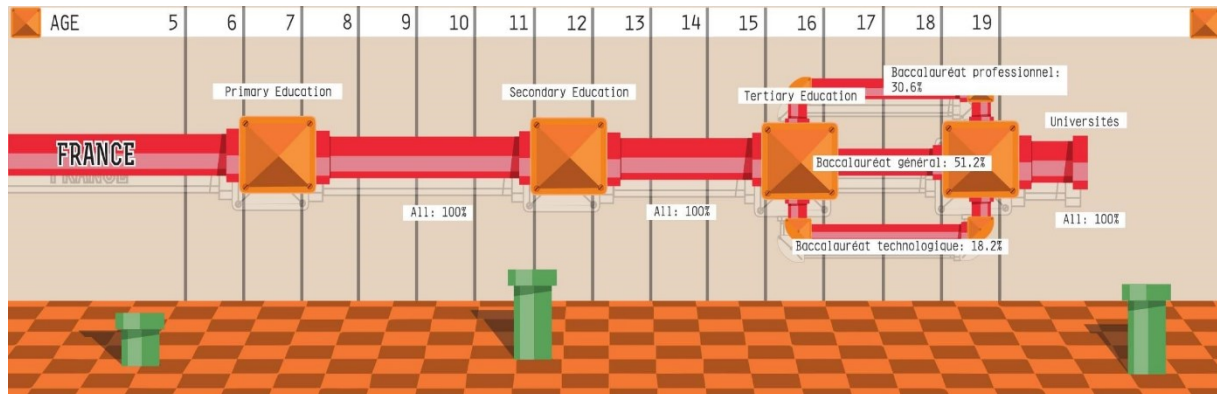
	FR	Q1	Q2	Q3
Share of students whose fathers' highest educational attainment is non-tertiary compared to corresponding male population, 2014	0.73	0.71	0.78	0.83
Share of students whose fathers' highest educational attainment is non-tertiary studying in non-university sector (i.e. UAS), 2014	0.64	1.20	1.48	1.72
Odds ratio for completing tertiary education of young adults* (25-34) whose parents attained tertiary education over young adults (25-34) whose highest educational attainment was non-tertiary education, 2011	2.16	2.47	2.89	3.76

Share of all tertiary graduates by occupational level, 2015 – high share of graduates in management positions, low share in professional positions

Source: Eurostat, [lfsa_egised]

Occupational position	FR	Q1	Q2	Q3
Managers	13.1%	8.1%	10.1%	12.8%
Professionals	38.4%	45.5%	48.0%	54.7%
Technicians and associate professionals	25.8%	14.5%	18.3%	21.3%
Clerical support workers	8.5%	5.4%	7.0%	8.6%

2.2 Overview of the education system



2.2.1 Schooling

In France, primary education begins at age 6 and lasts for five years. Students then proceed to a lower-secondary or middle school system for four years, from which students typically graduate at age 14 or 15. There is no selection between primary and middle school. Middle schools in France are known as *collèges*. At the end of middle school, students take the *brevet* exam and graduates of middle school receive the *Diplôme National du Brevet des Collèges*. Following on from middle school is upper-secondary school, which in France takes place in institutions known as *lycées*. Students will typically spend three years in one of three *lycée* streams, each leading to a different type of *Baccalauréat*: the BAC, BAC T and BAC Pro. By law all these three types of BAC allow admission to higher education.

BAC and the BAC T - Both these streams are intended to prepare students for higher education, with the latter focusing on a slightly more applied set of disciplines.

BAC Pro - The third stream is the BAC Pro which is a vocationally orientated route designed to prepare graduates directly for the labour market, but completion of which nevertheless entitles the graduate to attend higher education.

The BAC and BAC T are delivered in the same institutions (and indeed share a common first-year of courses). The BAC Pro is usually delivered in a separate stand-alone institution.

Students are assigned to a BAC route via the *conseil de classe*. Each *collège* has a *conseil*. This is a group consisting of the head teacher, the school's academic staff, plus some representative students and parents. The *conseil* assesses the student's academic results and the results of one-on-one interviews with counsellors and then recommends whether a student enters either the BAC, BAC T or BAC Pro. In most cases, their recommendations correspond to the wishes of the students. In 2007 (the last date for which information is available), 67.9% of students in the final year of middle school wished to be placed in a BAC or BAC T. The *conseil de classe* recommended that 64.3% of students should follow that route, meaning that the two sides disagreed in about 5% of cases. Students who are denied their wish to go to a BAC / BAC T may still apply to a *lycée* that offers these programmes. *Lycées* will then accept or reject requests on the basis of an interview.

Though legally all *lycées* are the same, informally there is a very significant prestige hierarchy. In most of the country, students will simply attend whichever *lycée* is most convenient. In Paris and its surrounding areas the choice of *lycée* is more dependent on the *Affelnet*⁴ system, which is an online centralised application and admission system. Students can apply to a number of *lycées* through *affelnet* and rank their choices. The system will then assign a *lycée* via a weighted score based on proximity, academic

results in lower-secondary school, and socio-economic status, with those students from low-income families who receive bursaries scoring more highly.

Students taking the BAC must specialise in one of three broad areas – Série L (*littérature*), Série ES (*économie et sociale*) and Série S (*scientifique*). Approximately half of all students are enrolled in the science stream, a third in the economic / social stream and the remainder in the literature stream. In the BAC T, there are eight specialisations: science, industry, design, management, health and social studies, music, catering and agronomy. In addition to BACs, many *lycées* also provide *cours prépas* (i.e. preparatory courses) for students who wish to attend the *grandes écoles* (see below). Certain *lycées* such as Louis-le-Grand and Henri IV are seen to dominate in admissions to prestigious *grandes écoles* and hence are considered the most prestigious *lycées*.

Admission to higher education

Students can apply for admission to a HEI from January in the year in which they are supposed to complete secondary education. Despite the BAC being a guarantee of access to higher education, a wide variety of courses (*fillières*) are selective. The *grandes écoles* all have their own entry criteria, usually including a separate set of entrance exams; these often involve up to two years of extra study in *cours prépas*. Technically-orientated programmes within HEIs, housed within *instituts universitaires de technologie* (IUT), require students to pass an interview in order to be admitted. Four sets of courses: law, psychology, kinesiology (known as *sciences et techniques des activités physiques et sportives*, or *STAPS*) and health studies (known as *première année commune aux études de santé*, or *PACES*) tend to have restricted entry in order to deal with excess demand; some institutions use lotteries to determine places in these fields. In PACES, universities are in fact permitted to take in 500 students for every 100 places they have in selective medical programmes – with many students being dismissed from the system in the first year of their higher education studies.

2.2.2 Higher education

The higher education system in France is a very diverse system with many types of specialised institutions. The bulk of the system is made up of public universities, which are open to all holders of a *Baccalauréat*. There are also private (mainly Catholic) universities, which mirror public universities in most respects, though they have autonomy in selection and charge fees. Within universities are a series of IUTs (that is, each IUT is attached to a university; many universities have more than one IUT); mainly these specialise in various types of engineering, though a few specialise in other areas, such as health, law, and communications. Outside the universities are what are known as *les grandes écoles*, most of which require students to take one or two years of *cours prépas* in addition to a BAC in order to secure entry. Most of these specialise in engineering and business, although some famous ones also operate in education (e.g. *l'Ecole Normale Supérieure*), political science (e.g. *Institut d'études politiques*), art (*l'Ecole du Louvre*) and public administration (*l'Ecole nationale d'administration publique*).

Admission to higher education is processed via a web-based application system known as *Admission Post BAC* (APB), which was set up in 2008. Students can assemble portfolios to submit to institutions and make up to 24 ranked programme choices. The APB system assigns students to programmes and institutions based on their choices, BAC stream, and the availability of places. With a non-selective programme, students tend to get their first choice. Where demand for places exceeds supply, students are prioritised first by their BAC programme (i.e. how closely their chosen field of study at secondary level is matched with their chosen field in higher education) and second by their chosen ranking. That is to say, if two students both have a programme in economics as their first choice, a place will go to a student who took an Economic / Social BAC over one who took a Science or Literature BAC, and to one who ranked the

programme second over one who ranked it third. In some rare cases where a programme is still oversubscribed, APB will use a lottery to determine who is permitted to take a place in the system. The APB has been generally controversial because it has brought some transparency to decisions that were previously opaque and some stakeholders have been displeased with what they have learned.

2.3 How does the school system determine who becomes a student?

2.3.1 Increasing participation in higher education despite streaming

The French schooling system is streamed in such a way as to steer at least some students away from higher education. However, as key informants mentioned, the consequence of streaming is changing with increasing percentages of students from all streams now attending higher education.

"The BAC and the BAC T have always prepared students for higher studies. The professional stream was always meant to lead to the workforce. But the system is more or less in upheaval now that students (from the BAC Pro) are increasingly pursuing (further) studies...why? Because there is increasing social and institutional pressure to continue education and get another credential to protect against unemployment."
Official, Ministry of Education

Over 90% of students who took the BAC in 2016 passed the exam, which gives them a right to a HEI place. For the BAC T it was 90.7%, and for the BAC Pro it was 82.2%. In total, approximately 78% of all young people now obtain a *Baccalauréat* at the end of their secondary studies. All these students have the right to attend higher education. Hence at public HEIs, students select institutions rather than institutions select students. Despite the pressures on higher education entry, the BAC is seen as a success by French policymakers with BAC participation and pass rates both at an all-time high.

"I believe our system works well. We've gone from a system where in 1985 35% of students received a Baccalauréat, in 1995 the percentage was 65% and now (after the "réforme Fillon", which shortened the BAC Pro to three years from four) is up to 80%."
Official, Ministry of Education

2.3.2 Equity issues are perceived narrowly in France

The Republican traditions of France mean that public policy often does not recognise equity issues in the way that other countries do. To the extent that the system actively promotes equity (usually described by the term *l'égalité des chances*), this is done via the *affelnet* system. The system provides a slight bonus to students from colleges in deprived educational zones, meaning that they get a slightly better chance of attending the *lycée* of their choice. Other than that, most equity policy revolves around accommodating students with disabilities.

Students from poorer backgrounds, and students from non-French ethnic backgrounds (particularly Africans) are over-represented in the BAC Pro and under-represented in the BAC. While the system does try to rectify this through programmes like the *Zones d'Éducation Prioritaire* (a scheme which provides extra resources to schools in disadvantaged areas) it does not attempt to do so by directly trying to improve results for specific groups.

2.3.3 Guidance is extensive and labour market centric, but there is lacking interaction with the higher education sector

The guidance system in France is a relatively extensive one, with a role in helping students choose both an upper-secondary and a higher education pathway. Guidance functions are carried out by specialised counsellors (*conseillers d'orientations-psychologues*, or COPs) who are employed by the ministry, but are not usually attached to individual educational institutions. Rather, COPs work from one of 420 regional *centres d'informations et orientations* (CIOs) spread throughout France. In total, there are 3,700 COPs spread across France. It provides students with a serious, sustained

focus on the labour market. However, this is an impartial focus that does not attempt to guide students towards particular fields of study.

It may also be the case, as shown by the interviews in the case study, that the guidance system is somewhat more effective in middle schools than in upper-secondary schools. The reason for this may be that the unit in charge of guidance is located in the same directorate within the Ministry of Education as the unit in charge of *collèges*. *Lycées*, however, are under a separate directorate.

2.4 How does the higher education system choose the students that are enrolled?

2.4.1 The APB system is a key element and supported by HEIs

Being a part of the APB system is attractive in two ways. First, because APB is universally used by students, being in the APB system means access to more students.

"Public HEIs are all supposed to be in APB. Private ones want to be in it because it gives them visibility. A programme that enters into the APB system on average gets a boost of about 20% more applications." Official from APB

The second advantage is that because APB acts as a centralised clearing system, institutions are less likely to have empty spaces at the end of the annual process. Prior to the arrival of APB, institutions deliberately overbooked their courses, knowing that some students who had applied would not take up their place. In some cases, so many students changed their minds that institutions would have empty spaces at the start of term, while others would be overcrowded. A computerised system now manages these flows better.

*"When I was a teacher in a *prepa*, I never knew how many students I would have because we would overbook students (in the expectation not all who were accepted would come). Now things are much more transparent."* Official, Ministry of Education

It is argued that students often feel overwhelmed by the choices available to them and blame APB for making choices difficult, but this can be seen as a guidance problem, not one inherent to the APB itself.

"A lot of what APB is blamed for is simply that there are not always enough places in specific fields and people find it incomprehensible and unacceptable when they don't get what they want. Also, there is a lot of criticism of APB because it doesn't provide enough guidance. But this confuses the role of guidance and the role of registration. APB is just a registration portal. It's not meant to provide guidance, to ensure that students have really thought about their programme of study or point them in the direction (of other programmes)." Official, Responsible for national admission system

2.4.2 HEIs have non-selective enrolments, but not for all subject areas

The public HEIs examined in the study are completely open and only a *Baccalauréat* is required to enter. If enrolment is high, HEIs will admit more students. This approach comes with obvious problems but it also reflects the mission of certain HEIs.

"Our policy is to take all of the students from our region and enrol them (in their study programme of choice) no matter what. That means it can get crowded. Students from our region will never face a lottery... we just admit them and figure out how to manage later. It can become very expensive." University official, public university outside Paris

At the same time, the public university contains an IUT, which is selective based on interviews. Approximately 4 in 10 applicants are refused entry to the IUT. At the Catholic university, access is for the most part non-selective, with the exception of PACES. At the selective institution, admission is far from non-selective. It has three separate intake systems: one for international students, one for local students and a separate third stream for students from underprivileged areas.

"The philosophy of [this grande école] is pretty simple: we want the best candidates, from France, from abroad, and from lycées d'éducation prioritaire. So our selection procedures for all three of these groups is designed to capture academic excellence." Official, selective institution

For local students, selection is done by a combination of a review of the student's portfolio, an institutional examination and personal interviews. These are performed prior to the *Baccalauréat* exams in June of each year. However, the BAC is still required for a student to enter higher education. Private HEIs are also free to use entrance exams to select students.

2.4.3 HEIs vary in their rights and possibilities to control who enters

The public HEI has essentially no autonomy in its decisions: it is bound to follow national regulations. Its IUT does of course have the ability to select and is autonomous, in the sense that its own admission committee uses its judgement and discretion in selection, based on interviews.

Both the Catholic private HEI and the selective institution are largely autonomous in the selection procedures. For the Catholic HEI, which is largely reliant on tuition fees, there is an incentive to leave admission relatively open – or at least, no less open than at competing public HEIs in the area. Nevertheless a majority of its programmes are to some degree selective, even in areas which are non-selective elsewhere. This is in part because this institution has some cachet – it is a very labour market focused 'entrepreneurial HEI', where students can participate in frequent internships.

The selective institution has an incentive to be very restrictive in order to increase its prestige (and indeed, it rejects far more students than it admits). However, the selective institution also used its autonomy to design its own special admission system for students from underprivileged areas. That said, government rules still have an impact on this policy since the definition of underprivileged area (technically, a school in a *zone d'éducation prioritaire* or ZEP) is controlled by government.

"ZEPs change over time because the population is not fixed, and zone boundaries change, etc. And we are dependent on this definition – what is a ZEP? Which lycées are eligible to have agreements with us? If things change, and a district starts to gentrify, does that mean we can't work with them anymore?" Official, Sciences Po

For most students, the only entry criteria used is the BAC, possession of which is sufficient to attend a HEI. This does not guarantee that a student will get into a programme of their choice, but it does guarantee entrance to a higher education programme somewhere. Occasionally, lotteries are used to decide on admission in programmes which are particularly oversubscribed. Selection by IUTs can be based on a mixture of secondary school record (not BAC results – HEIs usually make decisions based on partial results, because decisions need to be made prior to the time when BAC results are finalised) and personal interviews. Private HEIs and *grandes écoles* are free to use entrance exams as a means to select students. In practice, these are used more by the latter than by the former, and interviews are used as an additional means of selection.

2.4.4 Funding mechanisms have little impact on admission policies

Funding mechanisms play a relatively small role in admission policies. The main publicly-funded HEIs are by design almost entirely open access and in many cases will expand enrolment to meet demand, regardless of available funds. At the extreme, HEIs will use a lottery system to allocate spaces. At private HEIs, where fees more or less equal costs, funding is less of an issue. At *grandes écoles*, where costs per student are higher, funding does play some role in the degree of selectivity because it reduces the number of spaces available. However, *grandes écoles* are by design selective – more money would not eliminate selectivity there.

2.4.5 Little focus on equitable access – apart from at the most selective HEIs

Neither the public nor the Catholic HEI analysed in the case study implement many programmes that promote equitable access to higher education. However, the private (Catholic) HEI in the case study does use scholarships to attract academically promising students from under-privileged backgrounds.

"(Recipients) need to have a good academic track record, certainly. And we have to be able to sense potential in the student, one who really 'wants it'. Businesses can help us identify that..."

"Ok, but to be clear, what we are really trying to do is bring in more students from underprivileged backgrounds." Two officials from a private Catholic HEI outside Paris

But while financial aid policies are in place, little is done to promote *l'égalité des chances* (equal chances), a concept which sits uneasily with republican ideas of merit in France. All universities do, however, make significant efforts to accommodate students with disability.

The exception to the rule is *l'Institut d'études politiques* (IEP), also known as *Sciences Po*, which has created an entire admission process in order to help students from underprivileged areas. Under this scheme, the institute works directly with specified *lycées* (all of which need to be located in a ZEP) to provide support and counselling to students throughout the final year of secondary school. The *lycées* recommend their best student to the *grande école*; these students are then given an interview by the admission committee (meaning that in practice the students skip the written exam that students in the main admission scheme have to take).

"[On providing assistance to students who come in by this route] When you come from an underprivileged background, or have parents that can't provide a lot of academic guidance, everything becomes more complicated. So we put a lot of things in place: sometimes some specific guidance measures, sometimes refresher courses put on by specific professors, peer mentoring and above all mentorships with partners in industry." Official, Sciences Po

2.5 How do young people make choices regarding higher education?

2.5.1 Guidance seen as significant and effective in helping students understand pathways in upper-secondary education

All students indicated that they had been receiving some guidance on higher education from the beginning of upper-secondary education. Those who had spent lower-secondary at this *lycée* indicated that they had received some guidance on higher education in middle school. A substantial portion of the group had taken the time to go to career fairs and special seminars devoted to de-mystifying the APB.

2.5.2 There is no one reason why students choose higher education programmes

In subsequent case studies, there has been discussion of the proximity network i.e. friends, family, teachers and careers advisors / counsellors and the complexity of the choice formation process amongst young people. This network influences the range of motives that young people express for entering higher education. In the focus groups approximately one third suggested that they wished to study in a field of personal interest.

"I'm just interested in studying more –or, more precisely – in studying things which interest me more."

Approximately another third thought their choices were more constrained, in particular by parental pressure, while a similar number again were framing choices in terms of a perceived better outcome in the labour market.

"For me, the economy is what matters most. I want to have high purchasing power in the future, a higher standard of living. That means more education."

"More study means more qualifications, and a higher income."

2.5.3 The APB national admission system does not help, but hinders choice making

A common complaint from students with respect to choosing a field of study is that they feel pressured to choose something at the age of 17, at a time when they are also having to spend a great deal of time studying for the BAC. In fact, many find the search process more difficult and stressful than the BAC itself.

'I have no understanding of the APB, no one has really explained it to us. All the teachers know with respect to APB is how to make us more stressed out.'

'I don't really understand APB. I get the impression that admission decisions are more or less random.'

These concerns appear to be to a large extent connected to what is seen as a level of opacity surrounding the APB (and the admission process more generally).

2.6 Appendix: Interviews and focus groups

- Interview 1: Public institution in a small town
- Interview 2: Selective institution (Sciences Po)
- Interview 3: Selective institution in city
- Interview 4: Private (Catholic) university
- Interview with representative in the Ministry of education (secondary schooling)
- Interview with representative in the Ministry of education (higher education)
- Interview with representative in the Ministry of education (various departments)
- Focus Group 1: Pre-higher education students at higher entry school

3 Germany

3.1 Key insights

The education system

- Germany has a low-level enrolment rate in higher education, with recent growth over the past years.
- Pupils are divided into a general and vocational track in secondary schooling
- There is a mid-level share of students in private higher education in Germany
- There is a low representation of students from low socio-economic backgrounds in German higher education, but universities of applied science are more inclusive

On the transition from schooling to higher education

- Some streams do not lead to higher education while some streams tend to lead to different types of higher education
- Grade Point Average (GPA) and Numerus Clausus (NC) play a significant role in access to specific study programmes
- Guidance services are offered through the local Job Centre and integrated into curriculum
- The school system does not favour equitable access to higher education, although alternative routes are being expanded

The role of higher education institutions in admission

- The policy framework gives more emphasis to student choice than HEI selection
- Study place allocation is based on institutional capacity
- Greater emphasis is being placed on supporting student pathways from first to second year of higher education
- Equitable access is a low priority for HEIs, generally

The admission system from the students' perspective

- High importance of the 'proximity network' for advice
- Students are anxious regarding higher education entry opportunities
- There is a need for more and different support in higher education choices and application
- The GPA system is perceived as unfair, but also transparent
- Location shapes HEI choices for many students



Germany

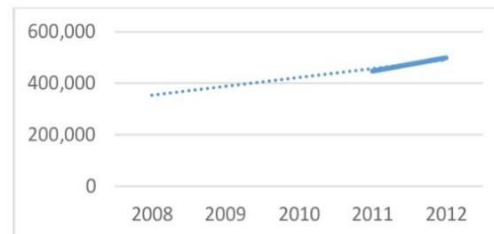
Gross enrolment rate 2014 – *low*

Source: Eurostat, [educ_uae_enrt08]

DE	Q1	Q2	Q3
28.4%	28.4%	33.8%	37.0%

Trend: Number of HE entrants 2008-2013 (ISCED) – *increasing*

Source: Eurostat, [educ_uae_enrt01]



School context: Share of upper secondary school pupils in vocational track schools – *large vocational stream*

Source: Eurostat, [educ_uae_ens04]

	DE	Q1	Q2	Q3
General track	52.2 %	34.3 %	50.8 %	60.4 %
Vocational track	47.8 %	41.5 %	50.0 %	66.0 %

Share of students in Bachelor and short-cycle programmes – *no students in short-cycle programmes*

Source: Eurostat, [educ_uae_enrt01]

	DE	Q1	Q2	Q3
BA programme	100.0 %	78.3 %	90.7 %	98.5 %
Short-cycle programme	0.0 %	1.5 %	9.3 %	21.7 %

Share of students in private (government-independent) HEIs by programme – *low*

Source: Eurostat, [educ_uae_enrt01]

... in private gov. indep. HEIs	DE	Q1	Q2	Q3
... of all tertiary enrolments	n/a	7.7 %	10.2 %	16.3 %
... of all BA enrolments	n/a	7.0 %	11.6 %	17.1 %
... of all short-cycle enrolments	n/a	0.0 %	6.5 %	31.8 %

Percentages of entrants & graduates from low socio-economic (underrepresented) groups, Bachelors 2014, 2011 – *mid-level representation of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, largely in the non-university sector*

Source: EUROSTUDENT V, Basicdata 4.2 & 4.4. Eurostat, EU-SILC ad hoc module on intergenerational transmission of disadvantages.

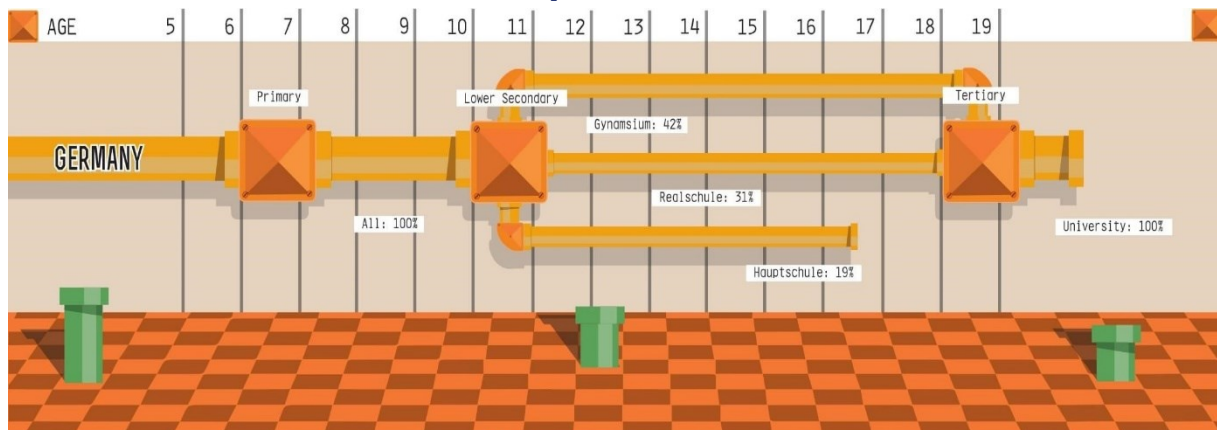
	DE	Q1	Q2	Q3
Share of students whose fathers' highest educational attainment is non-tertiary compared to corresponding male population, 2014	0.54	0.71	0.78	0.83
Share of students whose fathers' highest educational attainment is non-tertiary studying in non-university sector (i.e. UAS), 2014	1.75	1.20	1.48	1.72
Odds ratio for completing tertiary education of young adults* (25-34) whose parents attained tertiary education over young adults (25-34) whose highest educational attainment was non-tertiary education, 2011	2.86	2.47	2.89	3.76

Share of all tertiary graduates by occupational level, 2015 – *mid-level share of graduates in adequate employment (managers, professionals)*

Source: Eurostat, [lfsa_egised]

Occupational position	DE	Q1	Q2	Q3
Managers	8.2%	8.1%	10.1%	12.8%
Professionals	47.5%	45.5%	48.0%	54.7%
Technicians and associate professionals	25.3%	14.5%	18.3%	21.3%
Clerical support workers	6.5%	5.4%	7.0%	8.6%

3.2 Overview of the education system



3.2.1 Schooling

The German education system has a long tradition of separation – even a schism – between academic and vocational education routes, which is still evident today (Rothe, 2008, p. 156), although increasingly vocational routes can also lead to entering higher education. Education is under the jurisdiction of the 16 states (Länder), which leads to a degree of variation, but essentially there are four types of school across the national system:

- *Hauptschule*: provides an adequate general academic education to students with average grades or below; it is being phased out due its low status and in 2016 only accepted 12% of all secondary school pupils.
- *Realschule*: a vocationally orientated school, which only covers lower-secondary schooling. It is the most common entry route to an apprenticeship, but also provides a route to a vocationally-orientated path into higher education – in 2016 it accepted just over 20% of all secondary school pupils.
- *Gymnasium*: the academic track which usually leads students into higher education, in 2016 just over a third of all secondary school pupils were admitted.
- *'Merged schools'*: this growing strand of the secondary education system offers multiple streams, mostly focusing on vocationally-orientated courses. In 2016, it admitted a quarter of all secondary school pupils.

How a pupil is streamed at the end of secondary schooling is based mainly on the pupils' scholastic achievements at primary level and the recommendations of their teachers. In some states, the teacher's recommendation is meant as advice to the parents of a pupil, whilst in others (e.g. Bavaria) it is binding. Research suggests that parents from different socio-economic groups differ in how they view the authority of these recommendations. Parents from low socio-economic groups are more likely to follow the guidance of their children's teachers, while those from higher socio-economic groups will decide more independently and often ignore their child's teacher's recommendation not to attend a *Gymnasium*.⁵ Whilst permeability between the streams exists, it tends only to work downwards, e.g. in a pupil moving down from a *Gymnasium* to a *Realschule* (Bellenberg, G., Hovestadt, G., & Klemm, 2004). For instance, in Bavaria (where the German case study is based) around 3% of students in *Gymnasium* change to the *Realschule* during their educational career.

The importance of the Abitur

Admission to higher education is obtained through two types of qualification:

- **General entitlement** to the whole higher education system through the *Abitur* gained after successful graduation from a *Gymnasium*. If not all subjects are taken (e.g. not a second language), the graduate obtains a subject-limited

entitlement to higher education. Around 77% of graduates of upper-secondary schooling left with this form of entitlement in 2014, a slightly higher share than in 2000. This has led to developments in Germany towards regularising the competency standards tested in this examination (for the core fields of study Maths, German, English and French) following discussions on the comparability of content and marking of examinations. Common education standards (i.e. specifying the competences a pupil should attain) have now been set for these four subject areas.⁶

- **Specific entitlement** to the vocational part of the higher education system (*Fachhochschulreife*) through an alternative qualification, gained after vocational and academic courses at upper-secondary level (e.g. the *Fachoberschule*). This qualification leads to entitlement to access a University of Applied Science (UAS; *Fachhochschulen*). Around 23% of graduates of upper-secondary schooling left with this form of entitlement in 2014, a slightly lower share than in 2000.

Additional routes into higher education have been provided in the last decade in order to give people a second chance of entering higher education (Orr & Hovdhaugen, 2014). These may be through undertaking evening classes to obtain the school exit examination (*Abitur*) or they may be alternative routes, especially routes open to people without the required qualifications, but with vocational training and experience (Nickel & Duong, 2012).⁷ However, even after these new laws and initiatives, only 3% of all entrants to higher education have entered higher education without the *Abitur*, coming predominantly, but not only, from among those enrolled in the UAS sector.⁸

3.2.2 Higher education

As with schooling, higher education is mainly organised and funded regionally through the states (*Länder*). The German higher education system is dominated by the public sector. There are 88 general / technical universities (*Universitäten / Technische Universitäten*) which have the authority to award Ph.D. degrees and a stronger research focus. There are also 104 universities of applied sciences (*Fachhochschulen*) which do not award Ph.D. degrees, and have a stronger focus on teaching and applied research. Academies of the arts (*Kunst- und Musikhochschulen*) and theological colleges (*Philosophisch-theologische Hochschulen*) are usually considered part of the higher education sector. This is also the case for the few separate teacher training colleges (*Pädagogische Hochschulen*).

The higher education sector in Germany has recently been experiencing a period of growth, related both to the increased number of school-leavers with a qualification entitling them to attend higher education and to an increase in those qualified, who actually enter the sector. With around half a million entrants to higher education annually, the number of first year students has grown by 60% since 2000 and 10% since 2010. Most of this growth has occurred in the sector of the UAS (*Fachhochschulen*), which now enrol around 42% of all new entrants (31% in 2000).

There has also been a huge increase in the number of courses offered by the sector. In 2016 there were 18,300 courses to choose from, 7,000 more than in 2005. It should be noted that part of this increase is due to the fact that the Bologna Process led to a division of many courses into two parts – Bachelor and Master.

Of further relevance for the access question is the rise in the number of entrants enrolling in the private sector of higher education. This share has risen from 5% in 2010 to 7% in 2014 and – significantly – this sector has shown itself to be particularly strong in the recruitment of non-traditional students (e.g. those working and studying at the same time or those returning to higher education later in life after having gained vocational experience) gaining around one third of this student group through different access requirements and more flexible study provision. However, it should be noted that for public accreditation of a private HEI's courses, it is necessary for all students to have attained either an *Abitur* (see above) or a qualification deemed similar.⁹

3.2.3 How does the school system determine who becomes a student?

3.2.4 Some streams do not lead to higher education while some streams tend to lead to different types of higher education

Streaming is central to the German schooling system. The stream a pupil is in restricts opportunity to enter higher education directly. However, there is an increasing trend for pupils to change to the academic pathway, to the Abitur, at the age of 16 via a higher vocational route.

Students who obtain the general-education Abitur are legally entitled to study wherever they like. This right can only be restricted if HEIs can prove that they are oversubscribed and the Numerus Clausus (NC) procedure applies.

3.2.5 Grade Point Average (GPA) and Numerus Clausus play a significant role in access to specific study programmes

Higher education expanded in the late 1960s and early 1970s with an increase in the number of school-leavers obtaining the general Abitur. This expansion implied a need to find a way to balance the right to entry given by the Abitur with maintaining the overall quality of HEIs' provision. The Numerus Clausus was introduced to do this and re-balance study programmes which would otherwise be oversubscribed. The NC uses the candidate's Grade Point Average in the Abitur to place them in a ranking list of all candidates for a particular programme of study. HEIs may only use the NC if their study programmes are objectively judged as being oversubscribed according to a national formula, based on the number of staff ascribed to a study programme and the type of teaching and learning settings used (e.g. laboratory work reduces the maximum number of students who can enrol). This formula is largely out of the control of the individual HEI.

The NC procedure works at two levels: nationally and at HEI level and applies to approximately half of all study places. The centralised system applies to four subject areas: human medicine, pharmacy, veterinary studies and dentistry. This procedure creates three 'buckets' of study places: one for the highest Abitur scorers (20%), a second for applicants who have been waiting to enter their higher education programme (20%) and finally a third 'bucket' based on criteria set by individual HEIs. The HEI NC procedure works in a similar way. In almost all cases, psychology is subject to a HEI NC because there are fewer places than would be demanded by applicants.

One problem which HEIs have in the context of local NCs is that they are not allowed to set an NC as a conclusive threshold score (since this must be the empirical result of a ranking of supply and demand) and can therefore rely only on a prediction of how many applicants they will get. In the case of study programmes where the provision of study places does not regularly differ from the number of applicants, applicants apply individually for the programme at their chosen HEI and, if they have passed their Abitur examination, will receive a place. HEIs are only allowed to restrict entry to applicants through aptitude testing, after special authorisation from their respective ministry, which is currently granted rarely (as it contradicts the rights given through the Abitur).

3.2.6 Guidance services are offered through the local Job Centre and integrated into curriculum

Guidance on study pathways is offered through Job Centre advisors, who work with schools to advise on study opportunities and apprenticeships. Schools are not obliged to use this service. Almost all schools have teachers who have undertaken training to provide career and study advice to young people. Every school has at least one school-based advisor.

Bavaria (the German state in which the case study is focused) has integrated so-called P-Seminars into the upper-secondary level of the academic track, which involves group work related to career pathways and may be supported by local HEIs and employers.

3.2.7 The school system does not favour equitable access to higher education

The evidence suggests streaming at the transition point between primary and secondary schools leads to a differentiation in social background within the pupil body qualifying for entry to higher education. These streams usually involve attending different school types. However, recently there has been an increase in multi-stream schools, whereby the disadvantage of early streaming is reduced. The importance of alternative chances of achieving the higher education entry qualification are naturally related to the selectivity of the main stream. In Germany as a whole, around one quarter of holders of an Abitur or equivalent have obtained this outside of the Gymnasium school system. However, in Bavaria, with a much more selective academic stream, 41% of holders of an Abitur or equivalent have obtained it outside a Gymnasium. Many of these pupils are likely to go on to study in the UAS sector.

A separate route into higher education that builds on the vocational routes is being provided, either through adding a new route to Abitur or through recognition of work experience. However, the share of entrants through such routes is below 4%.

3.3 How does the higher education system choose the students that are enrolled?

3.3.1 The policy framework gives more emphasis to student choice than HEI selection

The system restricts the opportunities for HEIs to set their own criteria for choosing applicants, because the holder of an Abitur-examination has the right to study what they want, where they want. The HEIs feel strongly that this limits their chances to select the applicants who best fit their individual profiles. The HEIs are especially critical of the 'bucket' for applicants who obtain their study place in an NC-restricted programme by waiting, since these candidates are permitted to enter highly selective programmes and frequently do not complete their study programme.

For courses with restricted study places, HEIs can set a threshold GPA and further criteria, although the GPA must be the main criterion. Some HEIs include additional weighting of a subject relevant to the study programme. Additional criteria are more difficult to introduce, because in general they must be agreed with the respective state ministry before they are applied.

Private HEIs can be more liberal in their use of the Abitur GPA, where they set a lower threshold and use aptitude testing to select candidates.

Both the German Rectors' Conference and some HEIs are introducing tests of study interest and motivation for applicants to use voluntarily, to help them form their study choices.

3.3.2 Study place allocation is based on institutional capacity

Although the admission system focuses on student choice, HEIs have a relatively low incentive to recruit students actively. Additional student numbers above the HEIs capacity, as measured by the number of teaching staff, cannot be enrolled and filling study places is not strongly incentivised in most of the state grant allocation mechanisms. Labour market demand was not mentioned as a criterion for determining the number of study places.

However, it should be noted that there is a clear link between labour market and study places in a small – but growing – sector of the German higher education system. The so-called dual-study-programmes have adopted the German 'dual principle' from vocational training and applied it to higher education. The graduates gain both an apprenticeship and a Bachelor degree on graduation. Whilst these programmes were endorsed for further development by the German Science Council in 2013, they still account for less than 5% of all students and have a focus on business (43%), engineering (40%) or informatics / computer science (12%) programmes.

3.3.3 Greater emphasis is being placed on supporting student pathways from first to second year of higher education

HEIs have been giving attention to providing summer schools and additional support to students who need to improve their basic knowledge of subjects such as mathematics. Additionally, HEIs have been initiating activities to support students at the start of their studies, encouraging more teamwork and connections between students and providing mentors from students who are already in their second or third year of studies. Many of these initiatives are supported through funding from a Federal programme that aims to improve the quality of teaching and learning (Quality Pact for Teaching).

3.3.4 Equitable access is a low priority for HEIs

Whilst HEI leaders considered equity to be an important task, there was little active outreach into the community to recruit under-represented groups. There is one state-level quota for UAS (in Bavaria) to recruit their students from the higher vocational stream in the upper-secondary school system.

3.4 How do young people make choices regarding higher education?

3.4.1 High importance of the proximity network for advice¹⁰

The proximity network of parents, family members, friends and teachers shapes study decisions. This process works in a heterogeneous way differing between / within groups, with different weight being given especially to the role of parents / family members.

"My sister studies Environmental Engineering at an [other HEI], and she inspired me to do something similar." First year student at [HEI]

"The role model of my father, who is a mechanical engineer" First year student at [HEI]

"I am not decided yet, but I talk to friends about it. I take my own decision, but I receive inspiration from them." Final year student at [higher vocational school leading to higher education entry]

However, it is important to note that not all students can access a knowledgeable proximity network. Students at a university of applied science reported that they had experienced some pressure to study at universities from parents and for them universities of applied sciences seem not to be particularly attractive. They were perceived as of lower status and of inferior quality.

Pupils and students graduating from the higher vocational track seem to be more self-assured and conscious about their study-related decisions than those from the academic track. This may be because these students have had to make a number of decisions along their educational pathway and to decide specifically to continue their educational career through higher education.

3.4.2 Students are anxious regarding higher education entry opportunities

Pupils reported an anxiety about passing their Abitur and achieving sufficient marks to be able to study what they wanted. They said that it was hard to find a balance between focusing on achieving good scores in their exams and planning their future (educational) career.

3.4.3 A need for more and different support in higher education choices and application

Students think that schools should play a much more active role in informing students on study opportunities and should offer many more opportunities for the Job Centre to inform on different fields¹¹. They felt such information should come when students are actually ready for it, that is not before grade 12 and 13, but then several times per year, and be field-specific. Pure information should be complemented by accounts of first-hand experience from young people currently studying.

It was felt that advice coming from the Job Centre advisors was too infrequent and not focused enough on individual needs.

"90 minutes are not enough to present about 60,000 degree programmes. Experts from the Job Centre would need to come much more often and with information related to specific fields." Final year student at [higher vocational school leading to higher education entry]

"When the person from the Job Centre was there, we were offered one-to-one interviews. However, we did not get any further appointments. My impression was that there were too many pupils and too little capacity." Final year student at [higher vocational school leading to higher education entry]

It was suggested that information could be provided in a different way with a greater role for schools and higher education students:

"The admission system is good. The study possibilities are very good. But the fact that I felt well-informed is only because I knew exactly what I wanted to study." First year student at [HEI]

"Training courses should be offered on 'how to apply to higher education institutions'. When I had to write application letters to HEIs, I had no idea how to do it." Final year student at [higher vocational school leading to higher education entry]

"Schools should provide the framework for better information. They should not only invite the Job Centre, but also students who tell us what studying is really like." Final year student at [higher vocational school leading to higher education entry]

Some students expressed confusion regarding the information online about how to apply for their study programme, despite recognising that a lot of information was available. They complained of information-overload and about the very formal style of the information provided.

"There is too much dispersed information." First year student at [HEI]

"It is boring as the bible." Final year student at [higher vocational school leading to higher education entry]

"The descriptions (of the NC) on how to get to HEI are written in a very complicated way, it is unclear when and where one has to send in which part of the application, it is demanding to translate this into German." Final year student at [higher vocational school leading to higher education entry]

3.4.4 The GPA system is perceived as unfair, but also transparent

Students were caught in a dilemma in their overall assessment of the admission system. Many argued that the current system based on Abitur GPA was unfair and should be linked more closely to the programme a student wishes to study. However, it was also argued that the simplicity of the system was a strength.

"The GPA does not tell much about the real achievement or interest; an alternative are tests or interviews." Final year student at [higher vocational school leading to higher education entry]

"I am in favour of not giving that much importance to grades but looking at talent, for example some have bad grades in math, this is not that important when studying social work. Talent and interest should be given more weight. Grades should be weighted by relevance for the programme in question." Final year student at [higher vocational school leading to higher education entry]

3.4.5 Location shapes HEI choices

Students appear to focus on location as a more important criterion of choice than the actual profile of individual HEIs. Most students had a clear preference for studying close to where they live. Those few students who wanted to study in another region of their home country were the exception. The reasons they wanted to leave were either related to family problems and the wish to create some distance from the family, a strong

dedication to a certain degree programme and the ensuing willingness to go far away to realise the dream, or a specific interest in a certain town.

3.5 Appendix: Interviews and focus groups

- Interview with official responsible for guidance provision to pupils in the secondary school system in [city in Bavaria] and region
- Interview with senior official at national application centre on the operation of the admission system and the significance of the Numerus Clausus procedure
- Interview with senior official working at Conference of Education Ministers (Kultusministerkonferenz)
- Interview with senior official working at German Rectors' Conference (Hochschulrektorenkonferenz)
- Interview with vice-president for teaching and study programmes, high-prestige inner-city university in [city in Bavaria]
- Interview with vice-president for teaching and study programmes at inner-city university of applied science in [city in Bavaria]
- Interview with vice-president for finances at private inner-city university in [city in state of Berlin]
- Focus Group 1: First year students in university in [city in Bavaria]
- Focus Group 2: First year students in UAS in [city in Bavaria]
- Focus Group 3: Final year students in higher vocational track upper secondary school, academic stream in [city in Bavaria]
- Focus Group 4: Final year students in private academic-stream Gymnasium in [city in Bavaria]

4 Ireland

4.1 Key insights

The education system

- Ireland has a high enrolment rate in higher education, with more growth expected in the future
- Pupils are not divided into a general and vocational track in secondary schooling.
- There is negligible private higher education in Ireland
- There is a high representation of students from low socio-economic backgrounds in Irish higher education, especially in the non-university sector

On the transition from schooling to higher education

- There is no streaming in Ireland
- The Leaving Certificate is central to higher education entry

The role of higher education institutions in admission

- HEIs have a high degree of autonomy
- A significant commitment to equitable access exists throughout the system
- The grade points system reinforces institutional hierarchies, as high points requirement is seen as high status

The admission system from the students' perspective

- Students understand how to apply
- The Leaving Certificate and points system exert significant pressure
- No clear support for alternative admission methods on the part of the students
- Socio-economic background continues to frame choices
- Information, advice and guidance provision is still not supporting choice-making



Ireland

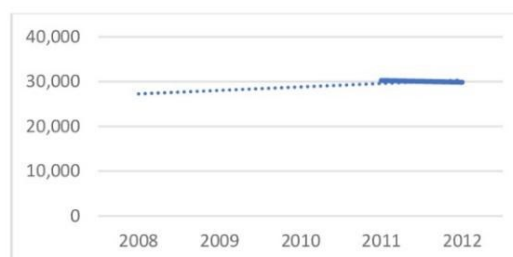
Gross enrolment rate 2014 – *high*

Source: Eurostat, [educ_uae_enrt08]

IE	Q1	Q2	Q3
36.9%	28.4%	33.8%	37.0%

Trend: Number of HE entrants 2008-2013 (ISCED) – *increasing slightly*

Source: Eurostat, [educ_uae_enrt01]



School context: Share of upper secondary school pupils in vocational track schools – *no vocational stream*

Source: Eurostat, [educ_uae_enrs04]

	IE	Q1	Q2	Q3
General track	100.0%	34.3%	50.8%	60.4%
Vocational track	0%	41.5%	50.0%	66.0%

Share of students in Bachelor and short-cycle programmes – mid-level share of students in short-cycle programmes

Source: Eurostat, [educ_uae_enrt01]

	IE	Q1	Q2	Q3
BA programme	89.6%	78.3%	90.7%	98.5%
Short-cycle programme	10.4%	1.5%	9.3%	21.7%

Share of students in private (government-independent) HEIs by programme – *no enrolment in private HEIs*

Source: Eurostat, [educ_uae_enrt01]

... in private gov. indep. HEIs	IE	Q1	Q2	Q3
... of all tertiary enrolments	0.0%	7.7%	10.2%	16.3%
... of all BA enrolments	0.0%	7.0%	11.6%	17.1%
... of all short-cycle enrolments	0.0%	0.0%	6.5%	31.8%

Percentages of entrants & graduates from low socio-economic (underrepresented) groups, Bachelors 2014, 2011 – *high representation of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, both in the university and non-university sector*

Source: EUROSTUDENT V, Basicdata 4.2 & 4.4. Eurostat, EU-SILC ad hoc module on intergenerational transmission of disadvantages.

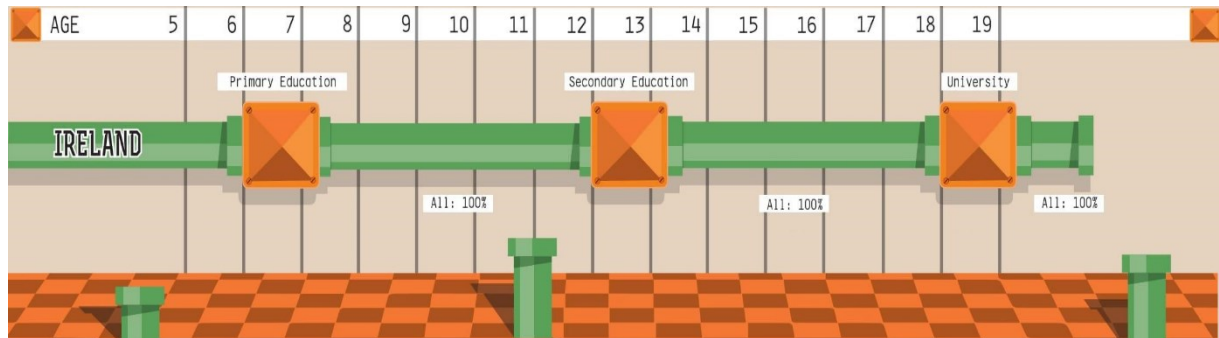
	IE	Q1	Q2	Q3
Share of students whose fathers' highest educational attainment is non-tertiary compared to corresponding male population, 2014	0.87	0.71	0.78	0.83
Share of students whose fathers' highest educational attainment is non-tertiary studying in non-university sector (i.e. UAS), 2014	1.83	1.20	1.48	1.72
Odds ratio for completing tertiary education of young adults* (25-34) whose parents attained tertiary education over young adults (25-34) whose highest educational attainment was non-tertiary education, 2011	3.83	2.47	2.89	3.76

Share of all tertiary graduates by occupational level, 2015 – *high share of graduates in adequate employment (managers, professionals)*

Source: Eurostat, [lfsa_egised]

Occupational position	IE	Q1	Q2	Q3
Managers	10.0%	8.1%	10.1%	12.8%
Professionals	42.1%	45.5%	48.0%	54.7%
Technicians and associate professionals	14.5%	14.5%	18.3%	21.3%
Clerical support workers	9.3%	5.4%	7.0%	8.6%

4.2 Overview of the education system



4.2.1 Schooling

The vast majority of schools are state-funded, privately owned 'all-through' schools, catering for pupils from 4 to 12 years of age. Pupils transfer to second level school when they have completed the full first level course – generally at about 12 years of age. The second level education sector comprises secondary, vocational, community and comprehensive schools. Secondary schools are owned and managed by religious communities or private organisations. The state funds 90% of teachers' salaries and 95% of other costs. Vocational schools are owned and managed by Education and Training Boards with 93% of their costs met by the state. Comprehensive / community schools were established in the 1960s, often by amalgamating voluntary secondary and vocational schools. They are fully funded by the state and run by local boards of management.

These schools have a great deal in common in terms of curriculum and follow the same state prescribed curriculum and take the same state public examinations. The secondary level school span is predominantly a six-year cycle, taken by ages 12 to 18. The terminology of lower-secondary and upper-secondary education is not used in Ireland, but the terms Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle are commonly used.

4.2.2 Admission to higher education

Most students sit the Junior Certificate after three years and will then spend two or three years in senior cycle before sitting the Leaving Certificate examination. In senior cycle, students study six or more subjects, which usually include English, Irish and mathematics. All subjects are offered at ordinary and higher levels and in addition, mathematics and Irish are offered at foundation level. Around 40 subjects are available, including a wide range of European and non-European languages, science, business and practical subjects.

The Leaving Certificate Examination results are converted into points via a set points scale. These points are then used to allocate places to applicants when demand for places exceeds the number of places available (which is the case for most courses). The scales which underpin the translation of grades to points in the Leaving Certificate have recently been changed to reduce the number of candidates who have the same number of points after their Leaving Certificate. When candidates have the same number of points, they are selected for courses randomly.

The system, which is commonly referred to as the points system, is administered by the Central Applications Office (CAO) which is a limited company set up by HEIs in the Republic of Ireland as an administrative mechanism for dealing with applications and admissions.

4.2.3 Higher education

Higher education in Ireland is provided mainly by:

- 7 Universities

- 14 Institutes of Technology, including the Dublin Institute of Technology
- 7 Colleges of Education

In addition, several what are described in Ireland as third level (or tertiary) HEIs provide specialist education in such fields as art and design, medicine, business studies, rural development, theology, music and law.

HEIs in Ireland are autonomous from government. This does not mean that the government cannot influence what HEIs do via policy decisions, but they do not directly manage or run these organisations. Higher education and research in Ireland is led via a statutory planning and development body called the Higher Education Authority (HEA). The HEA has wide advisory powers throughout the whole of the higher education sector. It is the funding authority for the universities, institutes of technology and other designated HEIs. The HEA sits between the government and the higher education providers.

The commitment to equity

There is a significant policy commitment to equity in higher education in Ireland, with a National Plan for Equity of Access in Higher Education from 2015-2019 which includes targets for the number of students from unskilled backgrounds entering higher education to increase from 23% to 30% by 2019 and the number from semi-skilled backgrounds to increase from 25 to 30% by 2019.

In Ireland around half the younger students who enter higher education from lower socio-economic backgrounds do so through a specific application route for such learners, called the Higher Education Access Route (HEAR).

"HEAR are HEI and university admission schemes which offer places at reduced points and extra college supports to school leavers from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds who are resident in the Republic of Ireland." (<http://accesscollege.ie/>)

Eligibility for HEAR can be through quite a complex combination of markers of socio-economic disadvantage that include income, parental occupation and welfare payments.

4.3 How does the school system determine who becomes a student?

4.3.1 There is no streaming in Ireland

The Irish system, while divided into different type of schooling, does not have any types of schooling that close off routes to higher education for young people. While not all young people attend schools which give them the same chance of entering higher education, it is not the structure of the system which differentiates their opportunities, but rather the nature of their social background, and that of the pupils in their school.

4.3.2 The Leaving Certificate is central to higher education entry

The schooling system may not stream pupils, but it does exert a huge influence on who become students by virtue of the pivotal role played by the Leaving Certificate. This acts as the key instrument in sorting students between courses and HEIs. Performance in the examination is the sole determinant of higher education entry for virtually all students. It also shapes students' perceptions regarding which courses or HEIs they should enter, as accumulating points becomes the key concern above anything else:

"The points system shaped student decision-making, with students becoming 'mini-economists' and experts on points and how to calculate them." Representative of State Examination Commission

It is clear, in the view of the examinations authority, that the purpose of the Leaving Certificate is clearly defined and related primarily to schooling and not higher education entry.

"The Leaving Certificate is an assessment of what people do in school, it is not a mechanism to admit students to higher education." Representative of State Examination Commission

4.4 How does the higher education system choose the students that are enrolled?

4.4.1 HEIs have a high degree of autonomy

From the Irish policymakers' perspective, the HEIs have considerable autonomy in who they admit to their courses. While they have to work within the points based system, how they operate within that system is at their own discretion.

As the Department of Education stated: "*The position is that entry requirements for admission to HEIs in Ireland are determined by the institutions themselves, as they are legally autonomous and academically independent.*"

However, from the point of view of at least one HEI, the situation is better described as 'quasi-autonomous' where the government does try and influence student demand and supply via money and dialogue. For example, there was a premium available to this HEI for recruiting science students.

In this HEI, there is also a commitment to admitting older, mature students via direct application to the institution, with the HEI making a decision on admission considering their previous labour market and educational experiences.

4.4.2 A significant commitment to equitable access exists throughout the system

The HEAR programme has been described above. It reflects the extent to which the government is attempting to support increased progression to higher education for those from lower socio-economic groups and influence HEIs and their commitment to equitable access. There is clear evidence that this commitment exists beyond the HEAR programme, and there is also a view that while HEAR is an important and valuable asset, it can, to an extent, have a negative impact since it places parameters around equitable access work, preventing it from becoming a mainstream commitment of the HEI. In at least one of the HEIs, there was evidence that those focused on issues of equitable access were working to try and embed this commitment into the structure and culture of the HEI through policy and action. For the most selective HEIs, engagement with the HEAR and DARE programmes is only one part of a multi-faceted strategy to widen access to these institutions. They are also undertaking (and funding themselves):

- Specific agreements with Further Education Colleges and Schools that offer significant numbers of students, by which these institutions require lower entrance points
- Specific training for teachers in schools on supporting progression to higher education
- Mentoring support from the students at the HEI for learners aged 14-17 to help them achieve higher grades in schooling
- Support from students at the HEI in offering a decoding role to enable those coming into the institution from lower income backgrounds to achieve their potential.

However, while this commitment exists, it has to be earned by those in the institution who are committed to the goal of equitable access. It doesn't happen automatically, but is the product of long term efforts to create internal coalitions of support for this goal and involves continual lobbying against the view that widening access reduces academic quality.

Through the HEAR and DARE programmes in particular there is also continued support for those from lower socio-economic backgrounds and for those with disabilities when they enter higher education. This support is focused on the first year of study and involves a range of services including extra tuition, and personalised advice.

4.4.3 The grade points system reinforces institutional hierarchies

HEIs decide how many places to offer for particular courses by balancing its academic capacity, and its perception of student demand. However, the desire to create hierarchy can shape this strategic decision making.

"We have a situation here where the number of applicants overall is greatly exceeding the number of places. This is allowing institutions to drive up the points requirements and perpetuates the myth that high points equal high status." Large HEI operating in Dublin

Not all HEIs see the excess demand for higher education and the points system as an opportunity to advance themselves up an institutional ladder. There is evidence that some HEIs see this as an unethical move and would rather not look to advance their own interests through the points system. However, HEIs as argued earlier have limited flexibility, thus even the alleged manipulation described below occurs within given parameters.

"Most HEIs manipulate intake numbers to keep points high for symbolic, competitive reasons. We have tried to move against that." Growing HEI outside Dublin

There was a criticism of the current large number of course options available to students in Ireland, in what is a very small system.

"This approach does not reflect genuine differences in what students want to study, but aims to maintain positions in a hierarchy. We take a different approach here in the humanities, where all students were accepted to one generic first year course and then selected different study options after year 1." Growing HEI outside Dublin

4.5 How do young people make choices regarding higher education?

4.5.1 Students understand how to apply

From the student perspective, the major advantage of the Irish admission system is that it is relatively easy to understand by virtue of the system's reliance on the points system. The system is transparent and appears to be well understood by all those in the focus groups. There is also a level of choice in the subjects students can take at the Leaving Certificate level which allows them to match better against their abilities.

4.5.2 The Leaving Certificate and points system exert significant pressure

There was a very strong view amongst the students that the design of the Leaving Certificate could be improved. It was felt that what was described as 'Backwash' was occurring i.e. the content and learning of the final years in schooling were excessively focussed on the entry requirements for higher education.

"It is all exam, exam, just one long lesson on exam practice." Large HEI outside Dublin)

This distortion is combined with excessive pressure on students to achieve at what is perceived as the pivotal point in their lives. This pressure associated with the Leaving Certificate was a common theme running through all the focus groups and the interviews with key stakeholders. It is a point of significant concern within the Irish education system.

"My friend became quite ill with the pressure and some time later had not recovered." Pre-higher education student at lower entry school

The pressure was exacerbated by the attitudes of teachers who, while no doubt only were trying to motivate their students, just added to the problem.

"My teacher said that this exam would define the rest of my life and was the most important thing I would ever do." Large HEI outside of Dublin

"It is a really important point in our lives and we are constantly told this, the teachers think that we have to go well otherwise the school looks bad." Pre-higher education students at lower entry school

Finally, in common with the majority of other case study countries, several students saw a disjuncture between what they were expected to study in their school leaving examination and their preferred higher education courses. The Irish system via the Leaving Certificate involves the students undertaking a range of courses, most of which they will not pursue in higher education.

"I think it was very difficult for me. I studied very hard to obtain my language qualifications and I do think why? I am doing nursing and the skills I need are just not in the exam. I am not sure this system is fair or efficient." Large HEI outside Dublin

4.5.3 No clear support for alternative admission methods

While there was ample evidence of the frustration that students felt regarding the Leaving Certificate examination and the points system, there was no clear support for alternative entry methods. There was also an awareness of the disadvantages that such alternative methods would bring. There was a view that in Ireland as a relatively small country, other forms of admission tools such as interviews would be subject to manipulative pressure from parents, who may for example be associated with the particular HEI, lobbying on behalf of family members or children of friends. The evidence of such practices is clearly hard to obtain but the perception appears real. The transparency of the present system was greatly valued, even if the points system as such was not.

"If you had another system it would be biased and unfair." Pre-higher education student at lower entry school

"It is anonymous and this eliminates bias which I think is fair." Pre-higher education student at lower entry school

And as can be seen below, despite the clear recognition that the examination may be forcing students into making choices they do not want to make, the alternative (or the alternative that the students understand as being the use of interviews) is seen as less desirable.

"The system is stressful as it can force you to take subjects at school that you may even be struggling in because you need the points but I would not like interviews and they also mean that your future is decided on what happens in one day." Student at research intensive HEI

4.5.4 Socio-economic background frames choices

It was argued that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are placed at a disadvantage by the Irish system where higher education progression is concerned. One example of how such differences in opportunity manifest themselves is through the use of private tuition, paid for by parents. Such private tuition referred to as 'grinds' is widespread in Ireland amongst higher socio-economic groups. It is used to assist in achieving the best points score possible. It is also another example of the points system actually exacerbating divisions between social groups.

"Lots of people do grinds to help them do better in the big examination." Pre-higher education student at lower entry school

"I think the points system is unfair. If your parents are rich, you can get grinds and significantly increase your points." Pre-higher education student at lower entry school

As outlined in the previous section however, there are specific policies and practices in place such as HEAR, which aim to support those from lower socio-economic groups to enter higher education. Several students pointed to the importance of these programmes in enabling them to enter higher education. It is clear that there was evidence within this small study of the impact and benefits of this form of work.

"I would not have been able to go to uni without HEAR – the extra financial support was what made it possible." Higher education student at large HEI outside Dublin

4.5.5 IAG provision is not supporting choice-making

The students across all the focus groups were generally critical of the support they received from careers advisors. The advice offered was not systematic and regular. There was a view that careers advisors lacked knowledge of higher education and different HEIs and that such support was relegated in terms of importance in favour of preparation for the Leaving Certificate. However, there were also examples of the possibly beneficial impact of conversations with individual teachers.

"I saw a careers advisor once for 10 minutes. He told me to look at some books on what I wanted to do in the future. So, it was no good really." Higher education student at large HEI outside Dublin

"My history teacher in secondary school was very encouraging – this helped me make the decision." Higher education student at research intensive HEI

4.6 Appendix: Interviews and focus groups

- Interview 1: Research Intensive HEI
- Interview 2: Large HEI operating in Dublin
- Interview 3: HEI outside Dublin
- Interview 4: Growing HEI outside Dublin
- Interview 5: Vocationally orientated HEI
- Interview with representative of Higher Education Authority
- Interview with representative of the Department of Education
- Interview with representative of the Central Applications Authority
- Focus Group 1: Pre-higher education students at higher entry school
- Focus group 2: Pre-higher education students at lower entry school
- Focus Group 3: Research Intensive HEI
- Focus Group 4: Large HEI outside Dublin

5 Lithuania

5.1 Key insights

The education system

- Lithuania has a high enrolment rate in higher education, with significant declines in numbers due to demographics
- Pupils are not divided into a general and vocational track in secondary schooling.
- There is mid-level private higher education provision in Lithuania
- There is a low representation of students from low socio-economic backgrounds, but high share comparatively in the non-university sector

On the transition from schooling to higher education

- The school exit exam is shaping schooling
- Streaming exists, but all routes can lead to a higher education entrance qualification
- Information and guidance is provided at school level

The role of higher education institutions in admission

- The admission system is simultaneously centralised and decentralised due to the existence of state-funded and self-funded study places
- Funding and incentives for programme provision are primarily based on student choice
- HEIs question whether supporting equity is their responsibility

The admission system from the students' perspective

- Study choice is the result of own favourites and advice from family
- Students are anxious regarding their opportunities to study
- The influence of cost is significant
- Students argue that admission criteria should be more holistic



Lithuania

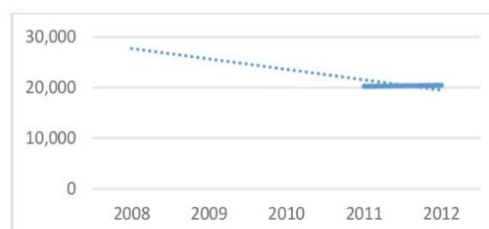
Gross enrolment rate 2014 – *high*

Source: Eurostat, [educ_uae_enrt08]

LT	Q1	Q2	Q3
41.1%	28.4%	33.8%	37.0%

Trend: Number of HE entrants 2008-2013 (ISCED) – *decreasing*

Source: Eurostat, [educ_uae_enrt01]



School context: Share of upper secondary school pupils in vocational track schools – *large vocational stream*

Source: Eurostat, [educ_uae_enrs04]

	LT	Q1	Q2	Q3
General track	73.3 %	34.3 %	50.8 %	60.4 %
Vocational track	26.7 %	41.5 %	50.0 %	66.0 %

Share of students in Bachelor and short-cycle programmes – *n/a*

Source: Eurostat, [educ_uae_enrt01]

	LT	Q1	Q2	Q3
BA programme	n/a	78.3 %	90.7 %	98.5 %
Short-cycle programme	n/a	1.5%	9.3%	21.7 %

Share of students in private (government-independent) HEIs by programme – *mid-level*

Source: Eurostat, [educ_uae_enrt01]

... in private gov. indep. HEIs	LT	Q1	Q2	Q3
... of all tertiary enrolments	10.2 %	7.7 %	10.2 %	16.3 %
... of all BA enrolments	12.0 %	7.0 %	11.6 %	17.1 %
... of all short-cycle enrolments	n/a	0.0 %	6.5 %	31.8 %

Percentages of entrants & graduates from low socio-economic (underrepresented) groups, Bachelors 2014, 2011 – *n/a for university sector, largely in the non-university sector*

Source: EUROSTUDENT V, Basicdata 4.2 & 4.4. Eurostat, EU-SILC ad hoc module on intergenerational transmission of disadvantages.

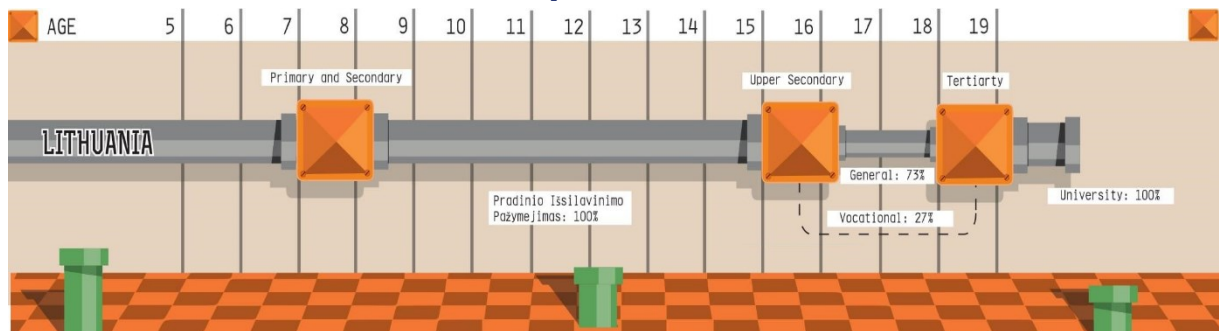
	LT	Q1	Q2	Q3
Share of students whose fathers' highest educational attainment is non-tertiary compared to corresponding male population, 2014	n/a	0.71	0.78	0.83
Share of students whose fathers' highest educational attainment is non-tertiary studying in non-university sector (i.e. UAS), 2014	3.46	1.20	1.48	1.72
Odds ratio for completing tertiary education of young adults* (25-34) whose parents attained tertiary education over young adults (25-34) whose highest educational attainment was non-tertiary education, 2011	2.84	2.47	2.89	3.76

Share of all tertiary graduates by occupational level, 2015 – *high share of graduates in adequate employment (managers, professionals)*

Source: Eurostat, [lfsa_egised]

Occupational position	LT	Q1	Q2	Q3
Managers	16.0%	8.1%	10.1%	12.8%
Professionals	48.0%	45.5%	48.0%	54.7%
Technicians and associate professionals	12.7%	14.5%	18.3%	21.3%
Clerical support workers	5.0%	5.4%	7.0%	8.6%

5.2 Overview of the education system



5.2.1 Schooling

In Lithuania the lower-secondary education curriculum is delivered at ages 11-17, and the one for upper-secondary education at 17-19. Lower-secondary schooling consists of a four-year basic education phase. In the second phase of lower-secondary, at 14 or 15 years of age, there is the option to pursue modules of vocational training programmes.

The *Matura* certificate is awarded to pupils who have completed the secondary education programme and have passed the Matura examinations. In order to obtain a Matura certificate, a pupil must pass at least two Matura examinations (except for cases when a candidate is exempted from the selected Matura examination by order of the head of the school). One of these is mandatory – Lithuanian language and literature. The type of exam – national or school – is chosen by the pupil (and depends on the higher education sector they want to enter – university or university of applied sciences – and if they want to apply for state-funded places). In addition to the Lithuanian language and literature exams, pupils have to pass a foreign language exam (English, German or French) at least at level B1. From 2016, a pupil willing to apply for a state-funded study place has to pass the mathematics Matura examination (entrants to arts studies are exempt from this requirement).

5.2.2 Higher education

The higher education system is divided into universities and colleges. Colleges award *profesinis bakalauros* (Professional Bachelor) degree, while *bakalauro diplomas* (Bachelor Diploma) is awarded in universities. Students can apply to individual HEIs for entry whether they are applying to universities or universities of applied sciences. Additionally, students can apply to the national body for entry to most universities and some colleges, i.e. those which have joined the Association of Higher Education Institutions in Lithuania that seeks to organise and coordinate common admission procedures (<http://www.lamabpo.lt>).

5.3 How does the school system determine who becomes a student?

5.3.1 The importance of the school exit examination and 'backwash'

The examination system has undergone significant changes in the last 20 years. The exams were centralised in 1999 to prevent corruption and provide a more objective measure for deciding on entrance to higher education. Previously, HEIs had used entrance exams or similar. This single-channel system is seen as beneficial for students, as they can graduate school and enter higher education with the same exam.

However, national exams leading to the Matura are having a potentially negative impact on the school system, as there is too much focus on the learning of discrete knowledge to pass exams. Whilst this may facilitate higher education entry, it may also be to the detriment of the learning experience of young people.

"Our teachers say in every lesson 'what are you doing here, you will be passing exams soon'. They tried to push us through with fear. I don't know what they were thinking; maybe they thought that if we would be afraid, we would make more efforts to study?" First year student at [City] University of Applied Sciences

"If your learning is based on looking at past exams but you don't train your thinking, you don't develop problem-solving strategies. This is not the way to accomplish tasks and you will not be able to solve more problematic questions." Official, National Examination Centre

A new focus on learning strategies has led to problem-solving tasks being more and more integrated into the examination system. However, there is a lack of teaching capacity at school level to prepare students for such tasks.

"There is a lack of investment so teachers do not have the opportunity to bring into their classes more questions of problem-solving. We have a situation where teachers are told 'do-it-yourself', but not everyone has abilities to do so." Official, National Examination Centre

All school students (traditional and non-traditional) have to pass the same state exams. However, students with special needs get adapted versions of the examination (depending on their disabilities). A level of preferential treatment in the marking of examinations is given to students from ethnic minority groups to reflect the fact that Lithuanian may not be their primary language.

5.3.2 Streaming exists, but all routes can lead to a higher education entrance qualification

Streaming occurs in the Lithuanian education system at the age of 14, after lower-secondary schooling. Following an examination at the end of lower-secondary school, which does not determine the future educational track, students can continue in vocational or academic streams. While this form of streaming does not in practice necessarily lead to the students being precluded from entering higher education, it reduces the chances of learners from vocational schools entering higher education.

"Basically, in our system, so far as access to higher education is concerned, the school type or profile doesn't matter. The point is that a student who wants to enter higher education has to fulfil the same conditions. A student who wishes to pursue higher education must have completed secondary education and [in order to be eligible for state funding] has to pass state exams, depending on what he is going to study. The fact is, if you graduated with an honorary note from a vocational school then you have a certain privilege to enter higher education, then it is easier." Official, Ministry of Education and Science

In Lithuania there are issues with regards to divisions in prestige and social background between academic and vocational tracks. Students from lower socio-economic groups and with special needs tend to enter the vocational track which is viewed as of lower status. Students in the vocational track obtain lower Matura scores than their counterparts in Gymnasiums; this decreases their study opportunities (although there are some preferential arrangements for students who apply for a study programme in higher education in the same field). There is a drive from the government to change the perception of vocational education and thus potentially the numbers entering higher education.

"Public opinion campaigns and improvements in infrastructure have aimed to increase the prestige of professional schools. But in Lithuania, higher education is still occupying the leading position, and the prestige of vocational education is still lower than that of higher education. In most cases at the end of secondary education, children tend to link their lives with higher education. We are not very satisfied with that. Therefore, we naturally try to orientate children towards vocational schools as early as possible." Official, Ministry of Education and Science

5.3.3 Information and guidance at school level

Professional guidance specialists at schools help students choose the appropriate training and employment opportunities and to plan their future work career. At school, there is a specialist responsible for providing information, advice and guidance to pupils. For those who do not study and / or do not work (and are under the age of 21), such professional information, advice and guidance services are provided through cooperative work between municipalities, educational, labour market and other agencies.

5.4 How does the higher education system choose the students that are enrolled?

5.4.1 The admission system is simultaneously centralised and decentralised

There are four modes of entry into higher education: state-funded places, places that are not funded by the state, but where students receive scholarships, targeted funding and paid places (not regulated by the state).

Students wanting to receive a state-funded place must apply via the National application processing centre (LAMA BPO). Students wishing to enrol in self-funded places can apply through the central system or directly to the HEI. Approximately 80% of students enter through the centralised admission system LAMA BPO, the rest enter via institutional admission processes.

The volume of places and study fields funded by the state has been largely calculated by the government on the basis of tradition:

"Everyone knows that it was basically determined by tradition, because other information was unsystematic. The problem [with an alternative method] has always been that you need to have some sort of analysis of the graduates' careers and their situation on the labour market. This [analysis] has started only two years ago, after long discussions, with the introduction of the pilot project by the Research and Higher Education Monitoring and Analysis Centre (MOSTA)." Official, Ministry of Education and Science

While the introduction of work to better understand the skill needs of the Lithuanian economy implies a move away from tradition, there is also some scepticism about the viability of really being able to understand such needs in a small economy like that of Lithuania.

"But, in my personal opinion, for a country like Lithuania and for other similar-sized countries, making long-term forecasts of the demand for graduates from particular fields is unrealistic." Official, Ministry of Education and Science

5.4.2 Regulation of enrolments – funding and incentives based primarily on student choice

Students bring state funding with them to the HEI they have chosen. This system was introduced to increase competition between HEIs. However, some HEIs criticise this approach:

"The voucher system (money follows the student), which is prevalent now, has increased the competition very sharply. It has encouraged institutions to compete in ways that harm higher education quality: to excessively increase the number of study programmes and to over-concentrate on making their names sound attractive." Head of admission office, [City] University

Funding received for a study place in a particular programme cannot be re-distributed by the HEI to cross-subsidise other programmes. HEIs criticise this as limiting their financial autonomy. For self-funded places, HEIs may enrol as many applicants who have passed a Matura as they see fit.

"We accept everyone to HEIs. If you have money, you will be admitted. It does not matter if you can't cope with the studies. It is the fault of HEIs that the [quality of the]

system of general education has declined. Everyone knows they will be able to study in HEIs, no matter if they do or do not learn [at school]. If they don't, their fathers will find the money and pay for the studies." Official, Ministry of Education and Science

Changes in the total number of applicants for study places due to demographics and the reform of the Matura requirements can result in HEIs closing courses. If they do not want to do this, they further lower the score requirements for entering their courses. Finally, there are concerns that the admission system does not help to balance skill supply and demand in the labour market:

"The admission system is not compatible with the labour market. The admission system should match the demand of the labour market in the sense that distribution of state-funded places should be based on information about both recent admissions and graduate employability. Then, having that information, the students who pay tuition fees themselves [will] be able to better decide whether it's worth investing money in different courses." Official, Ministry of Education and Science

The total number of students to be admitted is determined by HEIs. In some cases, the lack of state regulation has caused problems: for example, there are too many people paying for courses in social sciences, because those are considered relatively low cost and less challenging.

"In the past, the best students applied for social sciences, now the worst ones do. I think now, to the detriment of social sciences, we have a misbalanced situation. The requirements for entrants should be raised. However, too sizable decrease in the state-funded places for those willing to study social sciences could destroy the entire field." Official at national application processing centre

5.4.3 Supporting equity – the responsibility of HEIs?

There is a tension in the Lithuanian higher education system, since study-readiness for higher education is measured through the Matura. There are therefore discussions on what type of skills and competencies it should be assessing (see section on school system above). The focus of improving equity in higher education access is consequentially on how to assure that pupils from different schools and different backgrounds do well in this examination. Supporting inclusiveness is seen to a lesser extent as a role of HEIs. On the policy level, although there may be sympathy for being inclusive, scholastic merit is seen as the most appropriate criteria for allocating these study places. It is recognised by policy-makers that there is also a need to improve the financial support for students from low-income backgrounds:

"The support system for such disadvantaged students should be refined. The support allowance has already been increased once recently and with a new government in place, maybe we will succeed in increasing it a little again. The support from this fund should really be increased. So far we have only managed to increase the payments by 10 percent and after the election we will try to convince the government to increase it by 10 percent more." Official, Ministry of Education and Science

Despite the criticism that the school exit examinations are not perfect for selecting study-ready students, the provision of preparatory courses by HEIs seems to be an underdeveloped area. A national career management system has been developed and, whilst participation of HEIs is currently voluntary, it will be made obligatory in an amendment to the law.

5.5 How do young people make choices regarding higher education?

5.5.1 Choice is a product of own favourites and advice from family

Study choices were influenced by a mix of career aspirations, hobbies and subject interests and the view that higher education would lead to a better job. Young people argued that the most important thing is to choose the subject one really likes, because this choice will affect the professional career that a person will have to continue for

many years. Choices were also shaped by the proximity network i.e. parents, other family members, friends and teachers. A problem noted with this was that such advice was influenced by people's assessment of the labour market needs, as well as the prestige of a study programme or a particular HEI. All these factors may be outdated or highly subjective. Moreover, such networks operate in different ways and do not always shape the decision:

"My parents were against it (going to higher education), they had a negative opinion about universities of applied sciences and professional schools, they considered them the same, they told me to study either at university, or not to study at all, but despite this I have chosen my way, the one I prefer." First year student at [City] University of Applied Sciences

The views of parents can also run counter to the wishes of young people. Students at the University of Applied Science who participated in the case study reported that they had experienced some pressure from parents to study at universities as opposed to universities of applied sciences, which are perceived as of lower status with negative preconceptions about their low quality. Students applying to universities of applied sciences had to defend their choice, arguing that the course they had chosen was the best fit with the profession they wished to pursue in the future. In terms of the role of HEIs in relation to the proximity network, there were examples of study fairs, where students could get information from a range of HEIs.

"There is an event called 'LITEXPO studies'. Students of various institutions present the studies themselves. You come to them and they tell you everything. There was a bus going to this fair from our school, older students also went there." Pupil at the start of their last year in secondary school (Gymnasium)

Many students also said that their preference was to study in a capital city not only because of the quality of studies (it was the only place in the country these studies were provided), but also in thinking about future prospects and employment possibilities. Some also said they would have chosen other cities (nearer to their hometowns) if there had been courses of acceptable quality. Finally, admission support to help make choices differed by school. At the more prestigious schools, more support appeared to be available:

"There is a career development centre, they do a lot, they help filling in the forms, documents, gather recommendations from teachers, they fill in our grades. I know this is not happening in other schools. And this is very time-consuming. They know the admission system so you can ask them for advice, also they check your statement, they really help a lot, our school really means a lot in this application process." Pupil at prestigious gymnasium school

5.5.2 Anxiety exists regarding higher education entry opportunities

Referring to secondary school and preparation for the exams period, students and current pupils reported that teachers were creating an atmosphere of fear, stressing the importance of knowledge for passing the final exams. As one student said:

"I was told by one of my teachers If you don't pass it (the examination) you will end up cleaning the streets!" Pupil at the start of their last year in secondary school (Gymnasium)

"All the teachers think that their lessons are more important than others', that theirs are the ones you really have to study for and ask to do a lot of homework. And you have to choose between going to sleep and not having some of your homework done or doing the homework and staying without sleep." Pupil at the start of their last year in secondary school (Gymnasium)

Pupils reported three types of fear concerning the exams: that they may miss out on entering higher education, they may not receive a state-funded place and they may choose the wrong course.

5.5.3 The influence of cost is significant

Many students also felt that it was very important to get state-funded places as their families could not afford to pay for studies. Some of them had chosen a different programme simply because their preferred first option was not a state-funded one.

"I had no other choice, as I said, mum told me 'I will not have money to pay for your studies, so you should study to get the state-funded place'. I have chosen another programme, so I would get state-funded place and my mum would not be burdened."
First year student at [City] University of Applied Sciences

5.5.4 Admission criteria should be more holistic

Many students felt that changes to the conditions for passing the Matura to enter higher education were having a negative impact on them. They were very stressed about exams and would prefer that information on changes to the Matura was announced earlier. This gap between reality and students' perception reveals a problem of lack of communication and / or lack of interest among pupils in finding out about ongoing changes. Students and pupils complained that the general requirements needed to pass the Matura should be reduced and replaced with requirements closer to their chosen field of study. Some argued that the system needed to be more choice-orientated with a greater use of motivational tests in written form. Such tests are currently used only for entrance to teaching and arts study programmes.

Some HEIs put in place their own entrance arrangements in the form of a motivational conversation that some students found very helpful.

Interviewer: *"Why do you prefer a conversation?"* Response: *"You can see the person, it's easier to express your opinion verbally than to write it."*

Some students expressed confusion regarding the information available online concerning the central application process. However, others felt that their schools provided help with filling out the application in the central system.

"Actually, when I had to fill all this data applying for LAMA BPO, there was chaos, even my sister, who entered the university one year ago, could not understand many things and what was needed. Maybe if you go there for a second / third time it all seems clearer, but you have to ask a lot, find out a lot, where and what should be filled in."
First year students at [City] University of Applied Sciences

"In our school, concerning the acceptance or filling in the forms at LAMA BPO system, there was a person at our school, who would dedicate a lesson where we would all sit at the computers and they would tell us exactly where we should fill in everything."
First year students at [City] University of Applied Sciences

5.6 Appendix: Interviews and focus groups

- Official, National Examination Centre
- Officials, Ministry of Education and Science
- Official at national application processing centre
- Government officials with responsibility for higher education guidance functions
- Official at admission office, [City] University
- Director of Study Department / [City] University of Technology
- Vice-rector for studies / [City] University of Health Sciences
- Head of admission office / [City] University of Applied Sciences
- Head of admission office/ [City] University
- Vice-rector for studies, head of BA study project, [City] University of Management and Economics
- Focus Group 1: First year students at [City] University of Applied Sciences
- Focus Group 2: First semester students at [City] University, International Business
- Focus Group 3: Pupils in their last year in secondary school (Gymnasium)
- Focus Group 4: Pupils in their last year in a prestigious secondary school

6 Netherlands

6.1 Key insights

The education system

- The Netherlands has a high enrolment rate in higher education, with continual growth over the past years
- Pupils are not divided into a general and vocational track in secondary schooling
- There is negligible private higher education provision in the Netherlands
- There is a good representation of students from low socio-economic backgrounds, especially in the non-university sector

On the transition from schooling to higher education

- Early streaming steers pupils with less educated parents away from a direct route to higher education
- Guidance support is effective but needs improvement, and is currently receiving it

The role of higher education institutions in admission

- HEIs have diverging positions on selection
- HEIs are also adapting to policy changes on autonomy in contrasting ways
- Support for equitable access is not a focus
- HEIs continue to provide guidance for first year students

The admission system from the students' perspective

- The Study Choice Check initiative is perceived positively
- The proximity network remains central to choice
- Diverging views on the effectiveness of information provision exist
- Concerns about costs are beginning to shape decision-making



Netherlands

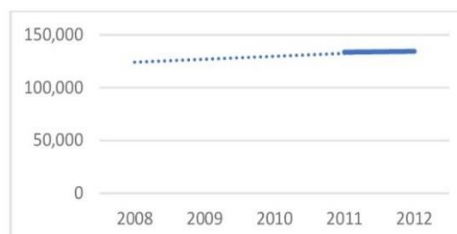
Gross enrolment rate 2014 – *high*

Source: Eurostat, [educ_uae_enrt08]

NL	Q1	Q2	Q3
36.7%	28.4%	33.8%	37.0%

Trend: Number of HE entrants 2008-2013 (ISCED) – *increasing slightly*

Source: Eurostat, [educ_uae_enrt01]



School context: Share of upper secondary school pupils in vocational track schools – *n/a*

Source: Eurostat, [educ_uae_enrs04]

	NL	Q1	Q2	Q3
General track	n/a	34.3 %	50.8 %	60.4 %
Vocational track	n/a	41.5 %	50.0 %	66.0 %

Share of students in Bachelor and short-cycle programmes – *n/a*

Source: Eurostat, [educ_uae_enrt01]

	NL	Q1	Q2	Q3
BA programme	n/a	78.3 %	90.7 %	98.5 %
Short-cycle programme	n/a	1.5%	9.3%	21.7 %

Share of students in private (government-independent) HEIs by programme – *n/a*

Source: Eurostat, [educ_uae_enrt01]

... in private gov. indep. HEIs	NL	Q1	Q2	Q3
... of all tertiary enrolments	n/a	7.7 %	10.2 %	16.3 %
... of all BA enrolments	n/a	7.0 %	11.6 %	17.1 %
... of all short-cycle enrolments	n/a	0.0 %	6.5 %	31.8 %

Percentages of entrants & graduates from low socio-economic (underrepresented) groups, Bachelors 2014, 2011 – *high representation of students from low socio-economic backgrounds, both in the university and non-university sector*

Source: EUROSTUDENT V, Basicdata 4.2 & 4.4. Eurostat, EU-SILC ad hoc module on intergenerational transmission of disadvantages.

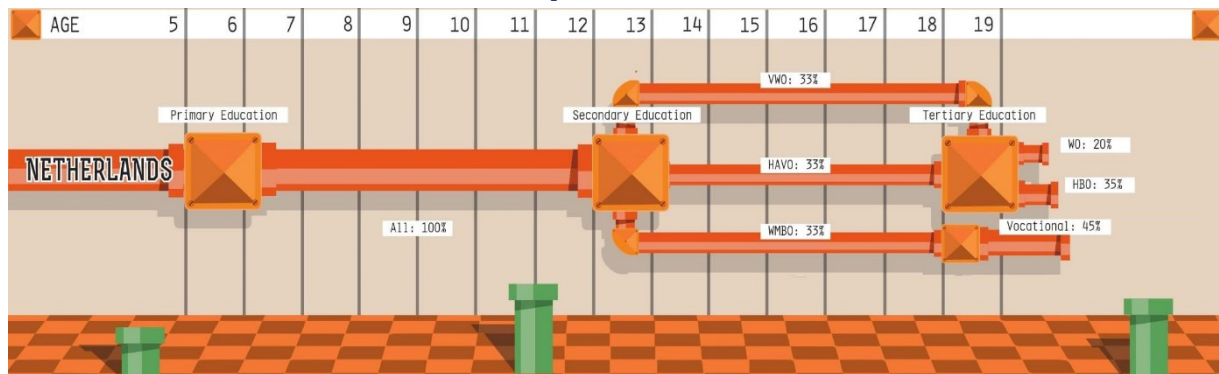
	NL	Q1	Q2	Q3
Share of students whose fathers' highest educational attainment is non-tertiary compared to corresponding male population, 2014	0.83	0.71	0.78	0.83
Share of students whose fathers' highest educational attainment is non-tertiary studying in non-university sector (i.e. UAS), 2014	1.99	1.20	1.48	1.72
Odds ratio for completing tertiary education of young adults* (25-34) whose parents attained tertiary education over young adults (25-34) whose highest educational attainment was non-tertiary education, 2011	4.66	2.47	2.89	3.76

Share of **all** tertiary graduates by occupational level, 2015 – *high share of graduates in adequate employment (managers, professionals)*

Source: Eurostat, [lfsa_egised]

Occupational position	NL	Q1	Q2	Q3
Managers	10.7%	8.1%	10.1%	12.8%
Professionals	55.2%	45.5%	48.0%	54.7%
Technicians and associate professionals	16.4%	14.5%	18.3%	21.3%
Clerical support workers	6.1%	5.4%	7.0%	8.6%

6.2 Overview of the education system



6.2.1 Schooling

Dutch children start primary school at the age of 4 and finish around the age of 12, before entering secondary education for 4, 5 or 6 years. In the last year of primary education, pupils select a type of secondary education based on an obligatory national graduation test, recommendation from their school and their own preference. They have three choices: pre-vocational secondary education (VMBO), senior general secondary education (HAVO) or pre-university education (VWO), and several combinations (VMBO/HAVO, HAVO/VWO or even VMBO/HAVO/VWO). Only HAVO and VWO give access to higher education (HAVO to universities of applied sciences, VWO to universities).

To enter higher education pupils must choose the general secondary education programme. Within this programme they follow a common curriculum for 3 years. The curriculum is common (same basic set of courses), but the level (grading, amount) is different for HAVO and VWO pupils. They can be in one class together (for three years max), but schools more and more choose to separate them in the first year or after the first year. Students are then divided into those who study for the HAVO for another 2 years which enables entry to universities of applied sciences and the VWO which takes 3 years and facilitates progression into research universities.

6.2.2 Higher education

The Netherlands has a binary higher education system with the profession-oriented *hogescholen* or hbo (universities of applied science) and the research-oriented *universiteiten* or wo (universities). Most of the institutions are public institutions with 7 state-funded universities of applied science and 14 universities in the Netherlands. Almost two out of three students study at a university of applied sciences (in total 446,000 students in these institutions and 250,000 studying at a university). Universities of applied science offer 4-year Bachelor programmes (240 EC) linked to the specific field (e.g. Bachelor of Engineering (B.Eng.), or Bachelor of Nursing (B.Nursing)). A Bachelor degree at a university requires the completion of 3 years of study (180 EC) and graduates obtain the degree of B.A. or B.Sc. depending on the discipline.

Every Dutch student has to pay the statutory tuition fee which is determined and subsidised by the Dutch government. From the academic year 2015-2016 the grant system was replaced with a loan system. Only students from low income backgrounds are still entitled to a supplementary grant which only becomes a grant if the students finish their study within 10 years. The loan system has been extended, enabling students to borrow money from the government on preferential terms with low interest rates for a 35-year period. Dutch students get free access to public transport (during both weekdays and weekends).

A new part of the student finance system is the lifelong learning credit. This is a loan option for people aged 30 to 55 for (further) training. The government hopes to

encourage older learners into higher education. The loan provision is very similar in nature to the system described above with a 15-year repayment period.

6.2.3 Admission into higher education

In principal the school-leaving diploma is sufficient to facilitate entry into higher education but in some cases the number of students applying for a course of study exceeds the joint capacity of all the institutions to provide that particular course. There is sufficient capacity within the sector but insufficient capacity within individual institutions. In such cases courses are subject to either national or institutional quotas. Until recently the selection procedures for these numerous *fixus* programmes were based on school leaving grades and weighted draws, organised at national level. From 2016-2017 the procedure is different. Selection has been changed from a standard (national) selection procedure to a decentralised system which can be shaped by HEIs working to a national framework. HEIs cannot select on grades alone, but always have to integrate at least one other indicator. For students this change means they now have to apply for programmes before January 15th. They will be informed if they have been selected by mid-April, in time to apply for a regular programme.

As part of the recent reforms there have also been new policies to support students in making decisions on higher education entry. Since 2014 all institutions are obliged to offer students with what is described as the *Study choice check*. These activities differ between institutions and include (online) questionnaires, and / or an interview or a day of trial study at the institution, including a test at the end of the day. After the Study choice check, feedback is given to the students, but again the nature of this feedback varies between HEIs.

Many HEIs then give a statement on the match between the student and the course they have participated in during the Study choice check (i.e. good / doubtful / no match), whilst others offer a statement about the Study check itself – usually pass or fail. This feedback or advice is never binding for students who register by 1 May. Even with a negative statement, they can still apply to enrol in the programme. It can be binding for students who enrol after the 1st May.

6.3 How does the school system determine who becomes a student?

6.3.1 Early streaming steers pupils with less educated parents away from a direct route to higher education

The stream a child enters in secondary education is based on a recommendation that the primary school makes and this recommendation is binding. Better educated parents are more likely to try and influence the nature of this recommendation and parents who have fewer qualifications are more likely to follow the advice of the school. Such differences become clear when the opportunity arises to move pupils to a more academic pathway in secondary education. The recommendation regarding the future pathway can be adjusted following a test that all children take in the final year of primary school. If the child achieves at a level which is seen to suggest they have the ability to enter general secondary education whilst the recommendation is that they enter at a lower level, then it is possible for the recommendation to be adjusted so they can enter the general pathway. It appears that parents with lower levels of qualification are less likely to ask for the recommendation to be adjusted than those who have higher levels of qualification.

It is also suggested that there may be some elements of hidden bias at work, where teachers are automatically seeing those pupils who may come from lower socio-economic groups and / or from particular ethnic groups as less academic, and thus they are perhaps wrongly placed in the lower vocational stream as opposed to the general education stream. As one of the key informants observed:

"Teachers often are more cautious in the advice given to a child from a lower educational background. Parents with low educational attainment, on the other hand, follow the advice of primary school carefully. Especially when the advice of the school is lower than the final exam score, lower educated parents are less likely to do the adjustment they are entitled to."

Another key informant added on the issue of the transition to higher education:

"Since schools aren't providing study orientation in a very structured or similar way now, differences between pupils become apparent. Parents who studied in higher education themselves have better access and knowledge (or money to buy it at a study advice institute) to help their children prepare for their future."

6.3.2 Guidance support is effective but needs improvement

Career and guidance services are provided in each school but because of the absence of national regulations, the differences between schools are great. Some schools provide the service via infrequent class-wide plenary work, others take time to speak to every pupil individually. The challenges here are finance-related: because of budget cuts and higher demands on school results, the time available for school counsellors to offer information, advice and guidance services is being reduced.

However, the view that information, advice and guidance is effective was also expressed. It was argued that one of the reasons why some secondary schools have higher percentages of students entering higher education has to do with the career orientation programme offered by the school.

There is a clear view from the careers counselling organisation consulted in the case study that the information, advice and guidance offered to young people in the Netherlands is in significant need of improvement. At the time of the interview they were in the process of writing to the government with a number of recommendations which are listed below:

- Special training for the school counsellors on the study choice guidance
- Making guidance obligatory for every pupil
- Connection of specific courses and the labour market
- Feedback to secondary schools on how their former pupils are doing in higher education
- National regulations for the study choice activities provided by HEIs
- Personal advice within the Study choice check
- Availability of comparable study-related information.

6.4 How does the higher education system choose the students that are enrolled?

6.4.1 HEIs have diverging positions on selection

The policy developments described above illustrate how policy makers have tried to give HEIs more control over how they select students. This autonomy is however given within limits. If HEIs wish to make a programme selective, they have to submit their reasons and their exact criteria for the selection to the Ministry and the Minister has to approve this strategy.

"If HEIs wish to apply selection, they should always submit to the Ministry, which has formal right of consent. The minister must agree. HEIs may not decide independently. Sometimes it is decided jointly between courses, sometimes it changes by institution. Psychology is chosen by some of the universities as a selection course, not by all."

This creates a constant challenge for HEIs:

"The dilemma is that if you set a numerus fixus, the risk (if others do not) is that you get less applicants than you would like. But the other way around could mean you get more students than you can accommodate."

However, there are differing views amongst the HEIs regarding selection in principle and in practice, with two of the HEIs stating explicitly that they are not in favour of selection on principle.

"Our university doesn't like selecting students: every student with pre-university level should be able to complete our study programmes."

How universities construct their selection strategy also differs. At one of the universities the choice to make a study a numerus fixus study is based on the labour market: will there be work for graduates and how many students will apply?

6.4.2 HEIs are also adapting to policy changes on autonomy in contrasting ways

At least initially, the HEIs have been cautious regarding the extent to which they wish to introduce more selection. A drawback of decentralised selection and the Study choice advice is that it is time consuming for both students and the HEIs. There is no extra funding for the study advice policy and HEIs are not allowed to charge students for participating in any selection procedures. The investment in both time and resources required to extend selection has led to a reduction in programmes that apply selection rules.

"In fact, a big change in the rules is that the date of registration has been set earlier in time (15th January) and that HEIs are no longer allowed to enrol students who apply after this date. In the previous drawing system, this was allowed: students would be placed on a reserve list and added if the number of applicants was lower than the set available places. In current system, you must be sure the number of applicants isn't less than the number of places, because you won't be able to fill up the places afterwards."

Finally, the new study advice policy is being implemented in contrasting ways. In some HEIs it was an obligatory part of the admission process:

"If students can't even make the effort to come to our study choice day, what can we expect from them in the rest of our study programme?"

Whilst in other HEIs, there was concern that study advice should not be a barrier to students applying to higher education from different backgrounds:

"As many as possible in, whatever background they have, as diverse as possible please! Our way of teaching will motivate them to do their best and keep them in."

It is also seen as important that study advice supports student decision making:

"Our Study choice check is set up as a trial study day at the university: a day in the life of a student. They have to do some homework ahead, attend lectures, do a test, follow a session in a working group and reflect on the day. On that basis, they can check if it was as exciting as they thought it would be, or not so much... And also important, they have a chance to reflect: 'can I do this?'"

6.4.3 Support for equitable access is not a focus

Where HEIs are selecting students for their courses, they are not giving preferential treatment in terms of entry criteria to students from specific equity groups. However, there is work being undertaken to focus on the issue of equitable access and there is an increased pressure from national authorities in this direction. An alliance of teachers, parents, schools, employers and civil society organisations is joining forces to ensure that in the coming years each child has equal opportunities. They are organising activities such as summer schools, better, more co-operation between different educational phases, smoother transitions through better school advice, establishing transitional courses and also improving access to higher education through vocational training routes.

The Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science explained the necessity for the Alliance for Equal Opportunities:

"Education should be the driving force of emancipation, in which differences between children with the same talents become smaller and desirably disappear. Now it appears that this emancipation function is losing power, intervention is necessary. Children with the same talents must be given equal opportunities. We therefore take our responsibility and challenge schools and teachers to do the same."

6.4.4 HEIs continue to provide guidance for first year students

After the first semester, all first year students receive a preliminary session of study advice which looks at their overall progress. At the end of the year students receive the binding study advice and are either allowed or not allowed to continue their study. The preliminary study advice system means students have the opportunity to address any issues in their studies prior to the end of the year. Selecting students, as one of the key informants described it well, is:

"A perpetual process of improvement, never finished, examine each case and determine whether you are doing the right things. It is never ready."

There is also the view that greater coherence across the educational phases would be beneficial:

"What could be better is if the different systems (knowledge about participating in information sessions before starting to study / pathways of study check, etc.) [were] to form a whole. The information gathered in the process of applying for the study is interesting to be aware of in the guidance of students."

6.5 How do young people make choices regarding higher education?

6.5.1 The Study choice check initiative is perceived positively

The majority of respondents, both those in higher education and those working prior to higher education, saw the introduction of Study choice check as a positive development. They felt it allowed prospective students to test their abilities and compatibility with their chosen study programme and to assess the costs and benefits of different course options.

As one of the students stated: *"[Study check] forces you to think harder on what you want and you can 'taste' if the study you apply for really fits you."*

In addition, the new selection mechanism for numerous fixus programmes was supported. Most students pointed to the increased fairness of selection, as well as the increased chance of enrolling in the programme of choice – due both to the introduction of additional criteria apart from secondary education grades and to the replacement of the national lottery mechanism by institutional selection.

"I found it [selection day] a very exciting day. Many people had signed up and it was possible that you would not be selected for this study at the end of the day. Besides that, I was very happy with this whole day because it showed how studying here would look like and you could find out if it really suited you."

"The new way of selecting does take a lot of time in a period already so full with other school stuff. But I do understand why it helps and a lottery would be worse!"

6.5.2 The proximity network is central

In common with the other case studies, student decision making regarding higher education and HEI courses was shaped by the proximity network of parents, colleagues and occasionally counsellors from secondary education institutions.

6.5.3 Diverging views on the effectiveness of information provision exist

Many respondents felt that the information they could access was sufficient and useful. There were examples of students who went to open days (not only to the HEI which was their first preference but also to different ones).

"I have been to many open days. I did not miss any information, but ultimately everything is new anyway."

Other strategies for making a decision included doing a day of trial study and talking to students who were already in the programme.

"It was different from what I expected. I thought I would talk to one of the teachers, but instead it was a first-year student. This was nice because I could also ask her a few specific questions about her experiences in the study programme so far."

One of the students mentions that for her, the range of different rules for admission makes the process of higher education entry a difficult one to navigate.

"It isn't always easy to find your way through all the information and rules, should be more support for that, especially if your parents find this hard as well."

Another student thinks that this pre-selection based on certain preparatory courses is helpful. It gives you assurance you have the knowledge needed for successfully completing the study programme.

There was also evidence of differences between secondary schools in the amount of study choice support that is given to the pupils.

"I have to say that I have received little information from school, I had to look for information and answers to my questions myself. I did this at open days or with people I know with experience with this."

"I received a lot of information from school, but I have also checked the website of the university for information on the programme and the uni itself. At the website everything was very extensive and clear."

6.5.4 Concerns about costs are beginning to shape decision-making

Some of the biggest concerns expressed regarding studying in higher education amongst those students at the pre-higher education stage were related to money. Studying in the Netherlands inevitably means accumulating debt. The level of costs influenced their choices. Since there are no grants anymore (apart from for students whose parents have an income below a certain level), students may have to live with their parents and therefore base their study choice on the programmes available in the vicinity.

"I don't like the fact that I have to choose the right study right away: because of the loan system it is too expensive to reconsider my first choice."

6.6 Appendix: Interviews and focus groups

- Head of admission office, [City] prestigious university
- Head of admission office, [City] university in capital
- Head of admission office, [City] university
- Head of admission office, regional university
- Head of admission office, regional university of applied science
- Senior policy-maker in education ministry
- Senior policy-maker at government body for higher education
- National-level official responsible for guidance issues
- Pupils at the start of their last year in secondary school (high entry rate into higher education), [City] school
- Pupils at the start of their last year in secondary school (low entry rate into higher education), [City] school
- Students at the start of their first year of university (from an academic university), [City] university
- Students at the start of their first year of university (from an applied university), [City]

7 Norway

7.1 Key insights

The education system

- Norway has a low enrolment rate in higher education, with continual growth over the past years
- Pupils are divided into a general and vocational track in secondary schooling.
- There is mid-level private higher education provision in Norway
- There is a low representation of students from low socio-economic backgrounds, but this is comparatively high in the non-university sector

On the transition from schooling to higher education

- School-level streaming is built to be highly flexible
- The school exit examination is central
- Guidance support is devolved down to school level

The role of higher education institutions in admission

- HEIs can choose the number of students, but seldom can set their own criteria
- The funding of HEIs promotes student performance to a limited extent
- Divergence in recruitment strategies and the focus on underrepresented groups
- HEIs provide guidance for first year students

The admission system from the students' perspective

- The importance of higher education leading to meaningful work
- Students question whether the admission system give teachers too much power
- Students have high levels of satisfaction with the information provided about higher education entry



Norway

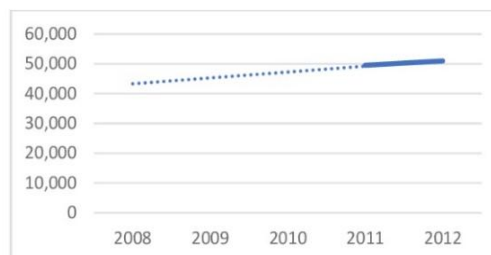
Gross enrolment rate 2014 – *high*

Source: Eurostat, [educ_uae_enrt08]

NO	Q1	Q2	Q3
35.0%	28.4%	33.8%	37.0%

Trend: Number of HE entrants 2008-2013 (ISCED) – *increasing*

Source: Eurostat, [educ_uae_enrt01]



School context: Share of upper secondary school pupils in vocational track schools – *medium-sized vocational stream*

Source: Eurostat, [educ_uae_enrs04]

	NO	Q1	Q2	Q3
General track	49.3 %	34.3 %	50.8 %	60.4 %
Vocational track	50.7 %	41.5 %	50.0 %	66.0 %

Share of students in Bachelor and short-cycle programmes – *low share of students in short-cycle programmes*

Source: Eurostat, [educ_uae_enrt01]

	NO	Q1	Q2	Q3
BA programme	95.0 %	78.3 %	90.7 %	98.5 %
Short-cycle programme	5.0%	1.5%	9.3%	21.7 %

Share of students in private (government-independent) HEIs by programme – *mid-level*

Source: Eurostat, [educ_uae_enrt01]

... in private gov. indep. HEIs	NO	Q1	Q2	Q3
... of all tertiary enrolments	9.3 %	7.7 %	10.2 %	16.3 %
... of all BA enrolments	11.6 %	7.0 %	11.6 %	17.1 %
... of all short-cycle enrolments	0.0 %	0.0 %	6.5 %	31.8 %

Percentages of entrants & graduates from low socio-economic (underrepresented) groups, Bachelors 2014, 2011 – *low representation of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, higher in non-university sector*

Source: EUROSTUDENT V, Basicdata 4.2 & 4.4. Eurostat, EU-SILC ad hoc module on intergenerational transmission of disadvantages.

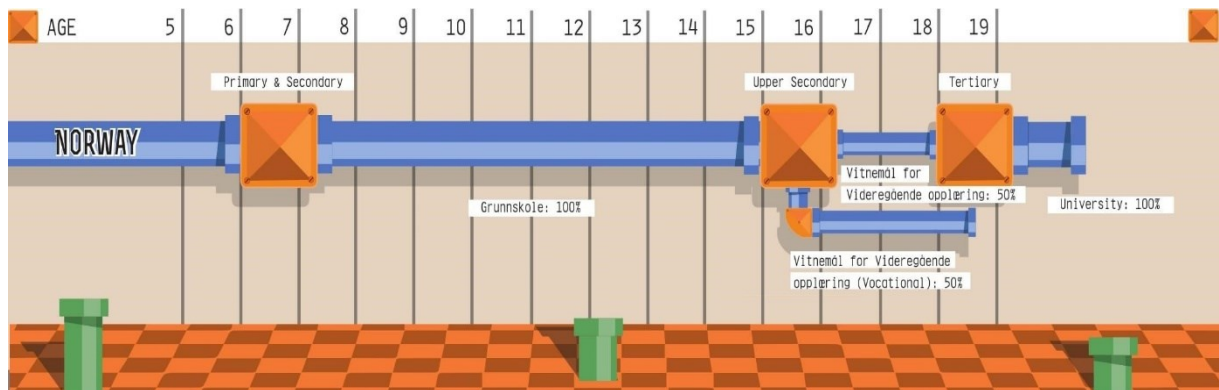
	NO	Q1	Q2	Q3
Share of students whose fathers' highest educational attainment is non-tertiary compared to corresponding male population, 2014	0.71	0.71	0.78	0.83
Share of students whose fathers' highest educational attainment is non-tertiary studying in non-university sector (i.e. UAS), 2014	1.60	1.20	1.48	1.72
Odds ratio for completing tertiary education of young adults* (25-34) whose parents attained tertiary education over young adults (25-34) whose highest educational attainment was non-tertiary education, 2011	2.34	2.47	2.89	3.76

Share of all tertiary graduates by occupational level, 2015 – *high share of graduates in adequate employment (managers, professionals)*

Source: Eurostat, [lfsa_egised]

Occupational position	NO	Q1	Q2	Q3
Managers	10.3%	8.1%	10.1%	12.8%
Professionals	53.3%	45.5%	48.0%	54.7%
Technicians and associate professionals	20.0%	14.5%	18.3%	21.3%
Clerical support workers	2.6%	5.4%	7.0%	8.6%

7.2 Overview of the education system



7.2.1 Schooling

In Norway there are 10 years of compulsory schooling and 3 to 4 years of voluntary upper-secondary schooling. The compulsory education is comprehensive and primary school (years 1-7) starts at age 6, with lower-secondary school (years 8-10) following on. Upper-secondary schooling is not compulsory, but most students attend and are given the choice of attending either an academic or a vocational track. To access higher education a student has to complete an academic upper-secondary education. Students who start on the vocational track can choose to switch to the academic track after completing the first two years of schooling, and thus gain access to higher education after three years in upper-secondary education.

Social differences are evident in the choice of the type of upper-secondary programme. Over half of all students starting on the academic track have parents who attended higher education, compared to approximately one in four on the vocational track. However, both tracks are promoted as acceptable pathways for students to take, as they lead to different parts of the labour market.

There are also differences in the social background of students who complete upper-secondary education. Within five years of commencing upper-secondary school 82% of students with parents who have higher education qualifications have completed. However, only 66% of students from families where the parents have no upper-secondary education complete higher education and only 43% of students from families where neither parent has education beyond primary school complete higher education (Bjørkeng 2013).

7.2.2 Higher education

In Norway 85% of students attend a public HEI which does not charge tuition fees. The remaining students attend private institutions. Not all private institutions charge tuition fees, but some do. There are three types of public institutions: universities, specialised university institutions and university colleges. Universities offer long professional degrees (e.g. medicine and law) as well as the general undergraduate and graduate / master's degrees in a range of disciplines. University colleges primarily offer professional diplomas of three years' duration (e.g. in nursing, engineering and early childhood education). While there are differences between HEIs, the degree of hierarchy between them is relatively low. Since 2005, university colleges have been able to apply to become full universities and several have done that. This has put the binary system under pressure, and has created general academic drift among university colleges resulting in fewer but larger and more diverse institutions. Short professional degrees are now also found at universities, but only at the new upgraded universities.

Admission to higher education

Admission is formally an institutional responsibility, but the Norwegian Universities and Colleges Admission Service (NUCAS) co-ordinates admission to most forms of undergraduate education. Students send in one application, with a ranked list of up to ten programmes of their choice. In general, there is limited pressure on applicants to win a space in higher education, with the exception of the most prestigious or popular programmes in the most popular HEIs. Even though there are generally more applicants than study places, in some less popular programmes not all HEIs manage to fill all their places and some HEIs have had a reduction in applicants over time. The application patterns in Norway are regional, in the sense that students usually apply to a HEI close to home. There are also second chance entry routes in Norway. People without an academic upper-secondary diploma who are 25 or over can be considered for acceptance into a specific study programme based on an accreditation of competences, known as *realkompetanse* (Opheim & Helland, 2006, Orr & Hovdhaugen 2014). Usually 5-8% of applicants enter higher education this way (Helland & Opheim, 2004; Helland, 2005). They are usually older, female, first in the family to enter higher education and from more rural northern parts of Norway. In addition to this, it is possible for those holding a vocational diploma in a technical trade, such as electrician or carpenter, to apply for admission to electrical engineering and building engineering respectively, a route into higher education called *Y-veien* (the vocational way).

The higher education funding model in Norway is performance-based. It has three main components: a basic grant (60% of the allocation) and two components based on performance, with 25% based on educational output and 15% based on research output. Educational output is based on the number of credits students complete, the number of graduates and the number of international exchange students. There is no limitation on revenue based on educational output, while research output has a ceiling. Hence, a HEI can increase its revenue if the average number of credits produced per student increases (Frølich, 2006). This has led to most HEIs admitting more students than the number of places on offer in order to make sure that they keep up their production of credits and thus access increased funding.

7.3 How does the school system determine who becomes a student?

7.3.1 Importance of the school exit examination

Academic achievement in upper-secondary education is key to deciding where and what a student will be able to study in higher education. For the majority of students, the grades they achieve will determine entry or non-entry. No interviews are used by HEIs (with the exception of some interviews for teaching students), nor do HEIs set their own examinations.

"In Norway, introduction of higher education entry exams has not been discussed, as we consider it to be a rather resource-demanding way of administrating higher education access." Ministry officials

Giving students who complete a vocational programme direct access to higher education is a policy that has been discussed within social democratic political parties, but it is unlikely to be implemented under the current conservative government. At present the trend is in the opposite direction, with stricter requirements in maths having been introduced recently for access to teacher education.

7.3.2 Guidance support is devolved down to school level

Guidance for students in upper-secondary education consists of two parts: occupational and educational counselling and social services (financial guidance for underprivileged groups as well as psychological and emotional well-being). In most schools one person takes care of both functions. The government has issued very few directions on how guidance should be delivered. It is up to the school to decide how it should be structured.

The norm is to have one adviser per 500 students, but this varies between counties and schools, as some have allocated more resources to advisory work. There are no formal educational requirements in terms of who should take on the role of adviser and in some schools, it is one of the teachers.

7.3.3 School-level streaming is built to be highly flexible

Whilst there is streaming, there are also policies in place to build flexibility into the system. After two years of study it is possible to move from the vocational to the academic track and by means of a catch-up year to become eligible to apply for higher education.

"Students should have the possibility to remake their choice, as everybody should have the opportunity to become eligible for higher education, implying that their educational choice is not a dead-end." Ministry officials

7.4 How does the higher education system choose the students that are enrolled?

7.4.1 HEIs can choose the number of students, but seldom can set their own criteria

HEIs in Norway have autonomy in the sense that, in the majority of subject areas, they can choose the number of students they wish to admit. They cannot, however, decide their own criteria for the vast majority of courses, as the system is centralised, uniform and government-regulated, based on performance in the examination system. HEIs, given the funding system described below, are working within a context that incentivises them to expand student numbers. There are challenges linked to unbalanced gender recruitment in certain programmes (e.g. engineering and veterinary medicine) but there are policies in place to address these concerns (i.e. bonus-points for the gender that is under-represented in the subject area).

7.4.2 The funding of HEIs promotes student performance to a limited extent

The Norwegian funding system is interesting from an admission system perspective. HEIs can increase the funding they receive from the state by increasing the average number of credits their graduates achieve. However, the average number of credits taken per student is quite stable over time, which means that the room HEIs have for manoeuvre is limited.

"The HEIs have to make sure they get enough students, and to do that they send out more offers than they formally have places. However, this is part of HEI's autonomy, and it is an experience-based exercise for institutions – they usually know the share of students accepting the offer. With the introduction of the new funding system (about 15 years ago), institutions have managed to streamline their operations, without indicating that the quality of graduates has decreased." Ministry officials

As admission decisions are delegated to HEIs, one could assume that HEIs with a surplus of applicants could be tempted to exploit this opportunity by increasing student numbers just to gain profit. However, this is not how the HEIs act.

"In the recent years, we have focused on only admitting the number of students we have funding for – and this is linked to quality of education. We could easily have accepted more students to some of the low-cost programmes, where it does not matter if there are 150 or 200 students in the lecture hall, but we choose not to do that." Administrative official at a selective HEI

Additionally, the government can offer extra funding to push forward admission in specific courses, such as teacher training and science, where there is a labour market need. Alternative admission structures exist for those over 25 years of age without an upper-secondary programme.

7.4.3 Divergence in recruitment strategies and the focus on underrepresented groups

HEIs provide online information and there are also information events for upper-secondary school students. In Norway, most progression into higher education is local to the area where the student lives. It is a relatively small system and the pressure on the supply of places may not be as high as in a system where greater competition is built in. However, this varies geographically. HEIs located in more remote areas have to focus on the recruitment of students, since there will be insufficient qualified applicants in their vicinity and they need to attract students from other regions of the country.

"What sets us apart from other institutions is that we 'fight for every student' – we spend quite a lot of time on marketing and recruitment." Administrative official at a rural / district HEI

The view in Norway is that the system is relatively equitable. Thus there is little focus on recruitment of students from particular social backgrounds. However, there is a focus on gender in admission, as some programmes have an inequitable distribution of either female or male applicants. Hence, gender is the main prism through which underrepresentation is viewed. There has been discussion on changing the admission system, by giving the relevant students (male or female as appropriate) additional points. Such changes cannot however be implemented by HEIs; they must be decided on by the Ministry of Education and Research.

7.4.4 Supporting students at entry

In the interviews with key stakeholders, several examples of support practices relating to student mentoring or buddying were described. Most HEIs do this in a similar manner with the aim of easing the transition into higher education.

"We know the value of meeting first-year students early. The transition to academia is central in our approach: everything from focus on investing time in getting acquainted, creating a social environment, and making them see the value of belonging, as well as arranging courses in study technique and teaching them about time allocation as a student." Administrative official at a specialist HEI

7.5 How do young people make choices regarding higher education?

7.5.1 The importance of higher education leading to meaningful work

The students in all the focus groups appeared satisfied with the amount of information they had received regarding higher education and the application process. The motivation to enter higher education differed by the background of the entrants as well as by the schools / HEIs they were coming from / entering. Those schools / HEIs which contained students whose parents had in the main entered higher education saw this as a natural progression for them. Amongst the responses from the participants, some of them appeared to display evidence of a reflection on the benefits of higher education and the need to secure a future that went beyond just earning a better income. The answers provided by the participants in one of the focus groups to the question: *What were the most important factors in helping you make the decisions regarding applying for higher education?* were instructive here. They included: high status occupation, meaningful job, safe future, wanting to work with people, caring for others, trying something new.

Overall, the lack of critique of the admission system was interesting, as well as the lack of recognition of external influences on students decision-making (e.g. from parents or teachers). Entry into higher education for students in Norway appears perhaps to be an expectation amongst those who are participating in the academic track (either by complete participation or by shifting to a make-up year). Once on this track, higher education becomes a default option.

7.5.2 Does the admission system give teachers too much power?

Most pupils felt that the Norwegian system based on grades is fair. However, several mentioned that an admission system based on grades gives upper-secondary teachers a lot of influence on a pupil's future opportunities in higher education.

"In general, most teachers are good and fair when grading, but if we don't understand a grade we can ask for a second opinion from another teacher." Upper-secondary level pupils

7.5.3 High levels of satisfaction with the information provided about higher education entry

Both pupils in upper-secondary education and students in higher education indicated that they were satisfied with the amount of information they had received regarding higher education and the application process. In particular, both groups expressed satisfaction with the information provided relating to the NUCAS admission system.

Regarding areas of improvement in the admission system, both groups mentioned that they wanted to know more about labour market needs and future employability.

7.6 Appendix: Interviews and focus groups

- Interview with the Norwegian Universities and Colleges Admission Service (NUCAS), Senior Adviser
- Interview with Ministry of Education and Research, higher education officials
- Interview with Selective institution
- Interview with Specialist technical institution
- Interview with a less selective institution
- Interview with a rural/district institution
- Interview with a private institution
- Focus Group 1: Upper-secondary education, school with high rate of transfer to higher education
- Focus Group 2: Upper-secondary education, school with lesser rate of transfer to higher education
- Focus Group 3: Higher education, university, selective programme
- Focus Group 4: Higher education, university, less selective programme
- Focus Group 5: Higher education, university college, selective programme
- Focus Group 6: Higher education, university college, less selective programme

8 Romania

8.1 Key insights

The education system

- Romania has a low enrolment rate in higher education, with recent decline due to demographic developments in the youth population
- Pupils are divided into a general and vocational track in secondary schooling.
- There is high-level private higher education provision in Romania
- There is a low representation of students from low socio-economic backgrounds

On the transition from schooling to higher education

- Streaming shapes opportunities to study for young people
- The school exit examination is criticised by HEIs as being inadequate for selection
- Equitable access to higher education is not promoted in the schooling system
- Information, advice and guidance policy in need of reform as it comes largely from the class master

The role of higher education institutions in admission

- The school exit exam (Baccalaureate) and HEI admission examinations together determine entry
- HEIs are and feel autonomous in their recruitment strategies
- Equitable access is supported by HEIs, but narrowly
- Declining student numbers have a large impact on the admission model and strategic decision making

The admission system from the students' perspective

- Importance of the proximity network and early choosing
- Significant differences in choice formation by school and social background
- Students express concerns regarding the role of the Baccalaureate examination
- Support in learning about higher education through social media



Romania

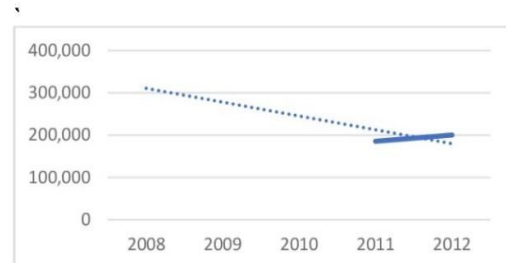
Gross enrolment rate 2014 – *low*

Source: Eurostat, [educ_uae_enrt08]

RO	Q1	Q2	Q3
28.3%	28.4%	33.8%	37.0%

Trend: Number of HE entrants 2008-2013 (ISCED) – *decreasing*

Source: Eurostat, [educ_uae_enrt01]



School context: Share of upper secondary school pupils in vocational track schools – *large vocational stream*

Source: Eurostat, [educ_uae_enrs04]

	RO	Q1	Q2	Q3
General track	42.8 %	34.3 %	50.8 %	60.4 %
Vocational track	57.2 %	41.5 %	50.0 %	66.0 %

Share of students in Bachelor and short-cycle programmes – *n/a*

Source: Eurostat, [educ_uae_enrt01]

	RO	Q1	Q2	Q3
BA programme	n/a	78.3 %	90.7 %	98.5 %
Short-cycle programme	n/a	1.5%	9.3%	21.7 %

Share of students in private (government-independent) HEIs by programme – *very high*

Source: Eurostat, [educ_uae_enrt01]

... in private gov. indep. HEIs	RO	Q1	Q2	Q3
... of all tertiary enrolments	16.2 %	7.7 %	10.2 %	16.3 %
... of all BA enrolments	19.5 %	7.0 %	11.6 %	17.1 %
... of all short-cycle enrolments	n/a	0.0 %	6.5 %	31.8 %

Percentages of entrants & graduates from low socio-economic (underrepresented) groups, Bachelors 2014, 2011 – *n/a*

Source: EUROSTUDENT V, Basicdata 4.2 & 4.4. Eurostat, EU-SILC ad hoc module on intergenerational transmission of disadvantages.

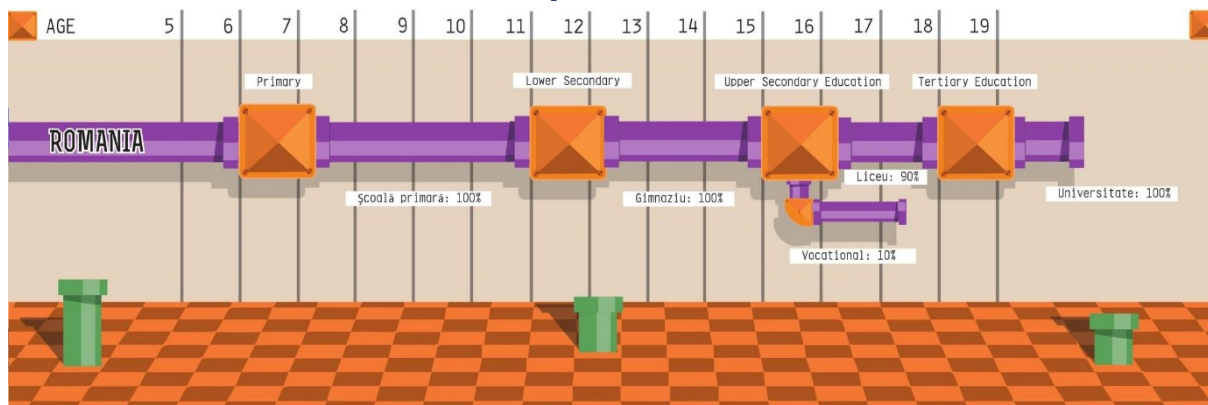
	RO	Q1	Q2	Q3
Share of students whose fathers' highest educational attainment is non-tertiary compared to corresponding male population, 2014	n/a	0.71	0.78	0.83
Share of students whose fathers' highest educational attainment is non-tertiary studying in non-university sector (i.e. UAS), 2014	n/a	1.20	1.48	1.72
Odds ratio for completing tertiary education of young adults* (25-34) whose parents attained tertiary education over young adults (25-34) whose highest educational attainment was non-tertiary education, 2011	5.84	2.47	2.89	3.76

Share of all tertiary graduates by occupational level, 2015 – *low share of graduates in management positions, very high share in professional positions*

Source: Eurostat, [lfsa_egised]

Occupational position	RO	Q1	Q2	Q3
Managers	6.9%	8.1%	10.1%	12.8%
Professionals	62.9%	45.5%	48.0%	54.7%
Technicians and associate professionals	9.7%	14.5%	18.3%	21.3%
Clerical support workers	7.3%	5.4%	7.0%	8.6%

8.2 Overview of the education system



8.2.1 Schooling

Romanian children enter primary school at age 6 or 7, usually starting with the preparatory year (grade 0) and then continuing for 4 years before entering lower-secondary education (*gimnaziu*) for grades 5 to 8. Upon completion of lower-secondary education, students sit a national examination process which streams students for an upper-secondary track. There are several streams within high schools:

- **theoretical** (for students who wish to attend higher education – either Humanities or STEM studies)
- **vocational** (for students who wish to have military, theology, sports, artistic and teacher training specialities enabling them to enter the labour market or to continue into higher education) **technological** (for students who wish to study specialities like services, natural resources and environmental protection, enabling them to either continue into higher education or the labour market).

There is also a **professional stream** within professional schools with a separate admission process. By attending the high school education courses for an extra year, students may have the same right to go on to higher education as students from the other streams.

The examination is called *Evaluarea Națională pentru absolvenții clasei a VIII-a* (National evaluation for 8th grade graduates) and is centred on mathematics and the Romanian language and literature. Professional and technological tracks are often second-choice education options for those who, as a result of their national test scores, do not manage to gain access to a theoretical high-school. Pupils can transfer between streams by having their parents submit a formal request to the desired high school principal. Such students may be required to take additional tests.

Education is currently compulsory for the first two years of upper-secondary education (with the National Education Law stipulating that all upper-secondary education should become compulsory by 2020).

The *sine qua non* criteria for admission to higher education is that secondary school students pass the Baccalaureate (*Bacalaureat*) examinations at the end of upper-secondary education. Before they can sit the examination, students have to complete one of the three streams with high schools. The examination is the main basis of the admission dossier. It is used to separate prospective students in cases where fields of study have a limited availability of state-funded study places. For HEIs specialising in the fields of security / policing / military-related subjects, special physical capabilities are tested. With theatre schools, artistic skills are assessed and HEIs also have the freedom to use additional interviews or exams.

8.2.2 Higher education

The higher education system is unitary, despite the existence of differences with regard to nomenclature between Universities and Polytechnics or Technical Universities. Regardless of nomenclature, HEIs grant similar qualifications upon graduation and have similar admission systems. The Eastern European dual-funding model predominates, in which state-paid places coexist with fee-paying places within the same HEIs, departments and study fields. Tuition fees vary by subject but most tuition fees are higher than €500 per annum in a country where the mean national wage is just over €400 per month.

There is a fairly extensive system of student support services, most of them having originated during the communist-era, when efforts were made to get the children of workers and peasants enrolled into higher education. These include state-subsidised dormitories, scholarships and subsidised canteens.

State-funded places in the system have increased in recent years, as fee-paying students in the public sector have fallen by 90,000 and the number of private-sector students has decreased from over 140,000 to fewer than 80,000 (by 2014)¹². The private sector was enrolling as many students as the public sector in 2008, but this has fallen to around 25% of all enrolments by 2016.

8.3 How does the school system determine who becomes a student?

8.3.1 Streaming shapes opportunities to study for young people

Streaming has a major impact in shaping who goes onto higher education in Romania. Decisions made at 14 influence the chances young people have for going to higher education as the graduates from professional schools do not have the right to go to higher education and graduates from technological schools have a very low success rate at the Bacalaureate exam. Streaming has played a significant role in reinforcing a hierarchy in the school system which places academic-related tracks above more vocational ones. As one of the respondents stated:

"The best students select the best schools, and additionally the best teachers select the best schools (based on their tenure exam grade they can select the school where they wish to teach)." Policy maker responsible for secondary education

It is also argued by one respondent that there is a lack of connection between how the streaming system is designed and the needs of higher education.

"There is no correlation between upper-secondary student numbers and the higher education system needs." Policy maker responsible for secondary education

8.3.2 The role of the Bacalaureate examination

The lack of effective connections between schooling and higher education is also identified by one of the respondents regarding the Bacalaureate exam:

"The needs of the higher education system are not taken into account in the design of the tests as the objective of the Bacalaureate exam is not considered to be the admission into higher education but rather as a final exam which guarantees that the student has the needed competencies." Ministry official responsible with organising the Bacalaureate exam

In the study, the key higher education informants saw the exam as an adequate instrument to filter students in a case where the university does not want to, or cannot, assess other (or more specific) skills or competencies. If the exam is associated with the completion of studies within an acceptable time-frame and relatively low levels of student dropout, then its fitness for purpose in this respect could be supported. However, the exam alone may not be the best way of admitting students to all programmes, as was also highlighted by one of the respondents from the higher education sector.

It is also a matter of concern that, in the view of Romanian HEIs, to be able to progress through specific study programmes, students they have admitted need remedial courses in specific disciplines that were already covered by the Bacalaureate exam. This could indicate that for study programmes that require advanced knowledge in specific disciplines, the Bacalaureate exam is not sufficiently relevant.

However, it is important to consider that students will have a differentiated Bacalaureate in terms of the level of difficulty in some disciplines (e.g. maths) depending on the specialisation of curricula within the high school attended (humanities or mathematics).

8.3.3 Equitable access to higher education is not promoted in the schooling system

The evidence presented here suggests that the schooling system is not focused on promoting equitable access to higher education. Pupils from different equity groups have less opportunity to go on to higher education, as they are more likely to attend professional schools. Socio-economic background is not accounted for in any way in the assessment of the Bacalaureate. The view of the central evaluation authority is that these problems should be addressed prior to examination. However, assessment does take into account the needs of students with specific disabilities or special needs. Where guidance is concerned:

"In disadvantaged areas, there are no targeted efforts to highlight higher education benefits in terms of student support services (scholarships, facilities – dormitories, canteens, etc.)." Official responsible for secondary school guidance

8.3.4 Information, advice and guidance policy in need of reform

There is a national guidance policy. However, the evidence in the case study suggests that the delivery of these services may need reform. Guidance is delivered by the class master, a teacher who taken on this role for a classroom – *diriginte*, and specialised counsellors who work through local centres to offer a range of services for pupils including counselling and support for children with Special Education Needs (SEN). However, the information on higher education progression specifically and student support offered is sparse, and actual guidance from class master teachers is limited. The greatest challenge for specialised counselling support is that of scale: there is only one counsellor per 800 students.

8.4 How does the higher education system choose the students that are enrolled?

8.4.1 HEIs are and feel autonomous

Regarding how the admission process is organised in Romania, it is clear, from examining the policy framework and the responses of the key stakeholders, that universities have both formal autonomy that is enshrined in policy and real' autonomy reflected in how they conduct their work. The Ministry of Education distributes a specific number of subsidised study places per university, depending on what the HEIs request from the Ministry each year. These subsidised study places are based mainly on historical criteria and are allocated per HEI, not per study programme.

The distribution of study places between different study programmes, however, is each HEI's decision, provided it does not go over the institutional capacity set by the quality assurance agency. In 2016 the Ministry for Education extended this autonomy, introducing a new framework approach which means the admission strategy will not be reviewed annually, as was the case in the past, but as and when required.

"The Law and the Constitution guarantee university autonomy and we have never felt any limitations from the Government (central public authorities)." Official from private HEI

"The admission policy is not influenced by the national legislation, as the HEI has full autonomy in that regard. The admission policy is rather influenced by the characteristics of the regional socio-economic environment." Official from small town HEI

8.4.2 Equitable access is supported by HEIs, but narrowly

Regardless of their marketing strategies, all HEIs in Romania provide guidance services which have been developed in past years; this is because they are actively trying to reduce the dropout rate. All students, even those from equity groups, are attractive to HEIs as student numbers decline. At policy level, there are quotas in place to support the recruitment of Roma students but the number of candidates is very small compared to the overall number of students. Additionally, not all subsidised places (within the quota) are filled, which indicates the limited impact of this policy. However, there is no focus on equity groups as defined by geography:

"There is no Ministry support for HEIs to promote their educational offer in disadvantaged areas and no HEIs have requested this form of support." Senior government policy-makers for tertiary education

However, individual HEIs are active in the area of equitable access practice:

"Our university has a clear target in terms of admitting students from disadvantaged areas. When the HEI promotes its academic offer, there is a specific emphasis on the facilities available: scholarships, living conditions, dormitories (in terms of available places, low prices and facilities), canteens, etc." Official from a regional HEI

"For example, we attract students with disabilities especially in the study programmes in the field of Informatics. We identify these potential students during the events we organise in high-schools to promote the university and through our public relations department (e.g. in the centres for young people with severe disabilities)." Respondent from a private HEI

8.4.3 The importance of declining student numbers for the admission model and strategic decision making

In the context of declining student numbers, caused by demographic changes and a shortage of high school graduates who have passed the Bacalaureate exam, the decision on how HEIs organise the admission process and build their own admission model is a strategic one. The competition between HEIs is high. The pool of candidates is low while the qualifications required to enter higher education have not decreased considerably. The interplay of budgetary considerations, research outputs / prestige and employability of students are captured well in the quotes below:

"When looking at the number of students enrolled, there are two issues the HEI deals with: for Sciences programmes, attracting the sufficient number of students is more challenging (although these programmes can bring international recognition and prestige to HEI); for the Social Sciences programmes, it is relatively easy to ensure a sufficient number of students, but these areas do not necessarily bring prestige; there must be a balance between students enrolled in these two categories, in order to ensure both institution's financial sustainability and prestige, internationalisation and recognition of scientific impact of study programmes." Official from a comprehensive HEI

"The decision regarding the number of places for each study programme is taken based on some specific indicators such as: student demand (the number of candidates for the same study programme in the previous years), the employability of students and the funding coefficient per student in that field of study, assigned by the Ministry." Official from a small town HEI

Subsidised study places also play an important role. They are distributed to study programmes that are not very competitive in order to make them more attractive to potential students.

8.4.4 The interplay between the Bacculaureate and HEI admission examinations

How admission to higher education is determined can vary from using the Bacculaureate exam and the grades from high school to letters of motivation, essays, interviews, aptitude tests (especially study programmes in arts, sports and military) and exams in specific disciplines. For study programmes that are competitive, in the sense that they have a high number of candidates, usually HEIs organise institutional exams and rely less on the Bacculaureate exam. For study programmes that have fewer candidates than places available, some HEIs tend to rely more on the Bacculaureate exam and the grades from high school in certain disciplines. Other HEIs consider the admission exam as a symbol of prestige:

"The HEI considers the exam as a legitimising element of the institution – it is a symbol for the seriousness of the HEI, as it represents a filter (there are many candidates who do not pass the exam) and a signal for them that this is not an easy HEI and that not all enrolled students graduate." Official from a private HEI

There was a view amongst HEIs that the admission system could be improved in this area:

"The admission system that does not use entry examination is not relevant enough for the needs of the HEIs [to select students able to complete the study programme]. Additionally, there should be a more balanced proportion between Bacculaureate grades and entry examination grades (50-50)." Official from a regional HEI

8.5 How do young people make choices regarding higher education?

8.5.1 Importance of the proximity network and early choosing

As with the other case study countries, the decision-making process amongst pupils / students regarding higher education progression in Romania is a complex one. It involves interactions between the influences of those in the proximity network and their ambitions or aspirations. These interactions differ within and between groups, although a common feature here was the role of family. One of the products of the streaming system for most of the students is that the decision to enter higher education is effectively taken very early on i.e. before the end of the 8th grade, as the opportunity to go on to higher education is connected to the hierarchy of upper-secondary schools.

"I always knew I would go to university, even before 8th grade. I chose this [particular institution] because I was interested in the subject and older friends who studied there told me more about how things worked." Student, last year of upper-secondary high school (national college) with high entry rate into higher education

The decision to go to a specific HEI is taken much later. Some students decide in the last two years of high school, based on their interests and academic results. Others who are less certain of their Bacculaureate exam results will wait until after the examination.

"My mother saw on TV that this year admission at the HEI is dossier based only and suggested it would be the right place for me to study. Looking back, I think she was right." Student, first year of higher education, comprehensive HEI

"I decided to apply [to this university] very late, after passing the Bacculaureate exam, because I wasn't sure that the grade I obtained would be enough to study somewhere else." Student, first year of higher education, specialised HEI

In this study, a distinctive feature of the Romanian focus groups was the presence of a significant number of students considering study abroad. Clearly for these students other factors came into play with regard to their decision making, in particular the quality of life in different countries and the relative educational prestige amongst the different HEIs to which they are considering an application.

"The HEI I chose is more prestigious and provides better quality programmes [than those in Romania], and after I graduate, I will have better work perspectives." Student, last year of upper-secondary high school (national college) with high entry rate into higher education

8.5.2 Significant differences in choice formation by school and social background

Students coming from prestigious high schools view themselves as more independent and consider that the higher education entry decision was mainly their own, but they do acknowledge the role of friends and teachers here. The independence is illustrated by the fact that students coming from prestigious high schools are more likely to apply to foreign HEIs.

"I knew what I was interested in studying, so I did thorough research in order to find out what the best programme would be for me." Student, last year of upper-secondary high school (national college) with high entry rate into higher education

The counselling offered in high school had little overall impact on students' selection of HEIs or programmes. There were however some respondents who pointed to the impact of individual teachers.

8.5.3 Concerns regarding the role of the Bacalaureate examination

Pupils consider the Bacalaureate exam as very important, because it helps them secure better jobs in the future. However, as a tool to facilitate entry into higher education it was criticised across the different groups, in particular with regard to its appropriateness and fairness. There was a perception that there was a mismatch between what the examination contained and what higher education required. It was also felt that it failed to encourage broader intellectual development.

"The current Bacalaureate exam does not make us think. This is the main problem, we are just required to reproduce different things, not to think." Pupil from a high school (national college) with high entry rate into higher education

Again, however, as with other case study countries where there is disquiet regarding the examination system, pupils and students expressed their awareness of the limitations of alternatives such as, in the Romanian case, the entrance examination:

"With this system, all students have access to studies. An entrance exam would lower the number of candidates, either because they realise that the chosen faculty is appropriate or not to their needs, or they do not have the necessary ambition." First year student at a comprehensive HEI

"I think there should be an entrance exam, but as there wouldn't be too many candidates I understand the decision." First year student at a comprehensive HEI

8.5.4 Support in learning about higher education through social media

Information regarding higher education and the process of admission is, in Romania, taken mainly from the internet. The most common sources of information are the websites of HEIs and Facebook groups. The level of research undertaken by the students regarding the admission system is, unsurprisingly, related to their perception of their own chance of passing the Bacalaureate exam.

8.6 Appendix: Interviews and focus groups

- Policy makers responsible for secondary education
- Officials at the central examination authority
- Officials responsible for secondary school guidance
- Senior Governmental policy makers for higher education
- Officials responsible for the admission process in a private HEI
- Pupils from a high school (national college) with high entry rate into higher education

- Pupils from a high school (technological college) with low entry rate into higher education
- Focus groups with new students at the start of their first year of a comprehensive HEI
- Focus groups with new students at the start of their first year of a specialised HEI

9 Spain

9.1 Key insights

The education system

- Spain has a high enrolment rate in higher education, with continual growth over the past years
- Pupils are divided into a general and vocational track in secondary schooling
- There is relatively high-level private higher education provision in Spain
- There is a mid-level representation of students from low socio-economic backgrounds

On the transition from schooling to higher education

- The *Prueba de Acceso a la Universidad* (PAU) higher education entrance exam is not a strong filter for higher education progression
- There is focused support for disabled students in the PAU exam, but not for those from lower socio-economic groups

The role of higher education institutions in admission

- Public HEIs have little autonomy in selection, but HEIs do not appear to be advocating for further autonomy
- Private HEIs can exercise control over higher education entry
- Constrained funding is shaping how HEIs admit students and mismatches between demand and supply for higher education exist
- For unrepresented groups support is largely financial
- HEIs continue to support students in the first year

The admission system from the students' perspective

- Higher education is perceived as very important to future labour market chances
- Transition a concern for all students, whilst cost and grades are a particular concern for students from low socio-economic backgrounds
- Students want more information and guidance on higher education transition
- Students feel the PAU may be focused too much on schooling and not what they will study at higher education level



Spain

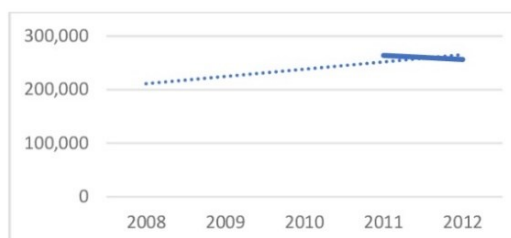
Gross enrolment rate 2014 – *high*

Source: Eurostat, [educ_uae_enrt08]

ES	Q1	Q2	Q3
37.7%	28.4%	33.8%	37.0%

Trend: Number of HE entrants 2008-2013 (ISCED) – *increasing*

Source: Eurostat, [educ_uae_enrt01]



School context: Share of upper secondary school pupils in vocational track schools – *small vocational stream*

Source: Eurostat, [educ_uae_enrs04]

	ES	Q1	Q2	Q3
General track	65.6 %	34.3 %	50.8 %	60.4 %
Vocational track	34.4 %	41.5 %	50.0 %	66.0 %

Share of students in Bachelor and short-cycle programmes – *high share of students in short-cycle programmes*

Source: Eurostat, [educ_uae_enrt01]

	ES	Q1	Q2	Q3
BA programme	76.3 %	78.3 %	90.7 %	98.5 %
Short-cycle programme	23.7 %	1.5%	9.3%	21.7 %

Share of students in private (government-independent) HEIs by programme – *high*

Source: Eurostat, [educ_uae_enrt01]

... in private gov. indep. HEIs	ES	Q1	Q2	Q3
... of all tertiary enrolments	15.0 %	7.7 %	10.2 %	16.3 %
... of all BA enrolments	16.2 %	7.0 %	11.6 %	17.1 %
... of all short-cycle enrolments	6.5 %	0.0 %	6.5 %	31.8 %

Percentages of entrants & graduates from low socio-economic (underrepresented) groups, Bachelors 2014, 2011 – *n/a*

Source: EUROSTUDENT V, Basicdata 4.2 & 4.4. Eurostat, EU-SILC ad hoc module on intergenerational transmission of disadvantages.

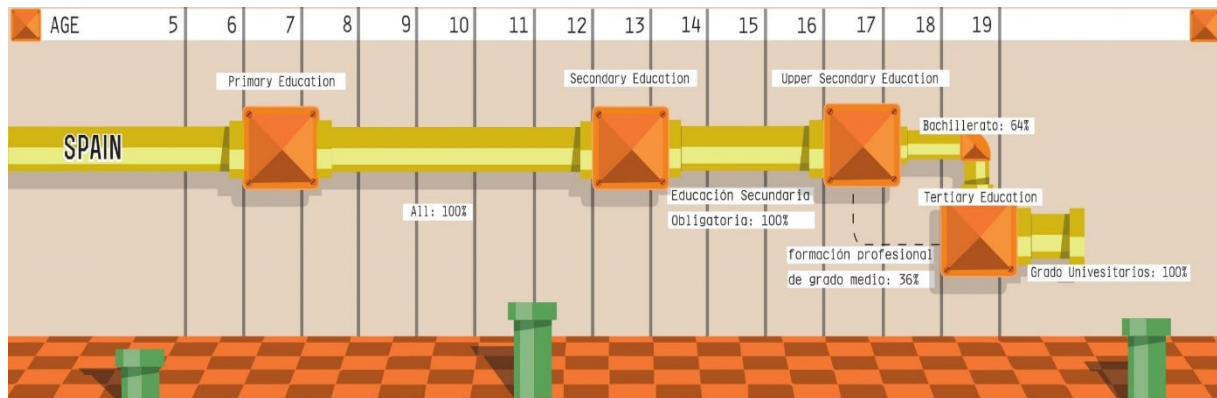
	ES	Q1	Q2	Q3
Share of students whose fathers' highest educational attainment is non-tertiary compared to corresponding male population, 2014	n/a	0.71	0.78	0.83
Share of students whose fathers' highest educational attainment is non-tertiary studying in non-university sector (i.e. UAS), 2014	n/a	1.20	1.48	1.72
Odds ratio for completing tertiary education of young adults* (25-34) whose parents attained tertiary education over young adults (25-34) whose highest educational attainment was non-tertiary education, 2011	2.29	2.47	2.89	3.76

Share of all tertiary graduates by occupational level, 2015 – *low share of graduates in adequate employment (managers, professionals)*

Source: Eurostat, [lfsa_egised]

Occupational position	ES	Q1	Q2	Q3
Managers	6.3%	8.1%	10.1%	12.8%
Professionals	40.8%	45.5%	48.0%	54.7%
Technicians and associate professionals	15.6%	14.5%	18.3%	21.3%
Clerical support workers	13.0%	5.4%	7.0%	8.6%

9.2 Overview of the education system



9.2.1 Schooling

The Spanish system of education is comprehensive through to the end of lower-secondary education. It is comprised of *educación infantil*, which is free from the age of 3 onwards and *educación primaria*, which is both free and compulsory and lasts from age 6 to 12. This phase is followed by *educación secundaria obligatoria* (ESO), which is also free and compulsory. This lasts until the age of 16. Students who successfully complete ESO are given a *Título de Graduado de ESO*. Those who fail to complete successfully can be switched over into a more vocational set of courses known as *Programas de Cualificación Profesional Inicial* (PCPI). Those who receive a *Título de Graduado de ESO* have four choices.

They may enter:

- *Bachillerato*, which prepares individuals for HEI entrance
- General mid-level vocational training (*formación profesional de grado medio*)
- Artistic mid-level vocational training (*enseñanzas de artes plásticas y diseño de grado medio*)
- Intermediate vocational sports education.

Successful completion of a mid-level vocational programme results in a *Título de Técnico*.

Students who choose the *Bachillerato* must enter into one of three specialist streams: the Arts (*artes*), Social Sciences / Humanities (*humanidades y ciencias sociales*), or Science & Technology (*ciencias y tecnología*). These programmes last two years. Students who complete the *Bachillerato* receive a *Título de Bachiller*.

Admission to higher education

The qualification for admission to higher education in Spain is the *Prueba de Acceso a la Universidad* (PAU) also known as *la Selectividad*, which is a nationwide higher education admission test taken after the end of the second year of upper-secondary schooling. In theory, *la Selectividad* is open to all students who have completed a *Título*. In practice, because students in vocational programmes do not study in university preparatory courses they have a low chance of success.

The PAU is a series of six examinations, three of which are mandatory exams which are known as the general phase of the PAU. In addition to the general phase is the specific phase, where students may choose from approximately thirty other subjects in which to be tested. Each PAU exam is graded on a score of one to ten, as is the *Bachillerato*.

Students apply to higher education based on their performance in two examinations: the *Bachillerato* and the PAU. They are given a *nota de corte* (i.e. cutoff grade) which is 60% based on the *Bachillerato* and 40% based on their best two exams in the general phase of the PAU.

Non-traditional students – that is, those not coming direct from upper-secondary school – who wish to enter higher education may take different routes depending on their age. There is a separate PAU for those over 25 years of age. For individuals over 40, there is no national exam, but rather an interview and a presentation of a curriculum vitae. For those over 45, candidates are required to take very short tests of Spanish text analysis (and, where applicable, similar tests in a regional language).

9.2.2 Higher education

Spain's system of higher education is comprised of the following:

- *Enseñanza universitaria* – university education
- *Formación profesional de grado superior* – advanced vocational training
- *Enseñanzas de artes plásticas y diseño de grado superior* – advanced professional artistic education
- *Enseñanzas deportivas de grado superior* – advanced sports education
- *Enseñanzas artísticas superiores* – advanced arts studies.

At the end of the first cycle of higher education, students are awarded a *Título de Graduado*. The second cycle results in a *Master Universitario*, while the third level culminates in the degree of *Doctor*.

There are 76 HEIs in Spain, of which 24 are private. They cover both general academic higher education and professional higher education. Arts education (*enseñanzas artísticas superiores*) – that is, higher studies in music, drama and dance – are run separate from, but parallel to the higher education system under a separate set of regulations known as the *Enseñanza de Regimen Especial*.

Higher education admission policy and practice

For students arriving direct from the *Bachillerat* and applying to public HEIs, the admission system is relatively simple. Students may apply to each province's central admission service and may, for a small fee, apply to three separate programmes (there is no limit on the number of provinces to which one may submit applications). The only criteria on which students are judged is the *nota de corte*, which ranges from 5 to 14. Public HEIs can increase the level of results required on programmes which are in higher demand. They may also place particular prerequisites on such programmes (e.g. requiring a pass in a PAU exam in physics in order to enter engineering). Public HEIs may not require a separate entrance exam and may not make their selection based on interviews.

In 2014, the Government of Spain issued a Royal Decree to permit HEIs to have greater control over selection. In particular, it allowed institutions to have their own entrance examinations and to permit differential weighting of different PAU exams in making decisions on acceptance of candidates. However, this measure was never passed into legislation and as part of the inter-party agreement which permitted the creation of a new government in late 2016, the decree was suspended.

The public HEIs do not use any selection criteria for the students beyond the PAU. The requirement for higher education entrance is that the student must pass upper-secondary school and the general phase of the higher education entrance exam. If a student meets these two criteria, they cannot be denied entrance to HEIs. However, meeting these two requirements may not be enough to achieve admission. If a public HEI has places available, it is obliged to admit all students who meet the requirements – a passing grade on the PAU is guaranteed to result in a university place *somewhere*, even if not in the programme of choice. However, if the HEI has more demand than supply it is permitted to choose those students who have the highest marks on the PAU, considering both the general phase and the specific one.

9.3 How does the school system determine who becomes a student?

9.3.1 The PAU university entrance exam is not a strong filter for higher education progression

One key feature of the *Selectividad* is that it is not particularly selective. Pass rates are currently over 85% and in some provinces over 90%. These numbers have progressed on an upward trend over the last twenty years. The point at which students are divided into the university-bound and the non-university bound, is at the end of the fourth year of secondary education, when students are awarded a *Título de Grado de ESO* and students must choose which track to attend: *Bachillerat* or vocational education.

Demonstrating a crucial difference with the other case study countries, in Spain entering the more academic or vocational track in upper-secondary schools is not a choice that is made for students. They are not assigned to one track or another by a test or through teacher recommendation. Rather, they are allowed to make the decision themselves. This choice nevertheless has significant consequences. Students who choose a more vocational track and are able to take the *selectividad* at a later date are at a disadvantage, because their secondary school courses do not prepare them well for the exam's more theoretical material.

9.3.2 Focused support for disabled students, but not for those from lower socio-economic groups

Socio-economic inequalities are not an issue that has influenced the design of the PAU. Spanish key informants tended to equate fairness with all students taking the same exam. For students with disabilities, there is support (e.g. in the completion of the exam) dependent on the nature of the student's disability.

9.4 How does the higher education system choose the students that are enrolled?

9.4.1 Public HEIs have little autonomy in selection

Spain has a very structured selection process. A pass on the *Bachillerat* guarantees a student a place in higher education but not necessarily in their chosen programme. In a large number of programmes, public HEIs do not select at all. To the extent that selection happens, it occurs in oversubscribed programmes which are by and large technical in nature and expensive. Selection can be used for programmes that are oversubscribed, but the only selection that can take place must be based on a score from the *nota de corte*.

Current regulations do allow HEIs certain autonomy in terms of carrying out additional tests. However, these must be *in addition* to the PAU and do not eliminate the need for this test.

9.4.2 HEIs do not appear to be advocating further autonomy

Key informants from public HEIs are generally satisfied with the current system. There is however an acknowledgement that the current system only looks at what students know rather than at their motivation, skills and competencies; some benefits would accrue from a greater use of interviews in admission. On the other hand, they see that a range of costs, for both students and HEIs, would arise from the introduction of forms of testing in addition to the PAU. These might cover the writing and production of a larger number of examinations, travel costs for students and staff, coordination costs associated with a more differentiated system etc. On the whole, they seem to think the costs would outweigh the benefits.

Key informants also note that in some regions certain admission tests have been introduced for particular degrees, e.g. in Cataluña in the case of students who want to enter the teaching degree course. These types of admission tests are viewed quite favourably among those involved in areas of high demand (mainly health). However,

HEIs officials tend to be of the opinion that these tests are unreliable and could in fact encourage elitism.

9.4.3 Private HEIs can exercise control over entry

Unlike public HEIs, private HEIs have autonomy as far as the admission process is concerned; they can give their own tests and use interviews to aid selection. These HEIs appear interested in expanding their use of these powers, particularly in fields of study which are both oversubscribed and not part of a regulated profession.

For example, in one case, a private HEI offering a new degree in Communications established a range of tools to determine whether to admit a student, including:

- A letter of motivation requiring the student to explain why they want to study that particular degree
- Two letters of reference from professors who have taught the candidate in the past
- A letter of reference from the guidance counsellor of the school attended by the candidate
- An in-depth interview with a psychologist from the HEI
- A competencies test used to diagnose the student's level when entering the HEI in order to show the advances made at the end of their studies.

This HEI is thus giving less importance to the PAU mark.

9.4.4 Constrained funding is shaping how HEIs admit students

The respondents from public HEIs indicated that, although economic concerns should not condition admission decisions, in reality they do so. In some regions, reductions in state funding have meant that the unit of funding per student has been reduced, because enrolment fees are insufficient to cover the full costs of course delivery. This restricts the ability of public HEIs to meet student demand in some areas.

As public HEIs become more stretched financially, it becomes more difficult for them to meet demand in areas where it is particularly high. The result is twofold: an increase in the degree of selection at public HEIs, and an increase in the course offerings amongst private HEIs, who may be able to provide these spaces if allowed to charge fees to cover costs fully.

9.4.5 For unrepresented support is largely financial

Both public and private HEIs offer grants and economic assistance for students from low-income families. One of the private HEIs included in the case study has also developed a set of scholarships for students with disabilities, organised through their collaboration with entities such as the Botín Foundation or the ONCE Foundation. In addition, both public and private HEIs provide various services to students with disabilities.

9.4.6 Mismatches between demand and supply for higher education exist

At public HEIs, there is a large discrepancy between the availability of places and the number of applications. In many degrees, demand is greater than supply. This has always been the case for very expensive, in-demand programmes, but the situation is exacerbated by recent reductions in state funding. In general, there are waiting lists of 50 to 100 people in each degree. However, in healthcare (medicine, nursing, biotechnology, biochemistry, and medical sciences) and education (early childhood and primary teaching) degrees, the demand is far higher. In medicine, approximately 2,500 students are left without a place, in teaching and physical therapy approximately 1,500, and in biotechnology and biochemistry approximately 650. The key informants noted that there was no method of co-ordinating the offer of places with the demands of the labour market.

9.4.7 HEIs continue to support students in the first year

HEIs have a wide variety of resources directed towards helping students during their first year. One of the smaller public HEIs offers four kinds of support:

- Tutoring & orientation support from older students
- Additional courses to support students in the development of their academic skills
- 'Zero courses' delivered at the start of the academic year to address any initial academic challenges
- Welcoming courses which introduced students into their degree programmes.

The larger of the public HEIs focused its work mainly on supporting students who are not achieving their potential and at risk of dropping out of higher education. In order to do so, they developed planned orientation for students, including tutorials (sometimes provided by older students, who get paid for their services), make-up classes and virtual support. Furthermore, units specialised in detecting students' learning difficulties were put in place, to take action and support students when necessary.

9.5 How do young people make choices regarding higher education?

9.5.1 Cost and grades a concern for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds

The two focus groups of students in upper-secondary education provided sharply contrasting views of the barriers to higher education. In the school which had lower rates of progression and served mostly lower-income students, practically all students indicated they were concerned about costs (tuition fees have been rising in recent years) and of having a sufficiently high mark on the PAU to get into their programme of choice. Students from the semi-private school which had higher progression rates were significantly less likely to be concerned about the PAU and none referred to financial concerns.

9.5.2 Higher education is perceived as very important to future labour market chances

Parents exert significant influence on higher education study decisions. They also communicate the view that going to university is the way to have a good job. This view is reinforced by schools. Many of the students think that having a higher education is a minimum requirement if they are to achieve labour market success (the phrase "need to have a future" was heard repeatedly). That said, a number of students – particularly those in humanities programmes at HEIs – indicated that their primary motivation was to continue learning in an area that interested them.

9.5.3 Transition a concern for all students

The students from the secondary school with lower higher education entry rates expressed concern that the teaching methods in HEIs would be different from what they have had in secondary education, the academic demands would be greater and there would be less support from the HEI to help them if they started to fail.

The students from the school with a higher rate of higher education entry voiced similar concerns: being overwhelmed by too many responsibilities and not knowing how to get around in an environment where they think they will have a lot of freedom and less supervision than in their current school.

9.5.4 Students want more information and guidance on higher education transition

The majority of students felt confident about what they want to study, but did not feel very well informed about the possibilities of studying in higher education, especially with regard to the different existing degrees. Students who had already made the transition to university indicated that during their final year of study they felt a lot of pressure regarding the PAU and most of the information they received was about the test. In contrast, the information they received about higher education programmes was seen as superficial.

Visits to public HEIs are offered on an occasion known as the 'Open Doors Day'. These visits are organised by the HEIs in coordination with the secondary schools, but students felt this was just an isolated activity. They also thought it only allowed them to get information about one or at most a few degrees and not the full range available. In addition, the students felt that on these occasions institutions are trying to "sell" them particular programmes.

The students from the semi-private school benefited from additional activities in the form of a cycle of conferences with former students and professionals who visit the school to give talks and conferences about the degrees they had studied and their various professions.

Although there does seem to be a guidance function at work at the end of upper-secondary school, in Spain the system seems more attuned to the provision of information. Furthermore, it appears students from wealthier backgrounds have access to more of this information. Many students indicated a desire for an intermediary who could provide a broader overview of available degrees and programmes.

9.5.5 Students feel the PAU may be focused too much on schooling and not what they will study

Students are extremely critical of the PAU, for a number of reasons. Partly, this is because it plays a disproportionately large part in the higher education admission systems. Many find it illogical that marks received in fields required in the PAU, e.g. philosophy, can affect one's chances to study in a field such as engineering; they wish there were other (non-test) means to measure merit, drive and ability. A large part of the students' criticism is for the way the test has taken over the final year of the school curriculum, which they feel has become obsessively orientated towards preparing students to take and pass the PAU.

9.6 Appendix: Interviews and focus groups

- Interview 1: Large non-selective public HEI in a major city
- Interview 2: Large public technical HEI in a major city
- Interview 3: Elite public HEI in a smaller city
- Interview 4: Public HEI in a smaller city
- Interview 5: Private HEI
- Interview with representative of Ministry of Education (higher education)
- Interview with representative of Council of Education, Culture and Sport
- Interview with representative of the regional Co-ordination body for HEI Entrance Examinations
- Focus Group 1: Pre-HE students at higher entry school
- Focus group 2: Pre-HE students at lower entry school
- Focus Group 3: Comprehensive HEI in a large city
- Focus Group 4: Technical HEI in a large city

References

¹ Based on United Nations Geoscheme
<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/methods/m49/m49regin.htm>

² UOE data for 2014, tertiary education students.

³ UOE data 2003 to 2012, tertiary education students (ISCED 1997 5-6). Average growth of EU countries, 24%.

⁴ Affelnet is used throughout the country as a registration system: however, in most of the country, students receive their first choice of institution on a regular basis; only in the Paris region (including Creteil and Versailles) is choice and selection a major issue.

⁵ Indeed, in the case of Bavaria with a binding recommendation from teachers, not all pupils who have been given such a recommendation of competence to attend a Gymnasium actually do this, favouring instead the vocational-track Realschule. Bildungsbericht Bayern 2015, p.112.

⁶ However, it should be noted that these do not fully assure the comparability of marks from the Abitur examination between the 16 German states, this mark is based to two-thirds on examinations and homework completed within the final two years of study. More on the competency standards:
<https://www.kmk.org/themen/qualitaetssicherung-in-schulen/bildungsstandards.html>

⁷ For a synopsis of the laws, see also:

http://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/Dateien/veroeffentlichungen_beschluesse/2014/2014_08_00-Synopse-Hochschulzugang-berufl_Qualifizierter.pdf

⁸ http://www.che.de/downloads/CHE_AP_195_Studieren_ohne_Abitur_2017.pdf

⁹

https://www.che.de/downloads/Im_Blickpunkt_Erfolgsgeheimnisse_privater_Hochschulen.pdf

¹⁰ Many of these points are highly congruent with a national survey carried out in Germany on young people planning to enter higher education:
http://www.dzhw.eu/pdf/pub_fh/fh-201501dzhw.pdf

¹¹ In fact, in the interview with an advisor from the Job Centre, he states that this has much improved in the past years through the opportunities for talking to young people provided by the P-Seminars.

¹² This does happen in some cases. The independent initiative Arbeiterkind.de offers this through a national network of volunteers, with a focus on students coming from non-higher education backgrounds. Also some HEIs offer such services, e.g. the Jade Hochschule (i.e. UAS) in Wilhelmshaven - <https://www.jade-hs.de/studium/waehrend-des-studiums/zentrale-studienberatung/serviceangebot/vor-dem-studium/jade-lotsen/>

¹³ CNFIS – Raport public anual 2014, p. 10. Available online at http://www.cnfis.ro/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/CNFIS-Raport-public2014_final.pdf, retrieved on December 28th 2016.

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