The world after COVID-19
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> The **World after COVID-19** is a series of 'think pieces' which ACA published every Tuesday from early May until mid-July 2020. The pieces are authored by well-known experts in the field of international higher education. The basic question posed to them all is: will the post-COVID-19 world be different, and if so, how?

AN INTRODUCTION

by BERND WÄCHTER Former ACA Director

In the weeks before ACA started its series of think pieces entitled *The world after COVID-19*, our lives had been changed in an unprecedented way. In a message announcing the series, I wrote: Recently, "we have lived a slow life, a life short of direct human contact. Travelling has become a rare activity and, outside one's own country, often impossible. Cities, usually awash with motored vehicles, have opened up into spaces for pedestrians and cyclists. Universities and schools switched to online teaching almost immediately. Pollution levels are dropping fast. I feel like I live in a prison, but in a very comfortable one." A few months later, I regard the prison as less attractive. But this is another matter.

At the time of the start of the series, i.e. in the first half of May, many of us were wondering what the lasting impact of COVID-19 would be on our planet, but particularly on higher education in general and on internationalisation in particular. This was the overriding question that we put to our authors: once the pandemic was over or anyway under control, would the status quo ante reign again or would it be replaced by a 'new normal', whatever that looked like?

We especially highlighted two questions for the attention of our authors, i.e.

• 		Would online education become the default mode of higher education after COVID-19?
• 		Would international physical (spatial) mobility of students and researchers be replaced, at least partly, by 'virtual' and by 'blended' mobility?

But we encouraged the authors nonetheless to address other issues they deemed relevant in a COVID-19 context as well.

ONLINE LEARNING AND TEACHING: THE 'NEW NORMAL'?

It is not the first time that the university as we know it, with people in their flesh interacting in one and the same space, has been declared dead. Some 20 years ago, in the dotcom hype, the 'brick and mortar'

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university was regarded by some as a fatally ill patient. The future belonged to the 'click university'. However, the patient proved to be very resilient. And distance and e-learning never quite became the successes predicted, at least not yet.

Was it different this time round? Yes and no, I understand our authors saying. It was different in that large numbers of higher education institutions went online more or less overnight. This is a sign of courage, but also the result of no alternative left.

So online education had its breakthrough. But often at the cost of quality. Universities practised 'rapid response', the lowest level of maturity in online education, as *Dominic Orr* states. Almost all authors agree that the infrastructure in many universities is only basic and requires big improvements. Formats have to be adapted to the new online mode, as *Sijbolt Noorda* demands. Professors need to be trained in the new medium and even many students lack the necessary skills. Advanced online learning and teaching is costly; it cannot be had on a shoestring. But not all is gloom and doom. The think piece of *Dylis and Lesley Wilson* shows that technology can successfully be used in training students and teachers in the area of early years learning.

INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY

Spatial mobility across country borders for purposes of study and research (i.e., what we meant when we used the term mobility 30 years ago), is already and will remain a casualty of COVID-19 in the nearer future. Even *Neil Kemp*, eternally the optimist when it comes to international mobility, expects it to take many years until pre-COVID-mobility levels will be reached again. He bases his analysis that these levels will eventually be reached again at all on the fact that there is still much unmet demand in Asia today and, possibly, in Africa in the future.

Sir Peter Scott also expects less international mobility of students and researchers in the near future. He links this expectation to an expected shift to virtual internationalisation. That might well happen, but it will have very detrimental effects on the finances of universities with high tuition fees. There might be a pressure on current fee levels. Sir Peter, but also *Eva Egron-Polak*, expect that over time universities will anyway turn to a more local and regional target group.

So the future of mobility is probably a mixture of classical, in-the-flesh study in another country, of online leaning, and of blended mobility, as *Irina Ferencz* predicts. Classical spatial mobility for full degrees is unlikely to ever fully disappear. Even though there might be pressure to reduce fee levels, if sizeable fees are still anywhere possible, it is in physical mobility. International students and/or their parents have in the past shown little enthusiasm to pay very much for online education.

There are already now some factors pushing growth in virtual mobility. They have not necessarily anything to do with higher education. Europe is betting on 'digitalisation', which is increasingly hailed as the 'best thing since sliced bread'. Europe is also betting on 'virtual exchanges'. The reason is that the new Erasmus programme (2021-2027) is to treble the number of beneficiaries, but will provide at best double the money, compared to the present programme phase. That explains in part the charm of virtual mobility. It costs practically nothing, or so we assume. International mobility, especially to far-away destinations, is also increasingly seen by many as politically incorrect in an environmental perspective. As *Peter van der Hijden* and *Kees Kouwenaar* put it, flying is 'not Greta'.

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The series *The world after COVID-19* has been enthusiastically received in the international higher education community. For this, we have to thank our 11 authors. The success of the series has also made us decide to come up with a new set of think pieces in 2021, but on a different topic. Stay tuned.

Bernd Wächter
Former ACA Director

October 2020

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EVA EGRON-POLAK

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THOUGHTS ON A POST-COVID 19 WORLD

For most of us, the past two or three months continue to seem surreal, a dystopia that we might read about in science fiction books or avoid, in some of our cases, in movies. Yet the COVID 19 pandemic is real, it is now, it is global and it will be with us for a long time, both as the virus continues to spread, and even afterwards as its impact will be lasting and deep. This is perhaps the only prediction that any of us can make with certainty. Everything else is closer to speculation.

Nevertheless, imagining the future is what all of us are trying to do daily – in our private lives and in our professional lives. In both cases, changes will be inevitable and long-lasting and depending on our personal situation, the sector we work in and the policies being put in place by the State we live in, the adjustments will be more or less difficult, if not devastating. Around the world a new normal is being invented.

In higher education, as in other sectors, the lockdown was implemented quickly, with relative ease (all things considered) and successful impact in terms of public health. Universities shut down one after the other around the globe, moved as much activity as they could online and launched crisis management protocols to ensure students and staff were advised properly, taken care of and repatriated or sent home as needed. Quickly, universities found ways in which they could support efforts to respond to the health crisis and students were often at the forefront of inventing ways to help either as volunteers in their community, through research, or by proposing technological solutions to reduce risks of exposure to the virus or simply make daily tasks easier.

The mobilization was immediate and in the face of the crisis, solidarity and collaboration prevailed in higher education as in other sectors. This positive response has made the tragic impact on human lives and even the economic hardships that spread as quickly as the virus, more bearable.

Moving from lockdown and crisis mode to resuming operations for the medium and long-term presents a much bigger challenge, and the political and social discord is quick to take hold in many

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countries. Just as governments worldwide are inventing strategies for economic survival, academics and university leaders are inventing options to continue pursuing their primary missions. In general, the main problem is balancing the imperatives of health security with those of economic survival while protecting rights and freedoms, political stability and social welfare.

For universities, the challenge is to find ways to offer again full-fledged learning and research opportunities of quality for all students, a safe and productive working environment for researchers and faculty members. This is likely to be even more challenging during a time of quasi global recession and economic downturn which will affect institutional funding but also the financial capacity of students and their families to enroll in higher education.

The crisis has shown the potential of online teaching and learning, online meetings, online sharing of expertise and experiences and online joint elaboration of workplans and proposals. But it also revealed huge gaps in the delivery capacities on the part of some institutions as well as the gaps in capacity to actively participate and take up what is being offered on the part of individuals. A tremendous effort will be required on both sides of this equation in order to ensure that education and research needs are met in a satisfactory manner using virtual means as a main mode of delivery.

In international education, the calls to focus less on physical mobility, still too exclusive rather than available to all, and more on other aspects of internationalization are not new but will certainly have a much stronger echo purely out of necessity. Virtual mobility is already an alternative to physical mobility, but so far still marginal in terms of numbers. Will it prove to be a viable replacement for the mass mobility that has been the target for so long in Europe and elsewhere? Will it have the same impacts in terms of learning and personal development? Will the business model that accompanies virtual as opposed to physical mobility suffice to sustain those universities that count on the foreign tuition fee revenues?

Most importantly though, how will universities provide the internationally and interculturally rich learning environment which has been deemed essential for quality education? Of course, the answer lies in curriculum and pedagogy as has been claimed by many scholars in the field. This shift to a greater focus on curriculum and the classroom has not proven easy in the past and will require both a concerted effort and time. However, as it is both a more inclusive approach, and forms part of a greener, more sustainable approach to interactions for international academic networking and collaboration, and can make greater use of virtual platforms, it is likely to gain in popularity and quality.

At present, going back to business as usual seems unlikely – not in the economy, not in our day- to-day life, not in higher education. There are many who see the pandemic as an opportunity for a much needed global and comprehensive 'reset' that will bring fundamental changes for the welfare of humanity and the planet. Yet, there are many dangerous signs as well.

Politically, such a 'reset' could be detrimental to democracy. Indeed, the crisis has brought its share

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of nationalistic, xenophobic and authoritarian trends around the world. Questions have been raised about democracy as an effective regime to combat this or any other future pandemic. We have seen even the most pro-international and pro-integration countries in Europe close their borders and seek national solutions. Multilateralism and international solidarity took a beating during this inward-looking phase of the pandemic. When and how political leaders, decision makers and citizens will again feel confident in decisions made beyond their nation-state, and at times beyond their local government, remains a question. Similarly, in economic terms, the 'reset' may be fundamental, moving away from globalization of production and multilateral free trade, or it may simply mean new trading patterns and an even more ferocious competition.

In higher education the 'reset' will also be necessary and the discussions and statements urging for a complete overhaul are already populating our virtual world. But this is also not without risk. The agenda and priority setting will certainly give prominence to virtual and online offers, but these can also perpetuate inequality and threaten access and success for the less advantaged. It may give priority to STEM disciplines and related research, thus further undermine social sciences and humanities. We may find it easier to collaborate within existing, well-established and familiar networks rather than opening up to new partners which may need our collaboration even more. How, in this new setting, will we ensure that personal contacts for teamwork, brainstorming, respectful intercultural discussions, creativity, instilling empathy and many other aspects of cognitive learning are maintained? The limits of the virtual mode of operations cannot be ignored, nor can the personal, face-to-face interaction be underestimated. The need for change must also not do away with collegiality or undermine fundamental values of academic freedom and autonomy: in other words, throw the proverbial baby out with the bathwater.

The COVID 19 crisis will certainly bring forth a re-ordering of priorities for many higher education institutions and may have a positive impact. Yes, it may pave the way for a greater emphasis on new dimensions of internationalization, there may be a greater focus on recruiting local students, on IT infrastructure and staff development for improved online design and delivery of programs, more emphasis on narrowing the equity gaps in access and success of learners, an even greater attention to issues of sustainable development and responding to the demands of a potentially changed demand for labour, with less emphasis on the global market and international trade, and many others.

In addition to juggling new and pressing priorities in the months and years to come, the longer-term future will be an on-going balancing act between some new or at least more prominent considerations – the costs of a no risk society, individual freedom, and quality of life and issues of economic survival, environmental sustainability, equity considerations and global solidarity. Each society, within its own context and in the light of its own resources and capacities, will be grappling with these issues.

Higher education and research institutions – as institutions that command respect and usually

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represent the progressive forces in society – will be called upon and must play several roles in the post COVID 19 geopolitical landscape. They will be expected to critically assess the impact of this pandemic from a variety of perspectives – economic, political, social but also scientific and academic as major shifts in power and influence will be taking place. In the newfound credibility in science, they will have the renewed trust to be at the forefront of the efforts to resolve this health crisis and potentially prevent others. More generally, universities have the potential to play a critical guiding role, using their full arsenal of expertise in all the disciplines to ensure that collaboration prevails, that the long-term and collective big picture is not lost in the struggle and need for immediate and individual solutions. As many have said, this global pandemic, as tragic and disruptive as it is, may also bring a host of opportunities to reset humanity's future path in a new, more caring, compassionate and ecologically sustainable direction.

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REFLECTIONS ON A WORLD AFTER COVID-19

Three powerful images - one hopeful, the second malevolent, the third tragic - suggest that the way we have thought about, and practised, the internationalisation of higher education for more than 30 years may have to change.

The first, and hopeful, image is of Greta Thunberg solemnly lecturing the world's leaders, or skimming across the Atlantic in a high-tech, but spartan, sailing boat. This 17-year-old Swede with her fiercely puritanical opposition to global warming and the destruction of the natural environment has captured the enthusiasm of millions round the globe. She has changed the world's political, if not yet its actual, weather.

The second, and malevolent, image is of desperate refugees (nearly always labelled 'economic migrants' to stigmatise them), squalid camps reminiscent of the agony of post-war Europe, frontiers reinforced with walls and wire, xenophobic nationalism disguised as anti-cosmopolitan and anti-elite 'populism'. Trump, Brexit, Orban, Erdogan – these are the prophets of our 21st- century rejection of the liberal and humanistic values of the Enlightenment.

The third, and tragic, image is of crowded hospital intensive care units and doctors and nurses in full visors, masks and cover-all gowns, of empty streets, offices and factories and of death lists more reminiscent of medieval plagues. The global Covid-19 pandemic now threatens to produce an economic recession unmatched since the Great Depression of the 1930s, and levels of social anxiety unknown in modern times. Contrast these images with the practice of internationalisation in higher education – massive student flows, still predominantly from east and south Asia to Europe and America (and Australasia), international research collaborations and conferences frequented by globally mobile scientists and scholars, and universities competing for world-class recognition and advantage.

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Of course, there are those who argue that everything will get back to 'normal' later this year or perhaps in 2021. The pandemic may be contained - but climate change or right-wing 'populism?' Universities, in their globalised form, face fundamental challenges on not one but all these fronts. As a result, they will need to make equally fundamental adjustments.

Obviously, international flows – of students and researchers - will be curbed. To cope a step-change will be needed in the shift from face-to-face encounters, whether teaching students or delivering keynotes at international

conferences, to online activities. This shift from physical to virtual forms of internationalisation so far has been written about far more than it has been practised. Now it will have to happen – and happen quickly.

Next, there has been a – too close – association between internationalisation and marketisation in higher education. The recruitment of international students and participation in global research networks have often been seen through the lens of income generation, and freedom from the scrutiny of the State. If internationalisation is curbed or forced to take other (and better?) forms, the entrepreneurial university will look very different.

Third, a key driver of the internationalisation 'game', student flows from Asia to the 'West', was almost played out anyway. The days of its core element, the recruitment of Chinese students, were already coming to a close. But this rebalancing of internationalisation will be accelerated by a more self-confident China, claiming (not implausibly) to have demonstrated its superiority in its response to the pandemic, and generally a more jaded view of the supposed assets and values of the 'West'.

Fourth, the excessive importance attached to internationalisation in our definition of 'excellence', expressed in the proliferating rankings of 'best' universities, will be diminished. As international students, and opportunities, dry up (even temporarily), universities will need to discover new forms of validation by better meeting the needs of their local communities, especially the deprived and excluded (which, of course, will help to counter-attack the fake populists).

Finally, the politics of climate change will favour 'near' internationalisation over 'distant' internationalisation. Catching the train from Brussels to Berlin, or Paris to Rome, will appear far preferable to another long-haul intercontinental flight. The imagined geography of the world is changing. Is it too fanciful to imagine that physical forms of internationalisation will become more confined to, in that sinister post-Soviet phrase, 'the near abroad', leaving more virtual forms dominant in the 'distant abroad'? If it is, this may be an opportunity to reinvigorate and re-imagine the European project.

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NEW WAYS OF WORKING WITH 'EARLY YEARS' LEARNING IN ENGLISH UNIVERSITIES

This contribution focuses on the challenges facing 'early years' training provision in England, initially intended as a move to improve quality. Previously, the 'early years' sector did not have a tradition of employing graduates to lead teaching practice. The field is diverse, with small private businesses providing much of the education and childcare places.

This programme has successfully recruited graduate professionals, working in early years settings, i.e., with young children under the age of five. The design has been informed by a belief that students benefit from the relationships they build with each other, and the programme team, through weekly university-based teaching sessions, and regular tutor visits to observe teaching practice. Hence the programme's strength has been that students learn from each other, enabling the group to develop a strong community of practice.

Covid-19 arrived suddenly for us at our mid-point review period. Both students and tutors were working hard to review their professional and academic progress, while setting targets for the final period of the programme. The speed at which we had to stop and work out how to change our way of working was quite overwhelming, for both students and tutors. Initially, we continued the review tutorials by telephone, but the situation was changing quickly. Almost overnight nurseries were closing, and trainees were anxious about the virus and their personal safety; when, or if they would be paid and be able to return to their jobs; how they would manage to complete the training programme.

The personal stories of students, facing major challenges, permeated the tutorials, with some leaving quickly to return home to other parts of Europe before the borders closed. Others had to face worries
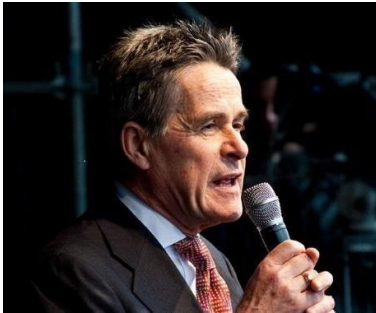
about paying the rent for flatmates who had left suddenly. The close relationships that we had already established with the student group both helped and hindered the transition to alternative methods of distance and online learning. The students trusted that we would support them, and as Programme Leader I confirmed this regularly through group emails, but there was also a yearning from both students and tutors to be able to return to more familiar training territory.

In response to this sense of loss, I avidly read the University's instructions on how to deliver live seminars and lectures and tentatively invited the students to try out a virtual classroom session. As time passes, we are establishing a better rhythm with this, and we are all learning to mute our microphones to sneeze or if the phone rings unexpectedly! I have noticed that we are all becoming slightly more comfortable with our distance learning relationships and any feedback from the group about what they would like to focus on next can be responded to more flexibly than would have been the case previously.

I now begin to wonder what could be learned from this in a post Covid-19 world. I recall observing a colleague delivering a session to her group of distance learning students from around the world and being curious about how she had been able to establish the group's sense of purpose and togetherness without ever meeting in person. Maybe there will be new possibilities for the future that can coexist comfortably with previous teaching methods. Will we be able to find an ethical way to share video observations instead of visiting students' workplaces and placements to observe their teaching practice? The possibilities that are beginning to emerge will become more possible to think about and the more comfortable we become with communicating online will inevitably lead to new territory.

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SIJBOLT NOORDA

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SOME CONSIDERATIONS ON HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE COVID-19 CRISIS

There is something deeply paradoxical about futurology. Whether the future is being painted as paradise or hell, more of the same or something completely different, these prophecies rarely materialise. Futurology isn't easy. In hindsight, looking back to looking ahead, one can nicely see the limits of extrapolation, as well as the restrictions of utopian dreams or nightmares. As the stale joke has it, it is very difficult to make predictions, especially about the future.

At the same time, they yield interesting insights about their origins. Evidently futurists are more reliable witnesses on their own day and age and the way they saw it than on prospects. Applied to the present this implies that future readers of contemporary expectations and concerns about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic will do so with a good deal of scepsis about their predictive accuracy. And take these for what they basically are: reflections or rather, magnifications of the mood of today.

CRISIS

The worldwide impact of the COVID-19 virus and the many measures to contain its spread have brought about a keen sentiment of crisis, not so much because of the lethal powers of virus itself as due to the implications of the containment measures. A range of emergency interventions is hitting sensitive nerves in our system, our usual patterns of behaviour and familiar preferences. In more than one way this crisis is a test, a kind of unintentional experiment on our customs and habitudes.

In Higher Education – like in many sectors of society - we are now facing a first round of urgent challenges. Although news media are carelessly reporting that universities are closed as a consequence of measures taken, in fact almost all have moved to different modes of activity, most of them by digital means of communication. For the time being working from home has become the default setting, access to library facilities is remote only and most activities in wet labs, clinics and hospitals have been

altered or reduced considerably. All of it with a high degree of success thanks to the joint efforts of many, a great talent for improvisation and a keen readiness to be flexible and adaptive.

The timeframe of these modified operations is in months. Reprioritising and adjourning are usually done within the same time window. The underlying, oft unspoken assumption is that normalcy will have returned by the start of next academic year.

In my estimation the most plausible scenario is that once this first round of urgent challenges and improvised response will be drawing to a close, Higher Education Institutions will want to resume business-as-usual as much and as fast as they can. Remote teaching and distance learning are very welcome substitutes, but they come with their natural limitations. In many fields practical work as well as peer learning and experiential learning require presence and teamwork. Comprehensive assessments are hard to do without a classroom experience. On top of that, the workload of faculty hardly allows for the present degree of prioritizing redesign of teaching to remain doable and acceptable for a much longer period of time.

Some may find this scenario of a rapid reset to default is wasting a good crisis, others may think it way too optimistic. Yet this course of events would not at all surprise me. Looking back to earlier periods of disruption over and over the powers of attraction of normalcy appear to be formidable and not to be underestimated.

There are of course certain important aspects of the present Higher Education landscape that will suffer drawbacks for a longer period of time than others. Pundits are already pointing to internationalisation – above all the mobility part of it – as the number one victim. I do, however, doubt it will be more than a temporary dip. More seriously, it is to be expected, given the economic setback in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, that private as well as public funding of Higher Education will come under pressure, according to the specific national arrangements the system is depending on. In some cases, these factors are interrelated: fewer incoming foreign students, lower income. The gravest problem I expect to occur is a further widening of the already existing gap between individuals, communities and nations that are more respectively less powerful in socio-economic terms. I'll get back to this effect later.

THE RISK SOCIETY

At this point of my thinking on the world of Higher Education after COVID-19, my thoughts went back to a think tank project we did almost twenty years ago. It was about the 'risk society'. We were a mixed group of scholars and practitioners of various backgrounds. Among them philosophers and sociologists, politicians and insurance people, safety inspectors as well as public health professionals. I learned a lot. I remember a transport safety specialist explaining to us how overreacting often the way is we cope with disaster. As we want to exclude future repetition of a calamity we avidly reach for measures, rules and regulations that promise exactly this. Never ever again! Yet what at the time of

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the event looked like the thing to do often turns out to be largely useless additional red tape, creating pseudo-security.

Our sociological colleagues introduced us to the work of the German sociologist Ulrich Beck on the risk society as a defining attribute of much of the contemporary world.[i] Progress has banned so many of the dangerous and unwanted features earlier generations had to live with that we came to embrace the illusion of a safe and predictable world. Misfortunes under control, as it were. The consequence being that every calamity is a mistake, an unacceptable breach of confidence. Someone should not have let this happen. Some authority should have prevented it and once it did happen, they should make sure it will never happen again.

At the same time, we know we are living amidst complexities, in a space of global dimensions, surrounded by a host of capricious agents and influences, including ourselves. There is a constant risk that any of these, anywhere might start a chain of events that could end in disaster. How to cope with this possibility, live in these risk-bearing conditions? How to avoid a state of denial and prudently be prepared for misfortune when it strikes?

The good news is that there are countless experts who know about risk, who make inventories of risk potential and contingency plans of how to prevent or how to cope. Long lists of national agencies, scientific institutes, international organisations and independent analysts are constantly producing schemes and schedules, issuing advise and warning. Just do a quick internet search and you'll find expert reports on each and every risk factor.

The not so good news is that most of us do not pay heed to such warning and advice most of the time. We do not care as long as emergency is asleep, and calamities do not materialize. Apparently 'It is bound to end in disaster' is not the kind of life motto that helps you carry through. 'We'll cross that bridge when we get to it' is more like it.

PANDEMICS AND SUSTAINABILITY AGENDAS

In most of the risk inventories I have seen pandemics invariably rank among the most serious and the most common. Infectious diseases have been with us since time immemorial. Some come and go, others remain. Whether carried by way of bacteria or a virus, it is their specialty to spread, to infect.

Sometimes with only benign consequences for their hosts, sometimes with very serious results. Annually influenza type A causes up to half a million fatalities. In its rather short career HIV has already killed an estimated 35 million people.

On the website of the Global Health Council – its offices not too far from President Trump's – you may find a report from 2016 on how to be better prepared and how important this would be. This is their summary message:

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"The Ebola crisis in West Africa was both a tragedy and a wakeup call, revealing dangerous deficiencies across global systems to prevent, prepare, and respond to infectious disease crises. To address these shortcomings and inform a more effective response in the future, the National Academy of Medicine convened the Commission on a Global Health Risk Framework for the Future (….). The Commission's report (…) highlights the essential role of pandemic preparedness in national security and economic stability—a critical but often under-examined dimension of the global conversation post-Ebola. Importantly, the report demonstrates that the impact of infectious disease crises goes far beyond human health alone—and that mitigation, likewise, requires the mobilization and long-term commitment of multiple sectors."[ii]

A wakeup call indeed. Yet this is by far not the only statement making the very same point. Evidently there is a constant need for wakeup calls. The "we'll cross the bridge when we get there" motto appears to be much more attractive than rational caution and prudence. It is simply more convenient to disregard calamity occurring elsewhere, hitting other people in foreign countries, and dream yourselves to be safe.

Which brings me back to my thoughts on Higher Education in a post COVID-19 world. Universities have a key responsibility for societies, ultimately in the interest of promoting health, prosperity and enlightenment around the world. Sustainable development has become a common umbrella term for the multitude of aspects and sectors involved. And it has become the general opinion that universities in teaching and learning as well as in research must contribute to present and future well-being by enhancing sustainable development.

Pandemic preparedness is no doubt a key agenda item for sustainable societies. Shouldn't this agenda be taken up by universities? Shouldn't they be creating strong interdisciplinary programs in teaching and learning as well as in research so that public health and medical expertise do not stay within their own silo but are being shared and co-developed with economists, sociologists, lawyers, cultural analysts, mathematicians? Or in an even wider circle and on the broader topic of sustainable coping mechanisms in the risk society?

In the course of the past decade sustainability has been graciously accepted as part of Higher Education's responsibility and agenda. This may be strategic lip-service in many cases. Here and there serious efforts are being made to redesign study programs and reprioritise research projects accordingly. This is, however, often happening in niches rather than mainstream. And only rarely directly linked with social innovation and/or policy developments at a national or international scale. So there still is a world to win.

If this present disruption would indeed be experienced as a wakeup call, our present crisis might have an up-side and lead to serious joint efforts of universities and relevant research institutes for the long term. I see a good number of good and real reasons for this to happen. One should strike when the

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iron is hot. There are clear signs that public appreciation for the role of scientific expertise is benefiting from scientists' part in mastering the pandemic. At the same time academics may be more prepared and willing to engage in redesign and reprioritizing their programs in the wake of the present challenges. An additional good reason for a prominent role of universities is the obvious lack of trusted alternative options. For-profit business is what it is: for-profit business. Which is not always identical to the public good. Political leadership for that matter is not always offering the trusted pair of hands societies deserve. Just compare the German Chancellor's press conferences on the pandemic and the role of science with the exclamations of the American President.

VALUES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Projections of desired developments and pleas for positive change like the one above definitely belong to the category of futurology I mentioned at the outset of this paper. They are invitations rather than predictions and should be read as reflections of this author's persuasion.

Since 2013 I have been working closely with the Magna Charta Observatory. This engagement has taught me that motives and values are of crucial importance in Higher Education, in terms of mission and strategy, as well as in terms of operations. It is essential that universities know what is driving them, as institutions as well as faculty, which moral and social values are underpinning their programs and preferences. Is it self-preservation, staying in business and doing well in financial terms? Or do universities heed ulterior motivations?

Had the COVID-19 pandemic not intervened, the Observatory would have launched a new version of its foundational statement this coming September. It professes a clear articulation of the main principles, values and responsibilities of universities worldwide. Its core message reads as follows: "Universities acknowledge that they have a responsibility to engage with and respond to the aspirations and challenges of the world and to the communities they serve, to benefit humanity and contribute to sustainability."[iii]

To live up to this commitment or not, that is in essence what is at stake in the wake of the COVID- 19 pandemic. Universities are facing moral and ethical challenges in dimensions that most of them have not been seen in the lifetime of present leadership, faculty and students. One would hope that we rise to the occasion. If under financial pressure as a consequence of the imminent economic setback difficult choices must be made, the less powerful must not be the ones paying the price. It most certainly would do Higher Education good if universities were defending and protecting precisely these interests. That is exactly the kind of test or real life experiment I referred to earlier on.

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[i] *Ulrich Beck Risikogesellschaft. Auf dem Wege in eine andere Moderne. Suhrkamp Verlag 1986 (ET Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity. Sage Publishers 1992)*
[ii] *https://globalhealth.org/global-health-risk-framework-the-neglected-dimension-of-global-security-a-framework-to-counter-infectious-disease-crises/*
[iii] *For the full text of the statement see http://www.magna-charta.org/magna-charta-universitatum/mcu-2020*

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MIND THE GAP: PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION NOW

In early May 2020, EAIE held a webinar called "Community moments" with the title "Online learning, yes we can." I had the pleasure of being the invited guest. One of the most poignant responses after the webinar was a personal communication I received from one of the participants, who complemented the discussion and then stated: "(…) I found it was just what was needed *after these long months of adapting and reflecting*." I mention this because it gives a glimpse into the hard work and engagement happening right across higher education to ensure that students remain well- served in these tricky times. We could contrast this with the voice of an international student we interviewed in a recent episode of "Kiron talks…", who described the lack of information and guidance he was receiving, his insecurity and that of his fellow students. For sure, Covid-19 and the need for the "online pivot" due to campus closures has led to a lot of turbulence.

In a recent UNESCO presentation on adapting education systems during the Covid-19 crisis, the chief of section for ICT in Education, Fengchun Miao, differentiated between three consecutive phases of transition. The first phase is about *rapid response*. In higher education some are already calling this phase "emergency online learning" or more cynically the "Zoom University". In this phase, the focus has been on ensuring students' access to content and offering socio-psychological support. While this has been solved individually by higher education institutions, online content from other providers has also been gaining traction.

Indeed, there has been an immense run on massive online courses (MOOCs) on all the well-known platforms, which Dhawal Shah from Class Central, a search engine for MOOC courses, says reminds him of the year of the MOOC nearly a decade ago. Shah and his team stated in a recent analysis that by the end of April, nine million learners had visited Class Central, compared to just 500,000 by the end of February, the MOOC platform Coursera received over ten million course enrolments in a 30- day period, up 644% from last year, and edX, another MOOC platform, became one of the world's top 1,000

websites. In China, this development was enforced through government, with the Chinese ministry of education issuing instructions for remote higher education provision to be facilitated through online learning platforms like XuetangX. The trouble with this phase is that it is evidently re-living many of the disappointments associated with the first generation of MOOCs, for instance, they are not accessible to everyone and often have *a very transactional view of learning*: content, tests, then certificate.

So, it is important to have a reflective phase following on from the first solutions. In this phase a "new normal" of types has been established, i.e. courses continue to some extent, and workarounds for examinations and to ensure progress have been found. In this phase, stock should be taken to see what is being achieved well with these solutions, and what is missing, and particularly which learner groups are not coping well with these solutions. The real concern here is that *underserved groups will be struggling even more under this 'new normal'*, which will only amplify inequalities in higher education provision. So, the second phase, the new normal, should be accompanied by evaluations and monitoring. In this phase, it makes sense to take inspiration from studies on the place of online learning and MOOCs in higher education teaching and learning.

A very recent systematic review by Sarah Lambert of Deakin University provides some insights into how online learning can be made more inclusive through careful guidance and didactics built around it. This meta-study identified, classified, and reviewed the equity and inclusion purposes and outcomes of MOOCS and open education programmes between 2014 and 2018 in 46 studies. The insights showed that those programmes that were successful combined elements of learning and community support, of online and offline delivery and carefully redesigned the learning programme for this extended learning environment. This picks up on the rather elementary insight that MOOCs can be integrated into learning programmes in different ways, but also on the insight that instructional design requires *careful didactical design that considers how to integrate support, guidance and interaction into the new learning space* – and with this, it can achieve more and at scale than purely on-campus lessons.

But perhaps there is more potential for change and improvement within this transitional process? Miao suggests using the momentum and the lessons from the evaluation and monitoring phase; policy makers and institutional leaders should move into a third phase, which is about *planning for the future.*

This is echoed in an article from a student talking about the "Zoom University". The student author, Nicholas Chrapliwy from Duke University, states on reflection: "And in some ways, the secondary characteristics of remote learning have deconstructed elements of our pedagogy. The opt-out pass/fail system, dropped final exams, reduced workloads, extended deadlines, and lectures recorded to watch when it's convenient are all revelatory actions for *how arbitrary these structures were* to begin with." This may act as a reminder to us all that we started out the year discussing the future of higher education and how it should change, and perhaps now we have the opportunity to *strategically plan for some of this change.*

One of the strands of debate was one I was involved in as project leader for a study into the future of

higher education called "AHEAD". This study looked at digital trends but argued that it was more helpful to conceive of the future of *the higher education landscape as different pathways*. We hypothesised: "Flexibility of provision of learning which is not based on a common path of linearity (like climbing a ladder), but spiral shaped (interchanging spheres of depth) and which is not based on fixed content ('knowledge canons') is a challenge for higher education. However, openness of provision, unbundling of higher education programmes and closer, more individualised support of learners by educators, are all being facilitated through digital solutions." This view chimes neatly with a vision for education, which was formulated by Josie Fraser in 2010, as part of a campaign to reenvisage education in the United Kingdom initiated by Doug Belshaw and others called "Purpos/ed". In her statement, Josie Fraser said: "We cannot expect education built upon, and educators who model, a fixation with certainty and inflexibility to meet the urgent and ongoing needs of pressing social, economic and political change." So, to end this essay, I would like to encourage us all to *think creatively and imaginatively* about how we can use new forms of teaching and learning to help higher education contribute more effectively to the challenges of inclusivity and creating a sustainable world for us all.

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NEIL KEMP

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WILL YE NO COME BACK AGAIN?

Where might international student mobility be two years or so from now? This brief review seeks to explore beyond the immediate at what a post-COVID world will look like (there will be one!). The COVID shock has been immediate and profound, reaching into all aspects of our life, far beyond health, welfare and financial concerns. As for people, whilst there are generalised effects, the impact on organisations has reflected their individual characteristics. For example universities everywhere moved fast, launching many innovative approaches to support both learning and welfare needs of students. For example a major initiative has been the migration of materials for online delivery, allowing students to complete current programmes and, if problems persist, for next semester students.

Creative responses will remain essential, given that many countries remain in crisis as the global health emergency is morphing into an economic one. What is agreed is that recession is inevitable, unemployment will increase, and international trade and mobility of people will be greatly reduced. By how much and for how long will be determined not just by economics but also by sentiment, the alternatives available and the likelihood of the occasional irrational decision. Various recovery scenarios are put forward: attenuated V, flattish U, slanting L or a wonky W, but no consensus exists. Even a sharp V-shaped bounce-back will result in lower international student enrolments beyond 2021.

However, it is important to be reminded that the underlying motivations that drove international mobility to six million students globally remains. Top demand considerations are known to be enhancing employability, building communication and language skills, experiencing new cultures, and being part of a learning community, in close connection with fellow students, academics and employers. Employability is now likely to be the overwhelming concern, given the looming recession. At previous times of high unemployment, it is worth noting that investment in higher education remained strong – acquiring new qualifications being seen as providing competitive advantage in a

tough labour market.

The last twenty-five years have been boom-time for mobility. During this period there have been two major economic crises – in Asia in 1997 and globally in 2008. For example in Indonesia in 1997 the US dollar exchange rate fell to 20% of its pre-crisis level. While international enrolments did drop initially, recovery happened and was back on track within three years. However, the current crisis goes beyond anything previously experienced, reaching into areas potentially not yet foreseen and beyond the financial. And it happened in the context of a global economic downturn that was forecast even before COVID struck.

It must be anticipated that barriers to mobility, some old and some new, will likely grow. Recession implies reduced means to fund international study, growing political tensions and nationalism could result in stricter immigration controls in destination countries, unemployment could close post- study work, reluctance to travel is likely and concerns over personal health and security will be high priority.

But there remains the strong desire across universities to attract international students and for many long-existing reasons: contribution to academic standards and research output; community enrichment; and revenue. In terms of income some universities could have a shortfall of over €60 million this coming year. For UK universities, Brexit, with the possible loss of 50,000 EU students and research funding, will exacerbate the challenging financial and academic problems.

Universities will need to respond positively and assertively to the changing circumstances. While the under 30s might be risk takers, their parents, who likely finance studies, are much less so and will need reassurance. A university able to demonstrate how it successfully managed COVID could prove attractive to a concerned parent. At the national level, a new differentiator might emerge, with those main destination countries perceived as higher COVID risk (for example currently the US, France and the UK) losing to those of lower risk (New Zealand, Australia and Germany).

Taking considerations together it is highly likely that there will be very significant declines in international enrolments over the next two years or so, followed by some growth, but from a lower base. There will be pent-up demand to satisfy, for example from China and India and, given the demographic bulge in the latter, this could result in new flows. Then, at some stage, increases from growing economies in Africa might perhaps offset declining demand from carbon dependent Middle Eastern countries. In spite of some positives, the pool of students seeking international study for the next few years is likely to be smaller and will result in greater competition between universities. This, in turn, could result in many more scholarships and fee reductions.

The immediate response, the move online for teaching and operation of universities, has to be welcomed but is likely time limited. Evidence from pre-COVID times indicates that the demand for degree programmes is much greater for on-campus study than for online delivery. Aspects of the new online capabilities should prove beneficial, with more individual modules within a degree being made available online, offering students greater choice, study flexibility and possibly lower fees. Enhanced online delivery might accelerate 'internationalisation at home', for example through COIL initiatives that facilitate new partnerships and engage communities of students not normally able to afford

mobility experiences.

While colleagues, wherever they might be, work hard to manage through the current crisis, it is important to recall that international education has optimism at its core: it provides diverse opportunities for young people, excites them with new experiences, promotes understanding, encourages the sharing of ideas and ideals, enhances cultural awareness, and creates global citizens. Values now even more important for all our futures.

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IMAGINING THE "NORM" AFTER COVID FROM AN "ABNORMAL" PERSPECTIVE

Three months into COVID crisis mode in Germany, my daily life remains pretty "normal" except that my child no longer goes to the kindergarten and I am more involved in the daily operations of the ACA headquarters in Brussels. This is, however, because my present life has been rather "abnormal".

Thanks to the European Union, I have been able to continue my employment in Brussels while living with my husband and child in Trier. Cross-border commuters living in Germany and working in Luxembourg are very "normal" in my area, the "Greater Region" (encompassing Luxemburg and close-by regions in Germany and France), but cross-border teleworkers residing AND working in one country for another remain rather rare. This becomes apparent when none of the authorities from both countries has "standard" answers regarding the social security, health care or taxation arrangements of cross-border employees working primarily in the cloud. Unlike commuters shuttling between two countries on a daily basis, cross-border teleworkers do not physically move. My daily commute to Brussels is through Outlook. Such virtual employment across the EU is theoretically and legally allowed, but practically subject to uncertain regulations because arrangements to ease cross- border employment are typically tailored for physically mobile workers. The lack of standardized regulatory arrangements for cross-border virtual workers could mean both *freedom* to try and freedom to risk.

During the COVID crisis, when national borders between Luxembourg and Trier were restricted and employees were encouraged to telework to slow down the spread of the virus, my abnormal mode of cross-border virtual employment suddenly became the temporary "norm" in my region. It didn't last long but was sufficient to sensitize regulatory bodies, on both sides of the border, of the need to clear the paths for another type of European mobile workers: cross-border teleworkers who do not move. Depending on how long COVID is going to linger on, we may even see some lasting changes if home office becomes the trend.

It may be hard for many to imagine home office being a post-COVID preference. Many are hoping that this is just an interim solution and are eager to return to the "normal" office the soonest possible. It's understandable because even for someone like me, who has been working from home for years, home office in COVID mode was very difficult to cope with. All the "outsourced" family obligations fell back on my plate and online activities exploded in volume with regular meetings, emergency meetings, and a sudden surge of webinars replacing cancelled physical events or responding to the pandemic. For those who are new to home office, the switch from physical office to cloud-based office and the sudden loss of routine and physical social contacts, plus the restrictions on personal freedom of movement make it even harder to appreciate home office.

As I told my colleagues in Brussels, the home office experience we have now is not normal.

Normally, home office moms do have and need external support for childcare or household chores to maintain a work-life balance. Normally, many of those meetings and events now turned online are not even accessible to us. Normally, we have quiet moments to focus on work after the kid(s) and the husband leave home to go to their respective school and workplace. Normally, we also have a social life, though it might be totally disconnected from our professional circle.

I also miss the calm of my normal home office sometimes. But having experienced the hustling and bustling online life, professionally and personally, I do hope some of these virtual experiments will take root and be mainstreamed to reintegrate mobility-challenged professionals living in remote regions or bound by family obligations, like me.

Technologically, cloud-based work environment has been ready for many years. Information access and exchange is no longer bound to physical locations as a result of the digitalization of work practices and documents. Social networking can also be initiated or sustained through online tools. In principle one just needs a computer connected to fast internet to work with colleagues from anywhere. Such a "work from anywhere" arrangement has, however, not been mainstreamed because the majority of employees are still working from physical premises. COVID is therefore a global social experiment pushing a critical mass of office workers and their employers to adopt some of the digital tools and infrastructures that have been there for years. For once, these digital means are not alternatives for the minorities but essentials for the majority in some fields, like ours. This is not normal for the majority, but neither is it abnormal for the minority. If we are serious about inclusive internationalisation, such potential and feasibility should be kept and further developed in the new normal even after we overcome the COVID crisis.

With the easing of lockdowns and reopening of national borders, the online home office fever will very likely subside. When certainty surrounding public health is re-established through vaccines, professionals in our field would likely prefer physical meetings over online meetings as well because of our belief in the value of physical mobility. The convenience of virtual meetings and our newly acquired skills to navigate different virtual tools may, however, convince a critical mass of professionals

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to stay online for different reasons such as family obligations, environmental concerns, financial considerations, etc. The question is whether event organizers, knowing the technical feasibility after the test-runs in COVID times, will begin to organize dual track events for those who choose to travel or stay home. Will mixed-mode meetings or events become a new norm? If so, how will the online and on-location participants be integrated seamlessly? Will online tracks become an appendix or a new parallel norm that is seen as equivalent to physical participation? How will online participation be recognized or priced if we argue that it is of equivalent quality to physical participation? All these questions may already have to be dealt with while waiting for COVID to disappear from our professional life.

COVID is here to stay. I am quite convinced that we cannot fly freely around the globe any time soon even though I would love to fly somewhere for holidays or visit my family in Hong Kong. It is no secret that we, people on this Earth, have missed the chance to break the chain of infection in the early days. As a new virus against which the majority of people around the globe have no immunity, it's bound to disrupt our lives if we don't want to be held responsible for crashing the medical systems or infecting our dear and near ones. It's not just a legal constraint but also a moral constraint on what we should do. Until the vaccines are there, and are available to all, we will have to constantly weigh the merits of travel against the risks, liabilities, additional hurdles in the journey (e.g. tests, quarantine), and potentially negative perception if we accidentally create a COVID "cluster" in our international meetings. We may be forgiven for creating a cluster in March when we knew relatively little about the new virus, but the same cannot be expected now. The stakes are high.

The future is hard to predict, but reduced physical mobility is almost a certainty. The next question lies more in the kind of mobility that will be reduced on the conditions of practicality and essentiality. Given the high proportion of asymptomatic COVID carriers, it's not unlikely that COVID test plus a two-week quarantine for incoming travelers, regardless of nationalities or residential status, will become an international practice. This will practically rule out mobility activities shorter than the quarantine period while enabling a safer reopening of national borders to long-term mobility. Such practicality, or rather impracticality, of physical movements in a difficult situation may also call into question the essentiality of mobility. This will certainly affect the frequency of mobility as long as travel restrictions stay in effect, but it may also leave irreversible impact on how we assess our needs to meet physically or online in the long run.

For sure, the negative impacts of COVID will outweigh its positive impacts. Human cost is not recoverable. Economic ramifications are unavoidable even with state interventions. Coming from Hong Kong, it's hard for me to be an optimist hoping for the return to normalcy after COVID. Nevertheless, having experienced the death of Hong Kong in 1997 and the end of the world in 2003 during the SARS epidemic, I don't believe this is the end of anything but rather the beginning of something new, depending on how we shape it. The future is in our hands now...

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THE RESOURCES AND ALSO THE SOUL OF THE UNIVERSITY UNDER ATTACK

In the COVID-19 pandemic, closures of higher education institutions have attracted less attention than closures of early-childhood education provision, primary schools and secondary schools. Yet, the long-term impact of university closures could be more severe than the impact of school closures. Tens of thousands of higher education institutions have closed down, affecting the life of millions of students worldwide. Like schools, universities have made a remarkably fast switch to replace face-to-face lectures and seminars by distance education, online learning and mixed modes of educational delivery. Notwithstanding exceptions, many institutions were not prepared for the radical switch. They found that infrastructure was lacking, the digital skills of lecturers were not up to the challenge, and that even the familiarity of students with digital tools and platforms was lower than expected. There was not enough time for the instructional design of the digital resources and conceiving the new format of lectures and assignments, so that the quality of the educational delivery and the learning experience of students suffered. Now that in many countries the end of term is approaching, it becomes clear that also examinations and student assessments will be affected, possibly causing severe disruptions in study progression, graduation, and progress in planned learning trajectories. And as in school education, students from disadvantaged backgrounds are suffering the most, triggering another blow to the already arduous ambition to improve equity in access and study progress in higher education.

But unlike schools which are sheltered under the safe shield of public funding, universities will also have to confront a serious assault to their business model. A first and almost immediate consequence of the pandemic is the sudden fall in the numbers of fee-paying international students. Many foreign students, especially those from Asian countries and China in particular, left and went back home. Universities are now confronted with claims to return part of the fees those students paid. And for the next academic year, they have to account for a significant income loss from fee-paying international students. For countries where universities have become dependent on this income stream, the

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situation looks very dire. In the UK, universities estimate the total financial loss at around 6.9 billion pound sterling and several university leaders have pressed the government to consider bailing out their institutions. Also in Australia, another country with universities very much dependent on income from fee-paying international students, similar emergency calls have been heard. Even regardless of the financial consequences, the sudden drop and subsequent reorientation in international student mobility will have a deep impact on the global university landscape.

Second, in many jurisdictions universities are indirectly confronted with the fiscal impact of the crisis on the budgets of their subsidizing authorities. Especially in the US, where states are not allowed to go into deficit spending, budget adjustments are implemented immediately and recklessly, causing immediate financial difficulties for state universities and community colleges. For those institutions which cannot rely on huge endowments like their private counterparts, the future looks very grim. Some institutions have already closed their doors or have announced not to re-open again in the next academic year. Even in countries, like in most of continental Europe, where public funding of universities is not immediately imperilled, expectations are that in the medium term the economic downturn and its fiscal consequences will lead to cuts in higher education spending. Governments will have to cope with demands to increase public spending on health care, welfare and care for the elderly and will most probably de-prioritise higher education.

Confronted with short- or medium-term financial difficulties, institutions seem to have no alternative than to lay off staff. Press reports in the UK speak about hundreds of staff being dismissed at UK universities. Often, younger, very promising and talented research staff on precarious contracts are made redundant first. In a sector with a distorted age pyramid and heavily reliant on the research potential of their younger, more innovative staff, this is a very risky strategy. It is difficult to see how universities can uphold their research excellence in the long run if they cut off their talent pipeline. Fewer and older staff will also lead to challenging situations on the teaching and learning functions of universities, at a time when it is expected that demand for higher education will increase. It is well-known that in times of crisis, students prefer to prolong their studies and delay their entry on a highly risky labour market. Opportunity costs for longer study careers decrease and students may wish to strengthen their competitive advantages on a very tight labour market. Despite increased expenditure on higher education in the past years, few countries have been able to match higher student numbers with equivalent increases in public funding. It will be very difficult for universities to meet increased demand with high quality teaching and learning in a situation of even smaller financial resources and fewer staff.

At the time of writing of this blog, Cambridge University announced that it will move to complete online delivery of its lectures and classes for the next academic year. Until the summer of 2021, no face-to-face lectures will take place, although there would be exceptions for small seminars and group-based learning with strict compliance to social distancing measures. Other leading UK universities such as the University of Manchester followed and beyond any doubt many more will take similar decisions. First reactions from students and politicians seem to indicate that they feel taken by surprise and that they

not really appreciate the perspective of a full year without face-to- face teaching.

This development raises a number of questions. Developments towards innovation in their education delivery and towards more blended forms of teaching and learning predated the COVID- 19 crisis, but the crisis definitely seems to accelerate this development. Innovative use of technology in higher education delivery is a necessary and promising development. But the question is whether universities will have the time, the resources and the expertise to switch to high-quality online teaching and learning. Developing high-quality coursework for online delivery requires huge investments, especially when integrating smart data and artificial intelligence in course design, learning analytics and delivery platforms. No doubt, many institutions are not up to the challenge. Low-quality videotaping of lectures will then still be the main format.

The next question then is whether students will be happy with the low value for money they will receive. In the UK, students already complain that what they received in teaching and learning experience was not worth the entry ticket of 9,250 pound sterling. With low-quality online provision universities will put the contract with students in danger. Many other countries have slowly but definitely shifted to higher levels of private funding. This makes students more critical of the educational value they receive. Universities feel reassured by the quasi monopoly they still have on awarding degrees, diplomas or other qualifications and credentials. In their view, a student still will look to universities to get the qualifications which pay off on the labour market. While this might be true to a certain degree, there are now many more competitors than in the recent past. In a recent paper, the OECD has explored the emerging market of alternative credentials which seem to rapidly conquer the space of postsecondary learning. Alternative provision and alternative credentials may very well undermine the monopoly of universities for advanced qualifications.

The really important question then is what intrinsically defines the university experience which makes it so worthwhile. Even if massification has fundamentally modified the dream of the medieval encounter between the master and the pupil or the Humboldtian ideal of research-based Bildung, many students and graduates would still see the personal exchange with researchers and professors and the small-group collaboration with students in laboratories and seminars as the most valuable learning experiences. The COVID-19 crisis and its aftermath might force universities and students to shift their frame of reference of high-quality teaching and learning, but to develop new modes of delivery which are equally motivating and effective, while remaining competitive against alternative modes of provision and certification, is going to require an awful lot of imagination, creativity and ingenuity. Universities need to rethink their value for money proposition and examine whether it is not the time to make the necessary investments to make the transition happen. The price for neglecting this challenge now might be very high.

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KEES KOUWENAAR

Kees Kouwenaar is Secretary General of the Aurora Universities Network. In his 38 years in international education he has worked in diploma recognition, mobility programmes, and legal & higher education capacity development. In the Mastermind Europe Project, he developed a competence-based approach to admission to Master's programmes.

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES ALLIANCES AFTER COVID 2019.
KEES KOUWENAAR (KK) AND PETER VAN DER HIJDEN (PVDH) IN CONVERSATION.

Question 1: Can European Universities Alliances still deliver on their ambitious programmes after COVID 2019, them being the flagships of the European Education Area?

KK: Good question. The verdict is still out. Universities tend to say: "We have enough on our plate with the forced digitalisation; we have more than enough uncertainty on how we can teach and do research for the coming semesters: we really can't engage in intensive reform or transformation activities".

PVDH: An understandable reaction in the short term, but we must think strategically. The ambitions set out for European Universities will not go away. Big transformations in education, research & innovation and service to society are already under way. The initial emphasis of European Universities was on improving and integrating education; now the selected alliances are also invited to develop common research & innovation agendas.

KK: The Aurora Alliance has big ambitions across all university missions. In education, for instance, we will develop a toolkit for transversal skills and mind-sets (e.g. as regards problem solving). And we will systematically integrate these into the learning process across all partners and programmes. This will allow us to add a focus on SDGs, so that our graduates will be able to tackle the big challenges our societies are facing.

PVDH: It is encouraging to see that most of Europe's bigger 'system-relevant' institutions want to be part of this benchmarking exercise. Also specialised institutions and universities of applied sciences have made original proposals. Corona makes transformation not less urgent, but emphasis may shift in order to better calibrate university missions and societal needs, for instance as regards short courses for re-training (micro-credentials).

Question 2: Will we see the end of internationalisation as we know it, e.g., less physical mobility?

PVDH: I would indeed expect more online collaboration and sharing of facilities, rather than further increases in physical mobility. The two or three university-hopping ideal was anyhow an elite thing and not very Greta. A shift towards more sustainable collaboration would also fit the EU Green Deal and the Digital Action Plan. European University Alliances are well positioned to **experiment with new collaborative approaches**, as part of their assignments under the calls launched by the EC Education and R&I departments.

KK: Absolutely. I never understood the mix-up between "all students need to have an opportunity" (for international experience) and "all students must travel" (for at least three months). Internationalisation of education is all about developing the competence to live and work in a globally interconnected world. I can see most European University Alliances aiming for virtual mobility, short-term mobility and internationalisation of the classroom and the curriculum. That is the way to go and that is the way Aurora is going.

Question 3: What will be the impact on the gap between stronger and weaker knowledge regions in Europe, on brain drain?

PVDH: Brain drain is natural but can be mitigated by online cooperation, access to and sharing of infrastructure, co-nominations of staff and targeted investments in underdeveloped regions.

One could even imagine '**Special Education Zones'** (cf. Special Economic Zones) in weaker knowledge regions, where rules may differ from national ones and where universities and research institutes would operate under the wings of a European University Alliance.

This could lead to the much-acclaimed '**European Statute'** for single institutions and cooperatives that stand out and apply all the goodies of Bologna and ERA (e.g. automatic recognition, open science, open recruitment).

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KK: Again, I fully agree. Why not imagine ´**Special Knowledge Zones**´ where excellent research facilities attract eminent researchers, teachers and innovators from across Europe. With the corona- inflicted economic bad weather we expect, relative cost advantages in CE Europe can help to make these 'Special Zones' more attractive. We would certainly examine how the CEE 'associate partner' universities in the Aurora Alliance can play a role in this.

Question 4: Everything went online overnight – what is the long-term perspective?

PVDH: Online education technology and pedagogy require **new expertise** in universities and with accreditors. In future, reviewing the quality of online provision will be the number one task of accreditors.

The basic Bologna Standards and Guidelines (**ESG**) will continue to apply, but the **other ESG** (Environmental, Social and Governmental standards) will be gaining in importance rapidly!

I also expect to see an exponential growth in **third party validation (or trusted crowd assessment) of online provision**, especially as concerns short courses (micro-credentials) and other types of sub- degree offerings (micro-degrees).

Students, lifelong learners, employers and professional bodies will express their appreciation online and almost real-time. Universities, integrating online courses produced elsewhere into their curricula will also act as third-party validators.

Trusted crowd assessment, artificial intelligence and block-chain techniques will **scale up, analyse, open up and secure** third-party quality reviews by, complementing and maybe surpassing the work currently done by accreditors.

KK: Well, I actually hope that the pandemic will bring back some sense into the QA charade. Ask professors and they agree that the correlation between QA as we know it and quality is negative! Assessing process quality without defining outcome quality, that is the root of the problem. I am not sure your 'trusted crowds' will bring the solution. It sounds like "if many people like graduates from a certain programme, we don't need to know what they actually, know, understand or can do." It will be more about popularity than about quality, I fear.

Outcome definition in terms of subject expertise is progressing; at the Aurora Alliance we hope to express more precisely what students need to be good at (and how good) in general academic and personal competences. That will serve both online and on campus education.

PVDH: I agree that we need a **longitudinal evidence-based perspective** on what works and what doesn't. The CALOHEE project assessing learning outcomes is also promising in this respect.

Question 5: On a global scale, will Europe fall behind more rapidly?

KK: Decline is in the eye of the beholder. The US leads in the global top 50 and Chinese universities are on their way up – Corona or no Corona. But at system level, Europe is very strong: look at the top 10%, or the top 25%. Look at the number of good universities against very weak universities across these systems and you'll see that Europe more than holds its own.

If governments and the Commission stick to research and education as primarily a public good and to a high medium and high lowest quality rather than supporting only a few peaks, I have faith in European R&I. Let's hope that Corona tilts the balance a bit further towards HE&R as a public good. Of course, this assumes that the universities understand they serve a public purpose. At Aurora, we call this "matching academic excellence with societal relevance".

PVDH: All very well, but I am not sure Europe can survive in the global competition on relatively high average quality only. Top scoring universities in Horizon are mostly in the UK, Switzerland and Israel. We should cooperate well with these neighbours, but we should also build our own champions by investing in clusters of university eco-systems as is done in the new EU industrial policy, and we should not focus only on cross-border cooperation. Europe needs to defend its sovereignty also in the knowledge area. EIT was a start and so are European Universities, but more focus and more clout will be needed.

KK: Yes, the world is bigger than the EU, we must not forget this, and we must hope that our governments don't forget that.

PVDH: That seems a good way to end this conversation.

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The world after COVID-19

#ACATHINKS

IRINA FERENCZ

Irina Ferencz is working for the Academic Cooperation Association (ACA) since 2008, currently as Deputy Director. In this capacity she manages a wide portfolio of activities, combining member engagement, research and policy work, advocacy, fundraising, and external representation. Irina is an avid advocate for international higher education and is active in multiple professional fora. She is also a PhD candidate at Ghent University.

POST-COVID-19, THE WAY FORWARD IS THROUGH

The past few months since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic have been unquestionably unprecedented in multiple respects. Shaping a 'new normal' – the recurrent label often used both within and outside the field of international higher education – current times remain characterised by unusual volatility, far-reaching uncertainties and novel glimpses of possibility. Although what the 'new normal' fully means, both now and in the future, is yet to be uncovered and defined, this has been a period of many *first times*: a larger-scale emergency response in higher education than ever seen before, a previously unimaginable degree of flexibility in educational modes of delivery, funding programmes and forms of international cooperation, and, what was named by some, as an overnight digital revolution in education. In a nutshell, a period of higher education and internationalisation not "as we know it", in which constant adaptation has become the norm of the day.

A period as particular as this would naturally leave its legacy, beyond the immediate, and possibly restrictive, short-term consequences. Past trying to forecast upcoming trends, what can be learnt from the response of the field of (international) higher education to the pandemic and what kind of internationalisation might we be engaging in, in the (near) future?

1.   Beyond dichotomies – truly comprehensive internationalisation

While theoretically committed, as a field, to comprehensive internationalisation, in reality, scholarly discourse and institutional action have often been artificially polarised – internationalisation abroad vs. internationalisation at home, physical mobility vs. virtual mobility, face-to-face vs. online education – into a discourse of either/or. Path-dependency, different leadership visions and priorities, limited resources, expertise, and personal preferences explained the choice of some forms and models over others. It is invariably easier to focus on differences than on finding links and potential synergies.

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And yet, the recent months have questioned some of the past assumptions, creating a fertile ground for new openness and experimentation, and revealing critical interlinks and complementarity. They showed, for example, that internationalisation abroad and physical mobility, while essential for most higher education institutions, are far from guaranteed. And that online education and virtual mobility need not be, by default, second best, having provided the much-needed salvation in these unusual times. Physical mobility is and will remain an irreplaceable, life-changing experience, but so can quality-driven international online exchanges bring clear added value to students' education, and constitute a valuable choice.

Post-COVID-19, frontrunner institutions will have reconciled this debate and will pursue a variety of mobility modes (physical, blended, and fully online) and models, without sacrificing one type over another. The question will not be which type of mobility, but how and with what purpose? Comprehensive internationalisation thrives on such innovation and presupposes connecting all activities into a meaningful whole. Comprehensiveness will require, even more than in the past, intentional strategic choices and sustained actions, through a combination of both at home and abroad activities, of face-to-face and online modes, in a fitness for purpose paradigm. It is the only way forward, to better deliver on institutional missions and contribute to tackling bigger societal challenges. However, these changes will not happen overnight. They need to be thoughtful, driven by institutional rationales and objectives, and not by the forms of delivery, which are secondary.

2.   Physical mobility – in need for more support than ever

The containment measures put in place to reduce the spread of COVID-19 have, amongst others, literally done the unthinkable, namely put a stop to most physical student mobility, be it for credit or degree purposes. As an immediate response, institutions and funding agencies have done the impossible to ensure that the previously mobile individuals could still benefit from their international experience by enabling them to finish the mobility periods online. For the autumn semester 2020 great uncertainties shape institutional responses. Most institutions expect a significant drop in incoming degree-seeking students, while an increasing number of institutions are opting out of student exchanges on the short-run, due to the inability to guarantee reciprocity with partner institutions, and to the remaining health risks.

Bringing back physical student mobility to pre-COVID-19 levels will require greater resources, support and institutional commitment than ever before: be it to ensure a safe study environment, to promote student mobility in new ways, to motivate and appease worried students and parents, to compensate for the decrease of purchasing power due to the ensuing economic recession, or all of the above.

Although often taken for granted in the past, physical student mobility is far from guaranteed in the (near) future. It will be thus crucial that higher education institutions and funding bodies use the coming period wisely: innovate by responding to the new realities with revamped models (e.g. shorter,

blended, more integrated, environmentally sustainable) and secure necessary resources to fully boost physical mobility as soon as technically possible.

3.   Continued flexibility – a booster for innovative internationalisation

Perhaps one of the most surprising elements of the higher education response to the health crisis, at least in the European context, has been the immense flexibility rapidly enabled by higher education institutions, funding organisations, at both national and European level, and by other stakeholder bodies, in order to safeguard the internationalisation of higher education – be it in the form of partnerships, mobility, joint programmes, or internationalisation at home.

This flexibility went well past what was previously possible, and has proven to be crucial for the speed of response, for developing customised approaches, for finding innovative solutions, and overall, for ensuring that internationalisation remains a living reality.

Maintaining a high level of flexibility in institutional activities and funding instruments also beyond the pandemic, as a new modus operandi, would be essential for finding new ways to mitigate the medium and longer-term impact of the crisis on international education. It would nurture continued experimentation and institutional innovation, resulting in the development of new models and creative approaches. Such flexibility is for example already the cornerstone of initiatives like the European Universities, but could be truly mainstreamed.

4.   A new era of cooperation AND coordination

The containment measures put in place by many governments, the search for national rather than joint and solidarity-anchored solutions, combined with general restrictions on international travel, have also contoured the risk of new era of political isolationism. Within higher education, however, where isolationism is a synonym to mediocrity, the indispensable value of international cooperation has been strongly and clearly reconfirmed. Individual higher education institutions, no matter how excellent and at the top of whichever ranking, are too small to tackle greater and deeper societal challenges alone. The interconnectedness of international higher education is the field's biggest strength, but when limited, also its biggest weakness. Therefore, the only way forward is through: supporting more and strategic in nature cooperation, which might need to happen in increasingly new ways, mediated by new means.

The epitome of international cooperation in higher education – university networks and Associations – have become, particularly in these troubled times, a vital rallying point. Looking at the impressive amount of intellectual productions, of services, online events and tools developed by most associations in our field to support member institutions in this period, one might even conclude that crises are a thriving time for associations. One when they can decisively demonstrate increased relevance.

The pressing need for enhanced cooperation rests, however, not only *within* individual associations, but also *between* such representative bodies, along the multiple and fast multiplying issues that require

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system-level coordination. From, for example, joint advocacy to adapt funding rules for European level programmes in a similar way that is applicable to all participating countries, institutions and students; to much needed coordination of the reopening of borders and the treatment of international students; in the alignment of practices in the autumn semester for student exchanges; on admissions for international students; on further advocating to secure funding for international education. This is a growing space of indispensable coordination that needs to be inhabited and used strategically. Within it, networks and associations have a key role to play, and could even take the driving seat.

5. Final words on funding – step up and speak up

Last, and very briefly, a few words on funding-related prospects. Beyond the anticipated decrease in income from international students, many systems fear larger cuts in the budgets for higher education due to the economic recession and to other competing priorities. Many of these concerns are justified. If the 2008 economic crisis can serve as a compass, governments are likely to again respond in different ways – while some will prioritise investments in education, seeing it as a motor for the economic relaunch, others will treat it as an unnecessary expense. Although the leverage on these decisions will likely differ across countries and individual higher education actors, as a field we should nevertheless be able to articulate what we strive for and what we need. Clarity of purpose is one of the key principles of advocacy work. So rather than waiting to see how the dice will be cast, the momentum could be used to step up coordinated advocacy efforts. And through joining forces, speak up about the indispensable contribution of international higher education, while showing decisiveness, innovation capacity, and via a new discourse that resonates better with society at large.

Many colleagues have already defined this crisis as a 'reset' moment. Some see it as an opportunity for reinventing international higher education, while others think it will be a reset to the default mode, to business as usual once the short and medium-term consequences are over. Both are likely right – the direction in which different institutions, actors and countries will go will be a factor of visionary leadership, resources, innovation potential, commitment at the grassroots level, and chance. The internationalisation of tomorrow, at least for some, will be fully comprehensive, foster new modes of delivery for long-standing core activities (e.g. physical student mobility), show great flexibility and innovation, be more deeply anchored in cooperation and coordination, and avail of proper resources.

ABOUT ACA

Working under the motto "the European voice of national organizations for the internationalisation of higher education", the Academic Cooperation Association (ACA) is a leading European association supporting research, innovative practice-development and smart policy-making in international higher education (HE). Created in 1993, as a member-driven platform, ACA provides a shared voice to national agencies for the internationalization of higher education in Brussels, and represents them in Europe, but also globally. Within ACA, the member organisations enhance their capacities and join forces in supporting and 'doing' future-oriented, top-quality internationalisation. ACA is also a brain-trust, with a long track record in conducting sound research and providing expert advice on key developments in international HE to universities, governments and supra-national organizations alike. ACA's core membership and identity is distinctly European, 'with an eye' on global trends. The association is supported by a Brussels-based Secretariat that plays a coordinator and expert role for the membership.