

On the tracks of students and graduates: methods and uses of tracking procedures in the EHEA

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Research questions

1. To what extent and how are students & graduates tracked at national & institutional level in European HE?
2. What do governments & HEIs use the tracking data for and do these uses reflect the Bologna goals?
3. Has Bologna lead to more tracking activities?

The TRACKIT! project

- Tracking data of key importance for governing HE institutions & systems
 - Information on progress of students & graduates...
 - ...helps HEIs assessing e.g. feasibility of study programmes, timeliness & problems of students, relevance for labour market
 - ...supports governments e.g. in monitoring the HE system & policy development
 - ...is connected to many HE policy goals high on the agenda (e.g. mobility, LLL, employability...)
- Few knowledge on existence & usage of tracking instruments in European HE

The TRACKIT! project

Project goals:

1. Map state of play of tracking at institutional, national, & European level
2. Identify & investigate examples of good institutional practice
3. Make first assessment of impact, challenges, & perils of tracking
4. Support enhancing national & institutional practice

The TRACKIT! project

- Runs from Oct. 2010-Sept. 2012
- Phase 1 (until 09/2011): conduct internal report on tracking in 31 European countries
- Phase 2 (09/2011-03/2012): site visits in >10 countries & >20 HEIs
- Phase 3 (from on 03/2012): research conference, final report & dissemination even
- Project partners: EUA (coordination), HIS, Lund University, University of the Peloponnese, Danish School of Education and the Irish Universities Association

Tracking & the Bologna Process

- Tracking data & the Bologna Process as mutually enforcing
- Bologna action lines, policy areas, & goals:
 - The degree structure
 - European/national qualifications frameworks
 - QA
 - The social dimension
 - LLL
 - Mobility
 - Student-centred learning
 - Multi-dimensional transparency tools
 - Resourcing
 - Institutional autonomy

Definition of tracking

- Tracking:
„All systematic approaches that can be used to monitor the progression paths of HE students during studies and of graduates towards further education or the labour market.“
- Various methods (survey & admin. data)
- Various kinds of data (individual & aggregate level data, panel & retrospective data)
- Various levels (inst., national, transnat.)
- Must depict developments of individuals

Methods of Phase 1

- Literature & internet research (throughout)
- Expert interviews:
 1. Approached NRCs in all 31 countries for contact persons (letter in 01/2011, reminder 02/2011)
 2. Sent fill-in questionnaires to NRCs/contacts as available
 3. Guided telephone interviews with same or further experts (fill-in questionnaire as preferred)
 4. Generate more contacts by interviews
 5. Cross-check of results

Results 1: student tracking, inst. level

- Done by at least some HEIs in 24 of 25 countries
- In 13 countries all HEIs do student tracking: AT, BE/fl., CZ, DK, EE, HU, IE, IS, LT, NL, SE, SI, UK
- In 6 countries only single HEIs: BE/fr., IT, LU, LV, MT, RO
- Predominant method: administrative data collection (HEIs in 20 of 20 countries; some countries additionally reported surveys)

Results 2: student tracking, nat. level

- At least 1 national tracking instrument in 17 of 27 countries
- No tracking at nat. (reg.) level reported: BE/fr., BG, CY, EL, FI, LV, LI, MT, RO, TR
- Predominant method: admin. data
- 13 countries build national database by integrating inst. level data: AT, BE/fl., CZ, DK, EE, FR, IE, LT, LU, NL, SE, SI, UK
- Surveys only: DE, IT

Results 3: graduate tracking, inst. level

- Done by at least some HEIs in 23 of 25 countries
- In 7 countries all HEIs do student tracking: DK, EL, FI, HU, IE, NL, UK
- In 6 countries only single HEIs: EE, LT, LU, LV, MT, SI
- Predominant method: surveys (HEIs in 22 of 22 countries; some countries additionally reported administrative data collections)

Results 4: graduate tracking, nat. level

- At least 1 national tracking instrument in 21 of 28 countries
- No tracking at nat. (reg.) level reported: IS, LV, LI, BG, CY
- One time/sporadic: AT, BE/fl., BE/fr., EL, LT, RO, SI, TR
- Current efforts in EL, LT, RO to build regular graduate tracking
- Predominant method: surveys (21 of 21 countries; some countries additionally reported administrative data collections)

Results 5: usage of student tracking data by HEIs

Usage	Countries (info. available on 21 countries at max.)	N
Stats. & analyses	AT, BE/fl., BG, CY, DK, EE, IE, LU, LV, NO	10
Admin. & manag.	AT, BE/fl., BG, CY, DK, EE, EL, FR, HU, IE, LT, LU, LV, NO, SE, SI	16
QA	BE/fl., BE/fr., BG, CY, EE, FR, IE, LT, LU, LV, NL, SE, SI, UK	14
Resource alloc.	BE/fl., BG, CY, FR, LT, SI	6
Study reform	BE/fl., CY, EE, LT, NL	5
Stud. counselling	BE/fl., CY, DK, IE, LU, SI	6
Inform students	CY, EE, FR, NO, UK	5
Marketing	BE/fl., BG, EE, IE, LU, NL, SI, UK	8
Legal obligations	AT, BE/fl., CZ, DK, EE, NL, SE	7
Govmnt. funding	BE/fl., CZ, DK, FR, IE, LT, NL	7
Accreditation	BE/fl., BG, DK, LT	4

Results 6: usage of graduate tracking data by HEIs

Usage	Countries (info. available on 22 countries at max.)	N
Stats. & analyses	AT, BE/fl., BE/fr., CY, DE, DK, EE, EL, ES, FI, IT, LU, LV, NO, RO	15
Admin. & manag.	AT, BE/fl., BE/fr., CY, DE, DK, EL, ES, FI, FR, IE, IT, LU, LV, MT, RO	16
QA	AT, BE/fl., BE/fr., DE, DK, EL, ES, FR, IT, LU, MT, NL, NO, RO, UK	15
Resource alloc.	IE	1
Study reform	AT, BE/fl., BE/fr., DE, DK, IT	6
Stud. counselling	BE/fr., BG, DE, EL, IE, IT, LU, MT, NO	9
Inform students	AT, BE/fr., CY, DE, EE, EL, FR, IE, UK	9
Marketing	AT, BE/fr., BG, DE, EE, EL, FR, IE, LU, NO, UK	11
Legal obligations	CZ, IT, UK	3
Govmnt. funding	CZ, TR, IT, UK	4
Accreditation	AT, BG, DE, DE, NL	5

Results 7: Bologna as driver for tracking

- Quite likely but few evidence
- Historical perspective not covered
- Some respondents referred to Bologna → intensified QA activities → triggered collection of tracking data (AT, BE/fr., DE)
- Others claimed Bologna was no key factor for developing tracking instruments. (FI, NL)
- “Examining Quality Culture”: clear trend towards QA activities
- Blurred connection between Bologna Process & national HE reforms

Conclusions

- Student tracking common but...
 - ... only in 13 (of 25) countries all HEIs do it
 - ... 10 countries without national level tracking
- Graduate tracking common but...
 - ... only in 7 (of 25) countries all HEIs do it
 - ... 5 countries without national level tracking
- Leeway for expansion of tracking activities
- But: resource demanding
- Heterogeneous tracking practice at inst. level limits transparency

Conclusions

- Usage in line with Bologna goals
- Potential of existing data not fully exploited
- European countries differ vastly in tracking capacities & tracking methods
- Limits possibilities of international comparison & transparency
- No European tracking model
- Some indication that Bologna has brought about more tracking