

# Excellence initiatives as tools of governance in higher education

Implications for research and teaching

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# Structure of the talk

1. „excellence initiatives“ as a relatively new and widespread instrument used by governments to allocate funds to research institutions (higher education institutions in particular)
2. relationship between existing research excellence initiatives and university teaching
3. teaching excellence initiatives
4. ask whether „excellence“ in academic teaching can/should be promoted in a way comparable to excellence in academic research

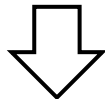
# Background



Science Directorate:

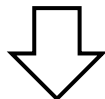
project on „new forms of incentive funding for public research“

overview of „research excellence initiatives“ (REIs) in OECD countries



in-depth surveys to

- National Ministries
- Centres of Excellence
- Host Institutions



final report, to be published end of 2012

*concept paper*

*design*

**HIS<sup>HF</sup>**  
Institut  
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# Methods

- explorative study  
based on qualitative analysis of official REI  
programme descriptions
- to be complemented by evaluation of survey  
results

# Research excellence initiatives (REIs)

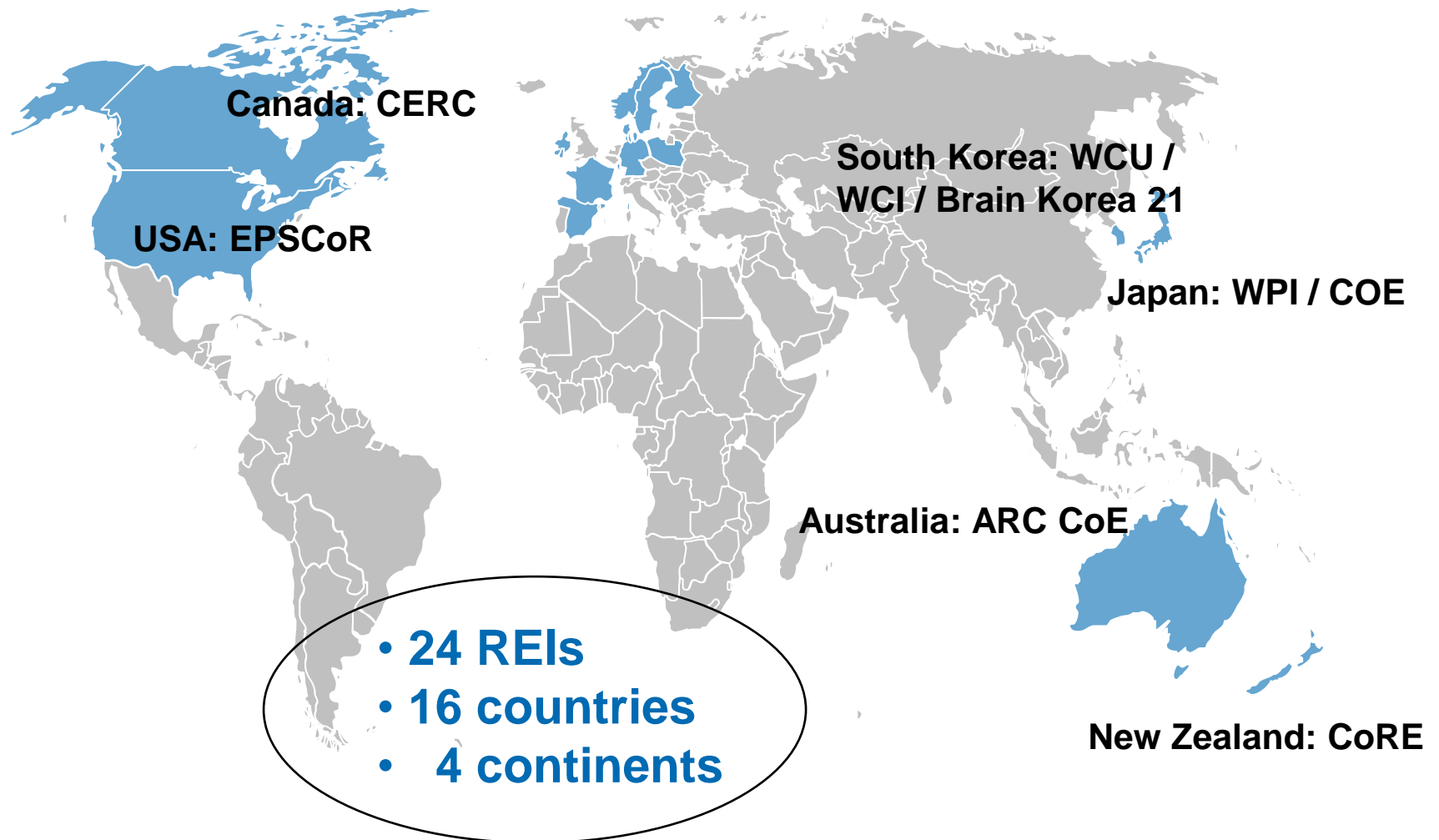
# What are REIs? - 1

- state-run programmes allocating time-limited (>4 years) funds to research units on a competitive basis
- mostly launched since middle of last decade
- primary goal: strengthen the international competitiveness of the national research landscape
- strategy: endow few research centres with considerable funds to conduct outstanding research
- selection procedure: multi-level application process based on international peer review, followed by regular evaluations of chosen centres of excellence

# What are REIs? - 2

- usually open to all areas and fields of science
- funds for research centres, not individuals
- interdisciplinary / inter-institutional collaboration encouraged
- Centres of excellence can be
  - clusters of research groups
  - graduate schools
  - HEIs as a whole
- universities as regular host institutions for „centres of excellence“

# REIs in OECD countries – scope of survey





# REIs in European OECD countries



# **Relationship between research excellence initiatives and university teaching**

# HEIs under the influence of REIs

- Large amounts of money are being channeled into HEIs via REIs.
  - Success in REIs has become an important source of reputation for many academics and institutions.
  - Success in REIs has become a strategic priority for many HEIs.
- How does this affect the link between university research and teaching?

# a „stronger link“ between research and teaching?

*„Our societies need higher education institutions to contribute innovatively to sustainable development and therefore, **higher education must ensure a stronger link between research, teaching and learning at all levels**“.*<sup>2</sup>

Bucharest Communiqué  
EHEA Ministerial Conference  
2012



# Status of teaching in REIs – general tendencies

Analysis of programme descriptions shows:

- The majority of REIs considered do *not* require or take into account any measures concerning teaching at bachelor and master levels.
- REI funding is awarded independently from aspects of teaching, except possibly at PhD level.

# Status of teaching in REIs – general tendencies

- Four REIs do include teaching in the programme description:
  - Ireland: PRTL I
  - Spain: ICE
  - South Korea: WCU
  - Germany: Exzellenzinitiative

# Teaching as an aspect in REIs: Ireland

- „Programme for Research in Third-Level Institutions“
- one major goal: „To enrich the educational environment within the institution [...] by supporting the development of strong and synergistic relationships between research and teaching/learning [...]“<sup>1</sup>
- assessment criteria: excellence in...
  - strategic planning and focus
  - inter-institutional collaboration
  - research quality
  - impact of research on teaching and learning



# Teaching as an aspect in REIs: Spain

- „International Campus of Excellence“ (ICE)
- comprehensive approach to university development
- assessment criteria for proposals include:
  - improved teaching and adaptation of learning spaces according to the EHEA
  - improvements in science and knowledge transfer to businesses
  - sustainability with respect to campus organisation and social and environmental aspects



# Teaching as an aspect in REIs: South Korea

- „World Class University Program“ (WCU)
- strategy: get universities to invite foreign scholars for medium- or long-term stays
- invited scholars' tasks:
  - establish new academic departments or specialized majors
  - conduct joint research with Korean faculty members
  - give lectures and seminars



# Teaching as an aspect in REIs: Germany

- „Exzellenzinitiative“
- general aim: promote top-level research and improve the quality of German universities and research institutions in general
- optional element of proposals in third funding line „Institutional Strategies“ (only in final funding round 2012): concept for „research-oriented teaching“
- obligatory assessment criterion: effects of proposed measures to expand top-level research on teaching



# Teaching excellence initiatives

# Initiatives for teaching excellence

- Some OECD countries have launched special initiatives to develop/support excellence in teaching.
- Their design resembles that of research excellence initiatives:
  - organised by national agency
  - call for proposals including assessment criteria, deadlines etc.
  - proposals to be submitted by the HEIs' presidencies
  - international board of experts chooses „winners“
  - funding provided for several years
  - intermediate and/or final evaluation of projects

# Initiatives for teaching excellence: France

- „Initiatives d'excellence en formations innovantes“ („excellence initiatives in innovative teaching“), 2012 onwards
- managed by the „Agence nationale de la recherche“ (French National Research Agency)
- funding for innovative teaching projects with a role model function for other HEIs
- launched explicitly to complement the national research excellence initiative
- 150 m. € for 37 chosen projects

# Initiatives for teaching excellence: Germany - 1

- Germany: „Exzellente Lehre“ („Excellent Teaching“)
- organised by the German Rectors' Conference and the Stifterverband
- 10 m. €, 10 HEIs, 2010-2012
- start-up funding for innovative teaching concepts applying to all departments of a HEI

Wettbewerb  
**exzellente  
Lehre**

# Initiatives for teaching excellence: Germany - 2

- Assessment criteria for proposals:
  - originality and innovative potential of concepts
  - degree of acceptance of planned measures among both teaching staff and students
  - feasibility
  - sustainability and transferrability

# Initiatives for teaching excellence Japan

- „Program for Promoting High-Quality University Education“
- managed by the „Japan Society for the Promotion of Science“ (JSPS), also responsible for the research excellence initiatives „World Premier Institute“ and „Global Centres of Excellence“
- funds to “sustain educational capacity and improve education quality”
- “targeted support and widespread dissemination of emulative results”<sup>4</sup>



# Excellence initiatives and teaching: preliminary results

- Linkage between research and teaching is not a prominent goal of existing REIs.
- National initiatives for teaching excellence appear less widespread than research excellence initiatives.
- Their financial endowment is modest compared to programme funding for research excellence.

# **Why is teaching less prominent than research in excellence initiatives?**

# Why is teaching less prominent than research in excellence initiatives?

Does REI funding promote higher quality in teaching even without measures directly aiming at teaching?

*But:*

- Roessler 2012: no relationship found between a university's research excellence status and conditions for studying in Germany.<sup>5</sup>
- Felder 1994: Institutional emphasis on research activity detracts from teaching quality.<sup>6</sup>

# Why is teaching less prominent than research in excellence initiatives?

Are competitive programmes with a high degree of selectivity not an appropriate tool to promote excellence in teaching?

example from Germany:

„Qualitätspakt Lehre“: application-based project funding for innovative teaching projects on a more distributive scale (186 funded HEIs)

# Why is teaching less prominent than research in excellence initiatives?

Is „excellence“ used in the sense of REIs, i.e. a rare and therefore valuable distinction, not applicable to teaching?

Is „quality“ the more appropriate concept?

# Why is teaching less prominent than research in excellence initiatives?

Are consensual definitions and measures of „excellence“ in university teaching lacking?  
(cf. REIs: „peer review“ as the established mode of quality assessment used in research project funding)

Teaching excellence initiatives fund projects with *role model* function.

→ standards of excellence yet to be developed?

# References

1	<a href="http://www.spd.dcu.ie/main/administration/research/documents/PRTLI%20Cycle5StrategyObjectivesGuidingPrinciples.pdf">www.spd.dcu.ie/main/administration/research/documents/PRTLI Cycle5StrategyObjectivesGuidingPrinciples.pdf</a>
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4	<a href="http://www.jsps.go.jp/english/">http://www.jsps.go.jp/english/</a>
5	Roessler, I. (2012): Auswirkungen der Zukunftskonzepte auf die Studienbedingungen. CHE Arbeitspapier 156 (June 2012).
6	Felder, Richard (1994): The Myth of the Superhuman Professor. In: J. Engr. Education 8(2), 105-111.