



# ISSUE BRIEF

The Effects of Transitions  
on Access to Higher Education

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# Executive Summary

Increased student access to higher education institutions has been associated with the recent proliferation of higher education opportunities throughout the world. Various countries have undertaken numerous initiatives to increase access, such as the Netherlands with its involvement in the Bologna Process and the United States with Achieve Inc.'s American Diploma Project and state-funded merit scholarships. In addition, some countries (e.g., South Africa and Ukraine) have promulgated legislation and policy documents aimed at enhancing and improving access and the transition of students from secondary schooling to higher education. The preamble to the 1998 UNESCO World Conference in Higher Education included calls for greater access.<sup>1</sup>

This paper focuses on how transitions within and between education systems affect access to higher education in four countries: the Netherlands, South Africa, Ukraine, and the United States. These four countries provide a diverse palette for demonstrating how issues surrounding access to higher education vary around the world. The United States and the Netherlands have well-established, progressive higher education systems,<sup>2</sup> while Ukraine and South Africa are in transition as a result of recent political changes. Diversity, wealth, and primary/secondary education vary among the countries as well. The paper explores three main themes: (1) the rationale for increasing access to higher education; (2) developments and pressures on the transition process from secondary to higher education; and (3) current policies that affect access to higher education and recommended solutions to increase access. Access is a twofold concept. The first aspect is *access with participation*, which means ensuring that students are granted entrance and acceptance at a higher education institution. This is represented differently in the four countries:

- After the demise of apartheid in South Africa, the entire education system focused primarily on removing barriers and providing access to higher education for Black students, disadvantaged groups, and women.

- The Netherlands is a multicultural country that has historically distinguished between indigenous (*autochtonen*) and non-indigenous (*allochtonen*) people. Institutions of higher education have experienced a substantial increase in the number of non-indigenous students.<sup>3</sup>
- After a collapse of the USSR and years of reforms, Ukrainian educational system is still in transition. The changes led to a rise in the number of the new higher institutions, mostly private. As a result, the number of people who complete higher education has increased, but the employers criticize level of recent graduates' qualification. There is still a visible disparity in access to quality education between urban and rural students. The number of people per thousand who complete higher education has increased by 31 percent in towns and by 69 percent in villages.
- In the United States, access gaps often focus on racial/ethnic minorities. From 1984 to 2004, minority undergraduate enrollment in the United States increased by 146 percent, to a total of 4.7 million students.

The second aspect is *access with success*. In addition to the need to provide entry to higher education, there is a need to monitor and enable student success. The four countries examined for this paper all have made efforts in this area.

<sup>1</sup> G. Michael, Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century Vision and Action, Paper presented at the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education held in Paris, October 5–9, 1998. See: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0011/001133/113346Eo.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> The countries' definitions of "higher education" may differ. The term "tertiary education" is used in the international context.

<sup>3</sup> In the Netherlands, *allochtoon* refers to anyone whose parent or parents were not born in the country, while *autochtoon* refers to anyone, regardless of place of birth, whose parents are both Dutch.

- The Netherlands government has adopted the following goals: (1) decreasing allochtonen school dropout levels; (2) ensuring that by 2020, 50 percent of persons between the ages of 24 and 44 are highly educated; and (3) along with the rest of the European Union, achieving full employment by 2010.
- Ukraine is increasing the number of state-supported places at higher education institutions from 51 percent to 60 percent. A new admission system based on a standardized external testing is established. According to its goals and recent assessments, it successfully combats corruption in schools, supports access and improves transparency in admission to the higher education institutions.
- In South Africa, the overall higher education graduation rate reached 69 percent in 2006 compared to 46 percent in 2000.
- The United States is slowly turning its attention toward higher education accountability regarding both aspects of access. What types of students are admitted? What do institutions do with the students once they are admitted? What is their graduation rate? What is their job placement rate?

Access in the four countries has been plagued by various problems that hinder progress and student success. For example, the Netherlands has a high proportion of dropouts of non-indigenous (allochtoon) students compared with indigenous students. Non-indigenous students have a tendency to choose vocational education rather than the more academic stream, and student counselors have been criticized for their failure to give proper career guidance to allochtoon students. In Ukraine, the status of higher education has decreased, so employers often require higher education degrees even for low-skill jobs, especially during a financial crisis. Besides unequal access to quality education in rural and urban areas, other ongoing barriers to education access include high levels of bribery and corruption, as well as

language barriers resulting from the diversity of residents. In the United States, various pressures have made it hard for states to increase access for traditionally underrepresented groups, such as the children of illegal immigrants.

A review of these four countries reveals that increasing access to higher education depends on the history of the country and its relative stage of development, its primary and secondary education system, the demographics and various opportunities offered to pupils, the legal framework, and the policy initiatives taken. Nonetheless, we can draw three general conclusions that may provide a framework for countries around the world:

1. As countries become more developed, access issues do not go away but rather change shape.
2. Access to tertiary education depends to a great extent on the secondary school system; lapses in secondary education have repercussions on access to tertiary-level studies.
3. Although access is typically identified as a national domain, the international domain must not be underestimated.

Demographic developments in each country make it imperative to ensure that no citizen is left behind and that everyone is able to contribute to the economy and prosperity of the country. ❧

# Introduction

In recent years, access to higher education has become increasingly important. Improving access is generally seen as a good in itself, because it has the potential to improve people's lives, national economies, and social stability. At the same time, the global demand for higher education is growing. Various factors play a part, including individual choices related to labor market incentives for having a degree, as well as public policies promoted by most national governments for increasing higher education participation rates. Social and political pressure exists for increasing participation in higher education for various groups (e.g., ethnic groups, persons with disabilities, and women), and the global economy means higher qualifications for the majority of jobs.

Demographic factors also influence the call for increased access. Factors include changes in the age distribution of the population and in individual life cycles, international migration, and changes in the structure of higher education systems; for example, as higher education has exploded in size and as it faces financial shortfalls, it has become increasingly differentiated and hierarchical, both within and among countries.

Increasing access to higher education is predicated on successful secondary education, so high school graduates can transition smoothly to the tertiary level. Policymakers must consider the key issues related to transitioning from secondary school to higher education. We can draw some general lessons from experiences worldwide, but different countries approach the issue of access differently because of unique pressures, education systems, and transitional opportunities for pupils.

This paper covers four countries: the Netherlands, South Africa, Ukraine, and the United States. Together, they present a broad and varied view of the role transitions within an educational system play in access to higher education.

- The Netherlands is a developed and rich country, where access to higher education is guaranteed to all at affordable prices. However, it is a small country and a founder of the European Community, where international pressures such as the Bologna Process<sup>4</sup> (which has had a visible effect on enrollment and time to graduation) are particularly important. Despite the promise of access to all, it is a multicultural society in which differences in opportunities and achievement between native and non-native Dutch are increasingly felt.
- South Africa is unique in that it has emerged from decades of apartheid and faces the great challenge of ensuring racial equity while maintaining the positives of a system that features some of the world's top universities. South Africa carries the responsibility of being the benchmark for other sub-Saharan nations, where access is mainly a problem of racial equity.

- Ukraine has emerged from many years of a Communist regime. It is a participant in the Bologna Process but not a European Union (EU) member. Ukraine's system is marked by an emphasis on social status and unequal access to higher education in rural and urban areas..
- The United States is a developed North American country with a hierarchical and merit-based system. It is the strongest magnet for foreign students because of the strength of its higher education system. However, a number of disparities within the system have led to gaps in access and persistence to a college degree.

We will explore three main themes: (1) the rationale for increasing access to higher education; (2) developments in and pressures on the transition process from secondary to higher education; and (3) current policies and recommended solutions.

For this paper, we define access in two ways: *access through participation* and *access with success*. Access through participation is the policy of ensuring that students are able to enter and commence study at an institution of higher education. Access with success goes a step further, defining true access as completion of a degree or certificate program that prepares one for a vocation. In all four countries reviewed in this paper, both types of access are pursued. The relative emphasis on one type or the other varies according to the characteristics and history of each country.

The paper is part of a series produced for the Global Policy Fellows Program, an initiative of the Institute for Higher Education Policy. The goal of the program is to bring together analysts from around the world who are interested in developing higher education policies that will affect the opportunity for and success in higher education. Other topics in this series include financing higher education institutions and students; the impact of higher education on workforce skills; and the trend toward privatization in higher education.<sup>5</sup> 

<sup>4</sup> The Bologna Process is the process of creating the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). It is based on cooperation among ministries, higher education institutions, students, and staff from 46 countries, with the participation of international organizations.

<sup>5</sup> For more information about the Global Policy Fellows Program, go to [www.ihep.org/programs/global-policy-fellows.cfm](http://www.ihep.org/programs/global-policy-fellows.cfm).

# Rationale for Increasing Access to Higher Education

The notion of access is popular and problematic. The popularity of the notion has a number of sources and dimensions, including the following:

- **Institutional survival**, which revolves around the issue of numbers.
- **Extension of educational opportunity** in terms of equity in relation to gender and other gaps in opportunity.
- **As a catalyst for change** in teaching and learning in higher education.
- **Increasing economic development** in a country and coping with the demands of globalization.

Globalization and economic development are two of the most significant reasons for increasing higher education access. *Globalization, knowledge society, Lisbon Strategy, and Bologna Process* have become buzzwords in the higher education arena and influence all countries to some extent.

For example, one could argue that the overwhelming motivation for successfully transitioning students from secondary to postsecondary education in the United States is fear associated with the effects of globalization. This fear spread rapidly in April 2005 when *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman published *The World is Flat*.<sup>6</sup> The book served as a wake-up call to Americans about the impending effects of globalization on the nation's economic stature. Friedman focused on educational progress in countries such as India and China, which are producing greater numbers and proportions of highly educated workers than ever before. Friedman aimed to jolt the United States out of its complacent self-image of global powerhouse and encourage greater educational and economic progress.

Education policymakers were quick to follow Friedman's lead. They now had a hook for engaging the American public in improving educational achievement and attainment. Using taglines such as "our international lead is slipping away"<sup>7</sup> and "[w]hile the United States has been mostly in a holding pattern, other countries have surged ahead,"<sup>8</sup> national education think tanks called on policymakers, educators, and business people to focus on improving high school graduation rates and postsecondary enrollment rates.

Globalization encompasses financial markets, global interconnectedness, global and regional trade agreements, media, information systems, labor markets, telecommunication, and so on.<sup>9</sup> Increased participation in and access to higher education has become a global orthodoxy, promoted by national governments as well as agencies such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Bank, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), to name a few.

Europe has the additional conditions set by the Bologna Process and the Lisbon Strategy, which are themselves responses to a globalizing world. Education, including higher education, has become ever more important in the European agenda because of several developments, including EU expansion and the Bologna Process, which also covers some non-EU countries. The Lisbon Strategy, set down during the meeting of the European Council in Lisbon in March 2000, aims to make the EU the most competitive economy in the world and

<sup>7</sup> Education Trust presentation, "Access and Success in Higher Education: A Look at the Numbers," October 2007 ([www2.edtrust.org/EdTrust/Press+Room/AccessToSuccessLaunch.htm](http://www2.edtrust.org/EdTrust/Press+Room/AccessToSuccessLaunch.htm)).

<sup>8</sup> Education Commission of the States, "Closing the College Participation Gap: A National Summary," October 2003, p.1 ([www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/index.html](http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/index.html)).

<sup>9</sup> N. Cloete, P. Maassen, R. Fenel, T. Moja, T. Perold, and T. Gibbon, eds., *Transformation in Higher Education; Global Pressures and Local Realities* in South Africa (Cape Town, South Africa: Juta and Company, 2002), 29.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Friedman. 1995. *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century*. New York, NY: Farrar Straus and Giroux.

to achieve full employment by 2010.<sup>10</sup> This strategy includes several indicators on education, such as increasing access and the number of graduates in mathematics and technology.

For countries in transition, such as South Africa, higher education is seen not only as a means to greater economic development and growth but also as a means for social cohesion, elimination of unemployment and crime, and bridging the gap between the rich and the poor. In fact, in many countries, education is seen as a panacea for all societal illnesses.

The multiple purposes of higher education include:<sup>11</sup>

- **Skills development**—Higher education may aim to develop skills that are of value to the students, to their actual or potential employers, and to society as a whole. This implies that countries whose focus has not been on this issue must start incorporating skills training into their higher education programs.
- **Selection**—Higher education seeks to identify and credit students with higher level abilities of certain kinds. Employers and others use these assessments to place the persons who have benefited from this process. This selection process entails certain entry requirements for particular fields; having a degree has increasingly become a requirement not only for entering the professions, but also for many service- and technology-oriented jobs.
- **Socialization**—Higher education is seen as responsible for socializing people for their future roles, forming and reinforcing their values to fit their intended professional and personal niches.

- **Scholarship**—Scholarship and advancement of learning are long-standing functions of higher education, though the focus on research is of more recent origin. Today, this criterion is used mainly in the academic world to indicate merit; for example, through promotions for individual faculty members or funding for a department to pursue research.
- **Service**—Higher education institutions are considered to have a responsibility to serve local industry and the local community through consultancy, applied research, and even advocacy.

These are some of the reasons access to education is important to governments and individuals. In the rest of the paper, we will explore how the transition from secondary to higher education affects the goal of higher education access. ❧

<sup>10</sup> See [www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/00100-r1.en0.htm](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/00100-r1.en0.htm).

<sup>11</sup> Malcolm Tight, *The Ideology of Higher Education in Access and Institutional Change* ed. O. Fulton (Bristol, United Kingdom: Open University Press, 1989), 86.

# Transition from Secondary Education to Higher Education

Each of the four countries studied has a different education system. Our primary focus is not to describe these systems, but it is clear that the issue of transitioning to higher education is strongly affected by the overall education system and that the nature of this transition has an impact on access to higher education.

In general, admission rules are set to streamline entry into higher education, although system and historical contexts are important in defining what those rules are and how they can change. Three of the countries reviewed in this paper (the Netherlands, South Africa, and Ukraine) have seen changes over the past few years in the rules for accepting students to higher education or are currently debating changes. In the United States, the main concern has not been changing admission rules but rather improving the alignment between the preparation of students graduating from high school and the requirements for success at the postsecondary level, with the goal of increasing the number of high school graduates who are qualified to attend college.<sup>12</sup>

## UNITED STATES

In the United States, 67 percent of 2007 high school graduates are enrolled in college.<sup>13</sup> This may seem like an admirable rate of enrollment, but the nation is fervently trying to focus on graduating more high school students and ensuring that those graduates are ready for college-level work. High school graduation rates, although not a primary focus, are part of the accountability matrix under the 2002 No Child Left Behind Act.<sup>14</sup> In 2005, the National Governors Association (NGA) sponsored a compact signed by all 50 state governors to begin uniformly calculating high school graduation rates so that all students are counted and national comparisons can be made.<sup>15</sup> The U.S. Department of Education has

recently announced that it, too, will identify and enforce a uniform method for calculating graduation rates.<sup>16</sup>

Groups such as Achieve, Inc. have created consortia that advocate state policies to align high school graduation requirements with postsecondary entrance requirements, so that graduating students are ready for college or work.<sup>17</sup> And individual states have created programs targeted at increasing the number of students graduating from high school. For example, in 2006, Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue established a program that funds more than 850 “graduation coaches” at an annual cost of over \$43,000,000. Every middle and high school in Georgia has a professional who is dedicated to identifying and serving students at risk<sup>18</sup> of dropping out of high school. High schools and local technical and open-access colleges have formed partnerships to ensure that students understand the relevance of high school and college studies to their future work ambitions. Local, statewide, and national businesses are identifying dropout prevention as a primary philanthropic target.

Quantitative measures of efforts to increase high school graduation and postsecondary enrollment rates are somewhat elusive. Currently, each state can calculate its graduation rate in a unique manner,<sup>19</sup> so there is no consistent

<sup>12</sup> Press release by US Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings on April 1, 2008 at <http://www.ed.gov/news/pressreleases/2008/04/04012008.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Achieve, Inc. ([www.achieve.org](http://www.achieve.org)). In the United States, the major goal tends to be ensuring that a student who graduates from high school is prepared for college, technical school, work, or a combination of the three. The intent is to fully prepare students for any postsecondary option they choose.

<sup>14</sup> Typically, students at risk of dropping out of high school have one or more of the following problems: low attendance rates, low socio-economic status, disruptive behavior, low test scores and grades, or a deficit in high school credits.

<sup>15</sup> There are five different formulas currently approved by the US Department of Education that states can use to calculate their high school graduation rate and be in compliance with the federal No Child Left Behind accountability act. The variation among the formulas centers on different ways to estimate graduation rates absent a longitudinal student database that can specifically track each student from entering high school to graduation.

<sup>12</sup> Of course, the issue of alignment is not solely a U.S. issue. However, while there have been major legislative changes in the countries in transition (South Africa and Ukraine), and debates and some changes in the Netherlands, the United States has focused solely on the issue of alignment, as higher education institutions set their own entry requirements.

<sup>13</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, “College Enrollment and Work Activity of High School Graduates,” April 25, 2008. See <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/hsgec.pdf> for press release, obtained April 25, 2008.

<sup>14</sup> No Child Left Behind Statute, 2002 ([www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/index.html](http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/index.html)).

<sup>15</sup> National Governor’s Association, NGA Graduation Counts Compact, 2005 ([www.nga.org/Files/pdf/0507GRADCOMPACT.PDF](http://www.nga.org/Files/pdf/0507GRADCOMPACT.PDF)).

baseline. However, states are showing progress using their own consistent methodologies. The State of Georgia had a 9 percent increase in its graduation rate from 2003 to 2007.<sup>20</sup> Although all subgroups of students are seeing increases, an achievement gap remains and has an effect on the college-going rate. However, there has been some good news about racial/ethnic minority postsecondary enrollment nationwide. Between 1984 and 2004, minority undergraduate enrollment in the United States increased by 146 percent to a total of 4.7 million students.<sup>21</sup> In the southern part of the country—where African Americans have historically had fewer opportunities—their college-going rate now matches their percentage of the population.<sup>22</sup>

## THE NETHERLANDS

In the Netherlands, admission to both the universities of applied sciences (hogescholen, or HBOs) and the traditional universities is open to qualified students. This open admissions policy has always been one of the cornerstones of Dutch higher education. However, the transition from elite to mass higher education provided a reason for the government to intervene. The process of “massification” started in the late 1960s (with growing student numbers at the universities) and continued through the 1980s (with the upgrade of the hogescholen to the higher education sector, which previously included only the universities).<sup>23</sup>

The issue of selection has been a topic of debate for several decades in the Netherlands.<sup>24</sup> In 1972, a law regulated the admission to costly study programs such as medicine and dentistry; in 1975, this law was replaced with a “weighted lottery” selection system, which has been heatedly discussed

ever since. However, despite the process of massification,<sup>25</sup> Dutch higher education is characterized by an open admission principle; by law, admission to HBOs and universities is open to all students who have the necessary entrance qualifications. The only entrance limitation is the system of *numerus fixus* (limited enrollment), which was introduced in 1972 and applies to a small number of programs. There are currently three types of limited enrollment:

- “Capacity fixus” applies when the number of applicants exceeds the national teaching capacity, in which case the minister of education, science, and culture decides on the number of openings (nationally and at the institutional level) that will be available.
- The “*opleiding* [program] fixus” is a combination of the capacity fixus and the “labor market fixus,” based on the minister’s prerogative to limit the intake of students if it can be shown that the supply of graduates from a particular program exceeds the needs of the labor market by a substantial amount and when this is expected to be the case for a number of years.
- A third type of *numerus fixus* is the “institutional fixus,” which is based on higher education institutions’ autonomy in determining their teaching capacity.

The debate on the selection mechanism was revived in 1996 with the establishment of the Drenth Committee, which was supposed to make recommendations about possible changes to the higher education admission system. The committee’s advice was to provide direct access to people with high grades in secondary education and to apply a weighted lottery system to people with lower grades. The committee also recommended that about 10 percent of the open seats should

<sup>20</sup> See Governors Office of Student Achievement website ([www.gaosa.org](http://www.gaosa.org)).

<sup>21</sup> “Growth and Consolidation of Minority Enrollments,” *Inside Higher Education*, November 28, 2007.

<sup>22</sup> Southern Regional Education Board, “Annual Higher Education Fact Book 2007” ([www.sreb.org](http://www.sreb.org)).

<sup>23</sup> Before the implementation of the HBO Act in 1986, the hogescholen were officially part of the secondary education system.

<sup>24</sup> The debates on selection mainly focused on university education, in part because of the gravity of the problem and the fact that HBOs were not part of higher education. Until 1993, HBOs used a totally different selection mechanism. Before the introduction of the law on higher education and scientific research (in Dutch, WET OP HET HOGER ONDERWIJS EN WETENSCHAPPELIJK ONDERZOEK [WHW]) in 1993, the HBOs could decide autonomously about entrance to their programs.

<sup>25</sup> The increase from the 1950s has been impressive. In the university sector alone, participation increased from fewer than 30,000 students in the 1950s to about 190,000 in 2005 ([http://statline.cbs.nl/StatWeb/table.asp?LYR=T:0,G3:0&LA=nl&DM=SLNL&PA=37220&D1=a&D2=a&D3=0&D4=a&D5=0,10,20,30,40,50,\(l-1\)-I&STB=G1&HDR=G2,G4](http://statline.cbs.nl/StatWeb/table.asp?LYR=T:0,G3:0&LA=nl&DM=SLNL&PA=37220&D1=a&D2=a&D3=0&D4=a&D5=0,10,20,30,40,50,(l-1)-I&STB=G1&HDR=G2,G4)).

be reserved for people with job experience. A public debate followed these recommendations, in which the case of Meike Vernooy played an important role. Vernooy was a secondary school leaver with extremely good examination grades (9.6 out of 10), yet her attempts to enroll in a medical program were rejected several times. As a result of the committee recommendations and publicity about Vernooy, the minister of education, science, and culture changed the regulations in 1999. Now, all candidates with an average grade of 8 or higher in secondary education are admitted directly to the program of their choice. Moreover, as of September 2000, universities and hogescholen have the opportunity to make use of decentralized (institutional) selection. A maximum of 10 percent of the total places available can be used by higher education institutions to grant admission to applicants on the basis of non-academic factors such as motivation, work experience, or talent.

Although selection is a topic of continuing interest in the Dutch higher education arena, institutions and students are generally reluctant to adopt a strict selection process—particularly for new entrants—that would undermine the Dutch and European ideal of universal access and the right to education at all levels. Most universities prefer a student capacity assessment after the student's first year, on which basis students would receive advice about proceeding with their studies or not. Also, the Dutch council of universities stresses the importance of an adequate student counseling system.

## UKRAINE

Like the Netherlands, Ukraine faces difficulties related to ongoing educational reforms. However, these processes are even more complex, as they include legislative changes that were urgently needed after the fall of the USSR. One of the newly amended laws on education concerned the introduction of a nationwide testing system at graduation, with the purpose of making higher education entrance opportunities more equitable.

In 2002, the international foundation Renaissance, part of the Soros network, established the Center for Testing Technologies and Monitoring of Education Quality. A network of regional testing centers provides necessary support for testing and studies the role of external assessment in preventing corruption in education. This project is being implemented in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine. The ministry created a legal basis for the external testing and legitimized the certificates awarded.<sup>26</sup>

Beginning on March 22, 2005, external testing results were taken into consideration along with the results of college entrance examinations. However, in 2007, only three subjects were being tested (mathematics, history, and Ukrainian language). Since 2008, external assessment is compulsory even for high school graduates of previous years if they enter higher education institutions in or after 2008. Many subjects, including foreign languages have been proposed for testing in 2009. To certify the results and combat corruption, sealed containers with test materials are delivered under police guard and opened in the presence of several officials and observers. Some international organizations, as well as the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), are providing funding for the Ukrainian Standardized External Testing Initiative<sup>27</sup> that supports public campaigns and regional media trainings on external testing. There is also a national hotline to answer questions about the testing.

Although this initiative is intended to establish a level playing field for access to education, there are many unsolved problems. First, some higher education institutions are critical of the results of external testing. Administrative and criminal liability for interference with external evaluation procedures and disclosure of test contents has been discussed but not yet implemented. Some high school teachers and pupils have criticized the testing approach itself. Most pupils,

<sup>26</sup> Decree of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine No. 409, dated July 17, 2002.

<sup>27</sup> Ukrainian Standardized External Testing Initiative, 2007 (<http://www.useti.org.ua/en/>), accessed October 2008.

especially from the rural areas, feel unprepared and find tests too difficult. They doubt that the results of such tests will improve their chances of being admitted to their chosen higher education institutions. The evaluation of the testing effectiveness confirms a serious gap in education country-wide. For example, the percentage of pupils from rural areas who obtained more than 195 from 200 possible points during a math test in 2008 is six times as low as that for pupils from urban areas. Nobody has expected that a difference between education in different regions is so high. According to experts, there is no equal access to higher education not because of corruption, but mostly due to unequal study opportunities.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine continues granting special admission privileges for applicants from rural (including mountain) regions.

## **SOUTH AFRICA**

South Africa is another country in transition. After the first democratic elections, equity and access were the preeminent transitional demands for the new government during the first policy phase, which lasted from the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) in 1992 to White Paper 3 in 1997. As Cloete and colleagues put it,<sup>29</sup>

[T]he demand is for both the enrollment and staffing of postsecondary education to begin to reflect the social composition of the broader society; for resources to be made available to historically disadvantaged social groups; and for increased funding and qualitative development to support historically black institutions.

A flurry of policies were created, amended, and re-amended to change the higher education landscape. In effect, the higher

education system underwent a policy-driven restructuring.<sup>30</sup> Since 1994, South Africa has experienced a huge increase in the proportion of Black students in higher education. According to Bunting,<sup>31</sup> total university enrollment of Black students in universities increased from 32 percent in 1990 to 60 percent in 2000, while in the vocational institutions (technikons) it rose from 32 percent to 72 percent. The most important contributing factor to this increase was undoubtedly the removal of racial barriers to admission. For the first time in the history of the country, students were free to apply at any institution of their choice, and this resulted in unprecedented mobility. The government also provided an incentive by giving more funding to institutions that admitted more students from disadvantaged groups. However, the government has not applied sanctions to institutions that do not want to change. Furthermore, historically Black institutions have been left struggling to attract students as Black students have moved to White institutions. Meanwhile, White student enrollment at the universities dropped from 89 percent in 1990 to 26 percent in 2000.<sup>32</sup> At least a portion of this change can be attributed to racism—White students expected the public institutions to become majority Black, and this expectation may have facilitated their leaving. Some students who might have been expected to attend the public universities have gone overseas to travel or to gain work experience, while others have enrolled in the burgeoning private higher education sector.

The latest change has been the merging of higher education institutions and the reduction in their number from 36 to 21. This has raised concerns, questions, and debates among the institutions, their staffs (both academic and nonacademic), the entire academic field, politicians, and society at large. When institutions merge, curriculum, efficiency, equity, staffing, students, organizational integration, and physical integration can all be either negatively or positively affected. These effects remain to be seen in the longer term. ❧

<sup>28</sup> Rakov S. (2008). Statistical information of Standardized External Testing—2008 and its interpretation. Reporter of testing and monitoring in education.(in Ukrainian), 9: 2.

<sup>29</sup> Cloete et al., 2002. p. 415.

<sup>30</sup> The founding policy document on higher education after apartheid is the 1996 report of the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) entitled *A Framework for Transformation*. The NCHE report laid the foundation for the 1997 white paper on higher education, *A Program for the Transformation of Higher Education*. The white paper identified diverse social purposes of higher education that also have a bearing on the curricula and the type of graduates produced by the system.

<sup>31</sup> I. Bunting, in Cloete et al. 2002, p.141.

<sup>32</sup> I. Bunting, in Cloete et al. 2002, p.141.

# Disadvantages and Barriers to Access

All four countries reviewed in this paper seek increased access to higher education for citizens, but significant barriers exist in all four. In many cases, the barriers are especially relevant to the transition of disadvantaged students from secondary to higher education. Although the term “disadvantaged” means different things in each of the countries, the barriers are similar. The following sections highlight some of the similarities and differences among the four countries in definitions of disadvantaged students and the barriers they face.

## THE NETHERLANDS

In describing residents’ demographic backgrounds, the Netherlands distinguishes between *allochtoon* and *autochtoon*. The former refers to anyone whose parent or parents were not born in the Netherlands, while the latter refers to anyone, regardless of place of birth, whose parents are both Dutch.<sup>33</sup> Data show that despite the increase in postsecondary enrollment as a whole, allochtoon students still lag behind autochtonen and are more likely to choose vocational and less prestigious options.<sup>34</sup> The reasons for this gap are many, including socio-economic disadvantage, which plays an important role in all four countries; motivation issues; and lack of adequate counseling at the secondary level. While this last point is hard to prove, data suggest that, more often than not, allochtoon students opt for the preparatory middle vocational education (Voorbereidend middelbaar beroepsonderwijs [VMBO]) or preparatory middle vocational education (middelbaar beroepsonderwijs [MBO]) track.<sup>35</sup> (See **FIGURE 1** for the structure of the higher education system).

The issue is how to smooth the transition into college, when students make crucial choices early (age 12) that lock them into a track that does not lead to higher education. As they make these choices, family pressure, cultural issues, and other factors will play a pivotal role, and unbiased professional advice is most needed—but not always provided. Often, socioeconomically disadvantaged pupils (such as allochtoon) choose vocational paths and later cannot go to college.

In 2007, an independent OECD report studied the strengths and weaknesses of the Dutch higher education and research sector.<sup>36</sup> The report mentions several positive aspects, including adequate public funding, strong institutions, research-intensive universities that compare favorably with those in other countries, and a good quality assurance system. However, the study points out that Dutch policy focuses too much on young students with a good prior education, while paying little attention to ethnic minorities and students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Still, the increase of allochtonen in higher and continuous education over the past decades has been impressive. The current problem appears to be mainly related to dropout rates, which confirm a trend of unequal accomplishments between these two groups. According to the policy document *Kennis in Kaart 2006* (Knowledge in Paper),<sup>37</sup> within six years of enrolling in an HBO (hoger beroepsonderwijs = higher professional education) in 1998, almost 70 percent of

<sup>33</sup> However, allochtoon has come to refer generally to non-western, rather than western, allochtonen  
<sup>34</sup> Cremonini, L., D. F. Westerheijden, J. Enders (2008). Disseminating the Right Information to the Right Audience—Cultural Determinants in the Use (and Misuse) of Rankings. *Higher Education*, 55:373-385, Springer Netherlands; CBS (Central Bureau of Statistics), *De Nederlandse samenleving 2007* (Dutch Society 2007), p. 138, and Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (2004), *Allochtonen in Nederland 2004*. This situation is often attributed to unsatisfactory levels of primary education in the so-called “black schools” (i.e., where the majority of students are allochtonen).

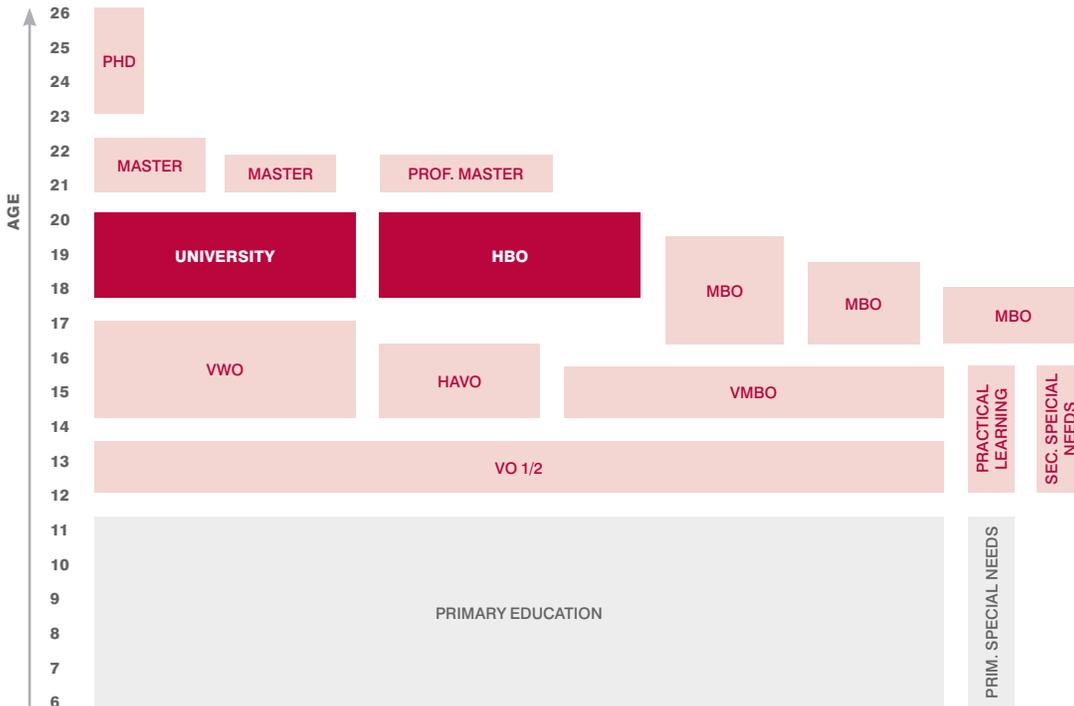
<sup>35</sup> According to Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (2007) (Statline; VO(voortgezet onderwijs = secondary education) leerlingen en geslaagden, Retrieved 25 September 2007, in 2002/2003), 47 percent of non-western, non-indigenous students opted for a VMBO, while 26 percent chose a VO (voorbereidend wetenschappelijk onderwijs = preparatory scientific education) or HAVO (hoger algemeen voortgezet onderwijs = higher general secondary education). For indigenous Dutch, the figures were 30 percent and 42 percent, respectively.

<sup>36</sup> Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), (2007) *Thematic Review of Tertiary Education: Country Note: The Netherlands*.

<sup>37</sup> The publication *Kennis in Kaart* (Knowledge in Paper) is produced annually. It reports on the results of efforts to reach the policy goals of the Higher Education and Research Plan 2004.

FIGURE 1

## Dutch Education System



VWO = VOORBEREIDEND WETENSCHAPPELIJK ONDERWIJS (PREPARATORY SCIENTIFIC EDUCATION)  
 HAVO = HOGER ALGEMEEN VOORTGEZET ONDERWIJS (HIGHER GENERAL SECONDARY EDUCATION)  
 VMBO = VOORBEREIDEND MIDDELBAAR BEROEPSONDERWIJS (PREPARATORY MIDDLE PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION)  
 VO = VOORTGEZET ONDERWIJS (SECONDARY EDUCATION)  
 PHD = PHILOSOPHY DOCTOR

SOURCE: E. DE WEERT AND P. BOEZEROOY, "HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE NETHERLANDS: COUNTRY REPORT," CENTER FOR EDUCATION POLICY (CHEPS) INTERNATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION MONITOR, 2007 (WWW.UTWENTE.NL/CHEPS), RETRIEVED APRIL 2008.

Wetenschappelijk Onderwijs, which means higher education provided by a research university), compared with less than 50 percent of allochtonen. Similarly, about 70 percent of autochtonen who enrolled in a WO in 1998 earned a diploma (including an HBO diploma) within seven years, while the figure is just above 50 percent for allochtonen. Students who had not achieved a diploma included dropouts and those who were still studying. However, the proportion of dropouts is also higher among allochtonen than among autochtonen.<sup>38</sup>

### UKRAINE

Ukraine faces somewhat more severe problems in ensuring access. The country currently has 2.8 million students enrolled in higher education institutions—about 597 per 10,000 inhabitants—with 2.3 million studying at institutions at the third and fourth accreditation levels.<sup>39</sup> (FIGURES 2A & 2B) In 2006,

the state paid the tuition of 58 percent of these students—almost 4 percent more than in 2005. Nonetheless, according to the Education Ministry, over the past five years the dropout rate has remained constant at 7–8 percent.<sup>40</sup> Ukraine also faces complicated choices in balancing access with the goal of fighting corruption.

In the Ukrainian context, access to higher education is defined by law: "Citizens of Ukraine have the right to receive education in state educational institutions free of charge regardless of gender, race, nationality, social and financial status, specialization, philosophy, party membership, religious preferences, state of health, place of residence, and other reasons" (Law of Ukraine on Education, 2002). Access to higher education institutions is regulated in accordance with the "terms of admittance to the higher education institutions of Ukraine" adopted by the Ministry of Education and Science. Admission boards function according to regulations adopted by the ministry. State-supported students (only those with good examination results) are guaranteed full tuition and a stipend.

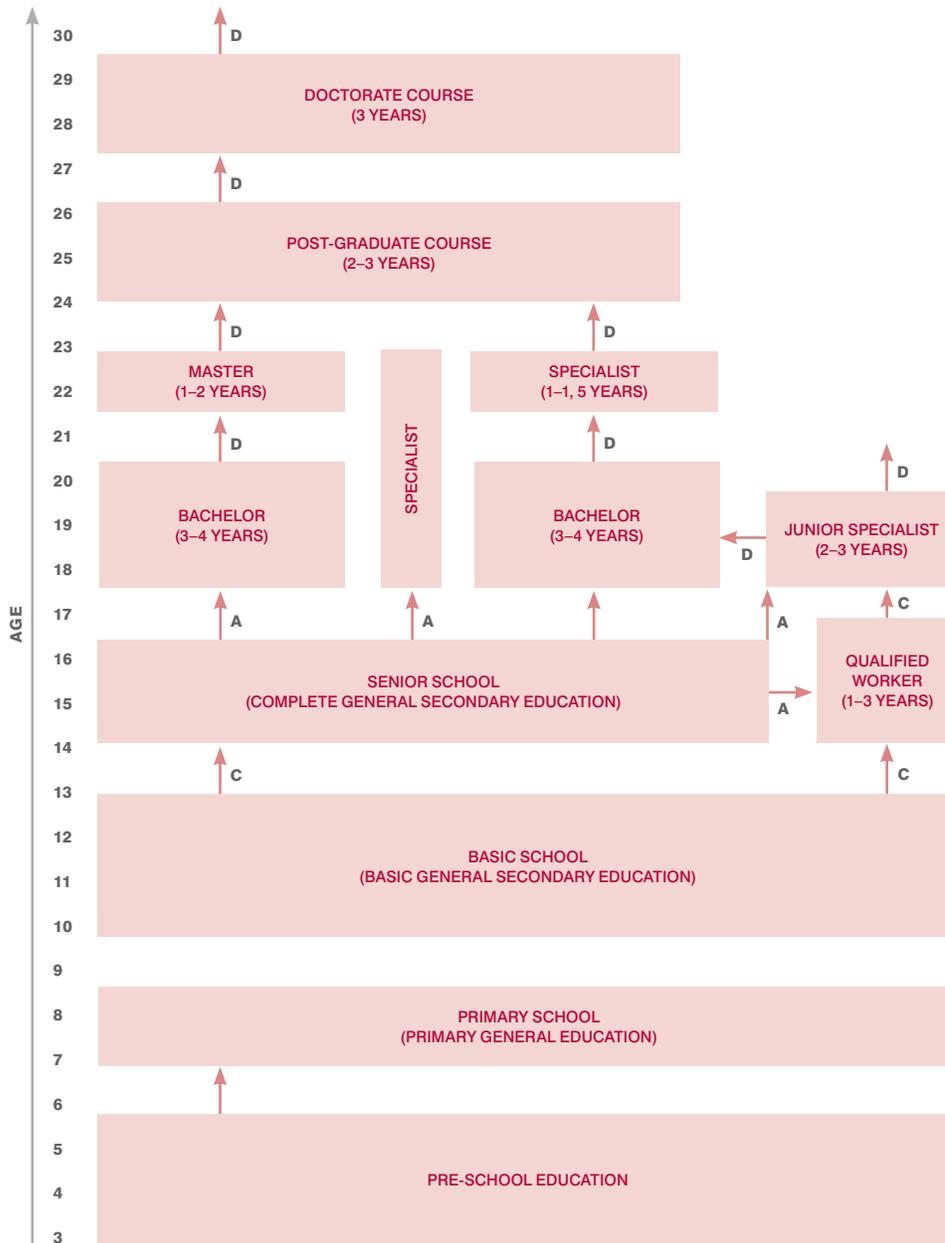
<sup>38</sup> Ministerie van Onderwijs Cultuur en Wetenschappen (2006), Kennis in Kaart, Den Haag, pp. 46 ff. It is interesting to note that, in addition to the issue of early choice mentioned above, the Dutch system has been criticized for a low level of permeability. In other words, choices are made early and it is hard to move from an HBO track to a WO track, or to gain access to a WO master's program after receiving an HBO bachelor's degree, according to the bachelor/master system introduced as part of the Bologna Process. (See Report of the Committee to Review Degrees for the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2005, "Bridging the Gap between Theory and Practice, Possible Degrees for a Binary System" (www.nvao.net).

<sup>39</sup> For a description of the classification, see Vera Ternivskaya, "Updates on Ukrainian Higher Education," Overseas Educational Advisers Professional Educator's Group (OSEAS) (www.bibl.u-szeged.hu/oseas/ukr2.html).

<sup>40</sup> Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, *Higher Education—2007* (in Ukrainian) (www.mon.gov.ua/laws/high\_2007\_11\_05\_07.doc), retrieved February 2008.

FIGURE 2A

## Ukrainian Education System: Current System

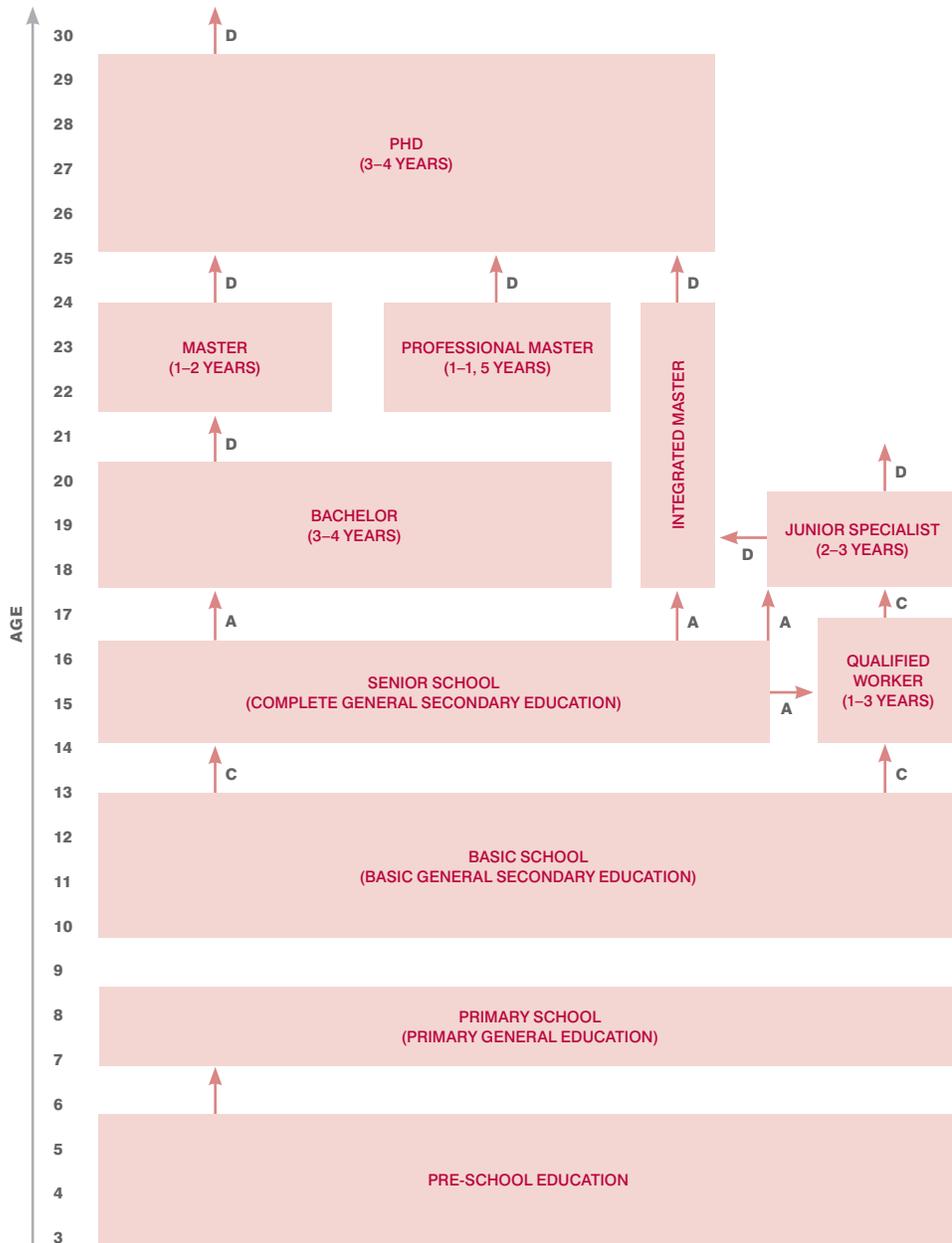


C=CERTIFICATE  
A=ATTESTATION  
D=DIPLOMA (SCHOOL-LEAVING CERTIFICATE)

SOURCE: SHYNKARUK, V. (2008). PRINCIPAL TRENDS OF MODERNIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION STRUCTURE IN UKRAINE. [HTTP://WWW.MON.GOV.UA/EDUCATION/HIGHER/BOLPR/NAPR\\_ENG.RTF](http://www.mon.gov.ua/education/higher/bolpr/napr_eng.rtf),  
ACCESSED SEPTEMBER 2008.

FIGURE 2B

## Ukrainian Education System: Modernized Structure in Accordance with the European Higher Education Area Requirements



C=CERTIFICATE  
A=ATTESTATION  
D=DIPLOMA (SCHOOL-LEAVING CERTIFICATE)

SOURCE: SHYNKARUK, V. (2008). PRINCIPAL TRENDS OF MODERNIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION STRUCTURE IN UKRAINE. [HTTP://WWW.MON.GOV.UA/EDUCATION/HIGHER/BOLPR/NAPR\\_ENG.RTF](http://www.mon.gov.ua/education/higher/bolpr/napr_eng.rtf), ACCESSED SEPTEMBER 2008.

According to Ukrainian law, state-supported higher education institutions should have at least 51 percent tuition-free openings. In 2007, the state raised the percentage to 60 percent at some institutions, and it is expected to increase to 70 percent in 2008–2009. However, the distribution of state-supported openings in prestigious fields varies among institutions.

Historically, prospective disadvantaged students have had priority for admission (between 40 and 60 percent of all admitted candidates). Society cares about orphans, disabled people, combatants, victims of the Chernobyl disaster,<sup>41</sup> recipients of state aid, and other groups. However, the number of disadvantaged people in Ukraine is enormous. This fact diminishes their status and creates challenges for admission committees. In addition, many prospective students who are not disadvantaged obtain false documents saying they are, which has the effect of discrediting the whole system. Admission committees do not have enough time or authority to check all the information they receive. Thus, under this system, a student has a better chance of being admitted to an institution of higher education by obtaining false documents than by preparing academically. Former Minister for Education Stanislav Nikolayenko alleged that, in 2005, 13–14 percent of university students were admitted on the basis of a phone call from a relative to university rectors or through another corrupt connection, although this figure dropped to 6 percent in 2006.<sup>42</sup> The state is currently developing more actions to combat corruption in education. As noted above, Ukrainian officials have decided to approach the dual problem of corruption and unequal access by establishing an external testing system. However, even this approach does not solve the problem. In 2007 and 2008, for example, some prospective students who obtained the highest scores on national tests were still ranked low for admission at one of the leading universities because so many

disadvantaged applicants had high-priority privileged status. Policymakers have been unable so far to fix the priorities system, and some fear that the quality of admitted students will continue to decrease. In fact, the status and perception of higher education have already decreased in the public eye.<sup>43</sup>

In addition to combating corruption, Ukraine needs to address other issues regarding access. For example, one study asked, “What are the problems related to children’s equal access to quality education that are most crucial for your educational institution?”<sup>44</sup> The most common responses were (1) social status and property-related stratification of society (27 percent); (2) integration of children with special needs into the learning process (23 percent); and (3) broken families (23 percent).

The first factor is social status and the stratification of society. The eradication of poverty is among the most pressing needs with regard to the transition into postsecondary education. Poverty contributes to the development of corruption in the educational sphere at all levels and affects access to higher education. If parents do not have enough money, their children cannot receive the additional training needed to prepare for competitive tests. Equal access to high-quality primary education is an urgent problem, especially in rural areas. Generally, the level of knowledge of students in rural areas is lower than that of their urban peers, and children often fail examinations because of a lack of preparation. The cost of private tutoring exacerbates the problem. According to one study, Ukrainian students spent almost 5 percent of GDP per capita for one subject

<sup>41</sup> As of January 1, 2007, 2,526,216 citizens had the status of victims of the 1986 Chernobyl disaster (State Statistics Committee of Ukraine, [www.ukrstat.gov.ua](http://www.ukrstat.gov.ua)).

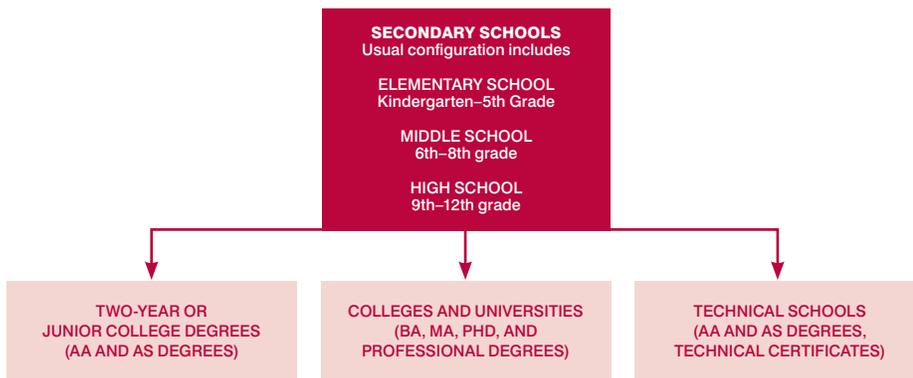
<sup>42</sup> A. Boguslavskaya, “The time to spend money? Whom, how, how much, and why to pay for admission to the Ukrainian higher education institutions” (in Ukrainian), *Ukraina Moloda.*, July 20, 2007, ([www.umoloda.kiev.ua/number/959/174/34887](http://www.umoloda.kiev.ua/number/959/174/34887)), retrieved October 2007.

<sup>43</sup> For example, employers often require higher education degrees for entry-level positions. On the other hand, degrees are undervalued for some positions. Job advertisements sometimes mention a higher education degree as a requirement even for a relatively unskilled job, and salaries for many jobs do not correlate with the highest level of education, especially during a financial crisis. As result, many students are interested in acquiring just any degree, which creates additional pressure on Ukrainian higher education institutions and promotes corruption.

<sup>44</sup> O. Ovcharuk and O. Lokshyna, “Education Modernisation in Ukraine: An Analytical Overview: Results of a National Survey of Heads of Comprehensive Educational Institutions in Ukraine,” Kyiv, K.I.S., 2004 ([www.undp.org.ua/download.php?id=1121429073&cm=doc&fn=modernizatsionshoolheadspollresults\\_engl.pdf](http://www.undp.org.ua/download.php?id=1121429073&cm=doc&fn=modernizatsionshoolheadspollresults_engl.pdf)), retrieved October 2007.

FIGURE 3

## U.S. Education System



of private tutoring a year.<sup>45</sup> Many people cannot afford the high costs of tutoring, however, and this impacts social inequity and, specifically, access to higher education.

### UNITED STATES

The United States has a highly developed higher education system that is extremely diverse in terms of the types of institutions and the students who enroll. (FIGURE 3) The country focuses on high school graduation and postsecondary enrollment for all students, but robust efforts target groups that have historically had limited access to higher education, such as racial/ethnic minorities and low-income students. Recently, the country has faced the challenge of many illegal immigrants. Some of the nation’s most at-risk students are children of illegal immigrants. Out of fear of being caught illegally in the country, the parents of these students may not readily communicate with the school about their children’s academic progress; this impedes the academic achievement of these students.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, federal and some state immigration policies have eliminated many benefits to illegal immigrants, which means that federal aid, in-state tuition, and state scholarships for higher education are withheld from these students regardless of their achievement levels.

The U.S. Secretary of Education’s Commission on the Future of Higher Education highlighted access issues in its findings and recommendations in September 2006. The commission’s final report states, “We want a system that is accessible to all Americans, throughout their lives”; to get there, we must ensure that access is not “unduly limited by the complex interplay of inadequate preparation, lack of information about college opportunities, and persistent financial barriers.”<sup>47</sup> The report included the following figures:

- Only 17 percent of high school seniors are considered proficient in mathematics, and just 36 percent are proficient in reading.
- By age 25–29, about 34 of every 100 Whites have obtained bachelor’s degrees, compared with 17 of every 100 Blacks and just 11 of every 100 Latinos.
- Only 36 percent of college-qualified low-income students complete bachelor’s degrees within eight and a half years, compared with 81 percent of high-income students.

The report’s recommendations for increasing access were rather broad; they included increasing the number of college awareness activities, increasing the rigor of high school curricula, and instituting assessments that gauge whether a high school student is on track for college. Some nationwide initiatives show promise for increasing access; two important ones are aligning high school graduation requirements with college entry requirements and offering statewide merit-based scholarships.

### SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa has a unique history in that the at-risk groups of today were essentially created by yesterday’s regime. By the 1980s, 19 higher education institutions had been designated as being for the exclusive use of Whites, 2 for the exclusive use of Colored students, 2 for the exclusive use of Indians, and 13 for the exclusive use of Africans in the various republics of South Africa. The National Party government put in place legal constraints to prevent institutions designated for the use of one racial group from enrolling students from another group.<sup>48</sup> For example, an institution designated for Colored students could register a student from one of the other three races only if that institution obtained a permit from the government. Permits were granted only if it could be shown that the applicant’s proposed program of study was not available at any institution

<sup>45</sup> L. Hrynevych, A. Toropova, T. Pylnyk, L. Sereda, and U. Gerasevich, “Private Tutoring in Ukraine,” Ukrainian Center for Educational Quality Assessment ([www.ukrtest.org/files/private\\_tutoring.pdf](http://www.ukrtest.org/files/private_tutoring.pdf)), retrieved October 2007. The survey showed a wide range in the cost of private tutoring, from about US\$19/year to US\$5,787/year.

<sup>46</sup> Conversations with personnel in local high schools.

<sup>47</sup> *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education*, a report of the Commission on the Future of Higher Education appointed by Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings, September 2006. See <http://www.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/hiedfuture/index.html>.

<sup>48</sup> I. Bunting, in Cloete et al., 2002, p. 61.

designated for the racial group to which he or she belonged. The White universities and technikons were also divided by the languages used for instruction: English or Afrikaans.

Throughout the 1980s, the governance systems in these institutions were highly authoritarian. The apartheid government made every effort to ensure that the councils and executive managers supported the basic ideology of the National Party government. It ensured that the leadership and most of the academic staff of these universities were White Afrikaners who had been trained at one of the six historically White Afrikaans universities. Even where Black vice chancellors were appointed, the government continued to exercise control through the members of the council. White Afrikaner department heads dominated the senate of each institution. South Africa's first and second democratic governments sought to reshape the system into one that met the goals of equity, easy access for everyone, democratization, responsiveness, and efficiency.

Clearly, barriers to access into higher education exist in all four countries studied for this paper. These barriers are born out of specific conditions rooted in each country's history, demographic development, and education system. Thus, attempted solutions differ by country, and no country has been entirely successful in eradicating barriers.

## OTHER BARRIERS

Although the discussion of access in this section has focused on disadvantaged groups in each country, there are other barriers, too. In fact, the increased pressure to widen access to higher education can create its own set of problems or issues.

- **Internal transformation**—Rapid changes in a country can create problems that affect the higher education system. For example, in South Africa, the state is no longer a unitary actor with a monopoly on power and control of higher education institutions; rather, there are several competing

and legitimate centers of authority and control. The role of higher education now reflects a constellation of interests voiced by various groups in the sector, such as student unions, staff unions, professional associations, industry and business, and regional authorities.<sup>49</sup> These stakeholders all have an interest in the direction of development in higher education. The main policymaking arena is a corporate network of public boards, councils, and commissions. In South Africa, the Council of Higher Education and Training (CHET) and the South African Universities Vice Chancellors Association (SAUVCA) are the main stakeholders. These players, among others, act strategically to further the special interests of their own organization or interest group. In this case, decision making is segmented and dominated by clusters of interest groups, including government.

- **Transition across borders**—The Bologna Process, with its aim of increasing student mobility,<sup>50</sup> is a big factor in discussions on access to higher education in Europe. For example, the European Union's expansion to the east has opened doors to the possibility of an increasingly diverse student population, as people who were prevented under Communist rule from moving across Europe are now able to do so freely. The Lisbon Strategy set benchmarks for higher education, and the Dutch government has acted on them, producing action plans and policy documents, including a bachelor-master-PhD system that supports increasing enrollment and decreasing dropouts because of the shorter time to graduation. Excessive time to graduation (a long-term Dutch problem) is on the decline, especially among the traditionally disadvantaged group of allochtoon students. Dutch Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) data show that in 1995, the average time among all students to obtain a

<sup>49</sup> P. Maasen, in Cloete et al, 2002, p. 25.

<sup>50</sup> In 1997, the Lisbon communiqué on recognizing qualifications of the European higher education was signed by 43 countries (including Ukraine). In 1998, the ministers of education of France, Italy, Great Britain, and Germany signed the Sorbonne Declaration "On harmonization of the European higher education system." This document stressed the importance of using the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). In 1999, ministers of education from 29 European countries signed the Bologna Declaration.

doctoral degree was about 66 months (among autochtonen, 66; among allochtonen, 69); in 2004, it took an average of 64 months to achieve a bachelor's and master's degree. The decrease was especially sharp among allochtonen—down to 56 months.<sup>51</sup>

On the other hand, in Ukraine, which is not an EU member but is a Bologna signatory, globalization and the breakdown of borders is a controversial subject. Some post-Soviet states are trying to become members of the EU, but the stringent requirements lead to internal discussions about whether it is worth it. However, meeting European standards in education is generally an attractive, although challenging, goal. The EU-Ukraine Action Plan focuses on the areas of research and education; Ukraine will have to reform and upgrade its education and training systems, and work toward convergence with EU standards and practices. The influence of the Bologna Process is visible everywhere. For example, all Ukrainian higher education institutions of the third and fourth levels of accreditation have implemented the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS).<sup>52</sup>

- **Attracting international students**—Beyond the Bologna Process, many countries hope to attract talented students from abroad. The United States is the prime example of a receiver of international students. It has a wealth of policies and initiatives to attract students and researchers from abroad, including specific visa and work policies. Other parts of the world, including Europe and Australia, are fiercely competing with the United States for international students, who are seen as an important source of income and contributors to international cooperation. It is unclear how this competition for foreign students affects the higher education opportunities for students within each country.

- **Language issues**—Even within the context of disadvantaged groups, language issues may be barriers to higher education in many countries. For example, within the broader context of controversy surrounding language issues in Ukraine, the issue of Ukrainian as the only language of instruction is especially important. Currently, Ukrainian is the state language, and the official strategic goal is to teach at universities in Ukrainian. However, under Soviet rule, Russian was promoted as the state language, leading to the need for bilingualism. This situation particularly affects the southern and eastern regions, where the population (especially middle-aged and older people, including teachers and lecturers) is primarily Russian-speaking, with only a rudimentary knowledge of Ukrainian. There is no established system of adult education to help these citizens reach proficiency in Ukrainian.<sup>53</sup> In addition, because Ukraine is increasingly multicultural, some ethnic groups use other languages as well.

In another example, South Africa has 11 official languages. The government policy is that all institutions should use English as the medium of instruction, but the mother tongue of each region is the next primary language. Since various provinces have different dominant languages, students tend to remain in their native region so they can learn in their home language. Although some regional issues exist in the Netherlands and the United States, language issues are not as significant. ❧

<sup>51</sup> See Central Bureau of Standards (<http://statline.cbs.nl/StatWeb/table.asp?LYR=G4:0:T:1,G5:9,G1:0&LA=nl&DM=SLNL&PA=71202NED&D1=a&D2=a&D3=a&D4=a&D5=a&D6=a&HDR=G3&STB=G2>).

<sup>52</sup> The ECTS is the only successful Europe-wide credit system ([http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/socrates/ects/index\\_en.html#1](http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/socrates/ects/index_en.html#1)).

<sup>53</sup> According to the 2001 Ukrainian census, the population includes 37.5 million Ukrainians (78 percent) and 10.9 million people from 130 other nationalities (22 percent). Russians predominate in the latter group, with 8.3 million (17 percent). The language knowledge of the population of Ukraine is as follows: Ukrainian, 86 percent; Russian, 92 percent; two state languages, 52 percent; and Ukrainian only, 45 percent (Research and Branding Group, "54 percent of Ukrainians support a national status for Russian language" (in Russian), 2006 ([www.korrespondent.net/main/208028](http://www.korrespondent.net/main/208028)), retrieved October 2007).

# Current Policies, Potential Solutions, and Recommendations

Thus far, we have outlined key problems with regard to the transition from secondary education into higher education. In this section, we describe the main initiatives taken in the four countries to tackle this problem. These are not the only initiatives, but we believe they are the most important ones in each country to increase opportunities for all and develop educated populaces. The policies are tailored to the needs of each country, but they address universal goals: justice and equal opportunities for all citizens.

## THE NETHERLANDS

Since 1987, the Netherlands government has been publishing the *Higher Education and Research Plan* (HOOP, Hoger Onderwijs en Onderzoek Plan); it is a four-year planning cycle<sup>54</sup> drawn up partly on the basis of the annual reports of the higher education institutions. In the HOOP, the government sets out its views on higher education and research for the medium term; discusses societal needs and trends related to higher education and research; and indicates how the institutions should respond. The ministerial publication *Kennis in Kaart* (Knowledge in Paper) is produced annually and reports on progress toward the HOOP goals.

The HOOP 2004 calls for higher education to contribute to the transition toward a knowledge society and strengthen the international positioning (in Europe and globally) of Dutch higher education. Several government documents<sup>55</sup> have set goals for higher education, including these:

- Increase the enrollment ratio in higher education to 50 percent of young people (18–30 years old) by 2010. (This objective aligns with the Lisbon Strategy.)
- Reduce the dropout rate among allochtonen students to a comparable level to that of autochtonen students by 2010.
- Ensure that, by 2020, at least 50 percent of persons between the ages of 24 and 44 are highly educated.

- Create a stronger international profile through higher quality research and education.
- Develop work-study programs to help young adults learn how to function in a complex society, to be entrepreneurial, and to shape their own learning processes.
- Contribute more to the innovative capacity of the Dutch economy and to sectors such as health and education. This requires more interaction, a permanent tuning of higher education to labor market needs, and more attention to activities focused on knowledge.
- Although the quality of research is good, more focus and concentration are needed, more competition and research dynamics, and more opportunities to attract and keep researchers and other knowledge workers.

The government proposed four ways to reach the goal of 50 percent of highly educated people by 2020:

1. Qualify more students to enter higher education, especially by increasing the number of students who proceed from vocational education to higher education.
2. Increase the success rate of students and decrease the number of dropouts.

<sup>54</sup> Until 1998, it was a two-year planning cycle.

<sup>55</sup> See, for example, *Kennis in Kaart*, HOOP 2004, 2020: de Helft van Nederland Hoogopgeleid (Half of the Netherlands highly educated), Ministerie van Onderwijs Cultuur en Wetenschappen (Ministry of education culture and sciences) (2006), *Kennis in Kaart*, Den Haag.

3. Increase the number of graduates among those over 30 who are still lagging behind the younger age group.
4. Attract more foreign graduates into the Dutch labor market.

In response, various institutions have created more individualized learning pathways, such as admission to a shortened program based on work experience, e-learning, and cooperative education (combining education and work). The university sector advocates more freedom for universities to differentiate their bachelor's and master's degree programs, including broad bachelor's programs with options for later choices; honors programs for select students; and extending master's programs by an extra semester. In conjunction with student support services, these measures are expected to enhance the success rate of students. In 2006, certain HBOs introduced pilot programs for associate's degrees to explore the demand for two-year trajectories that will be designed by HBOs and employer organizations.<sup>56</sup> If these programs are aligned with the needs of both students and employers, such degrees can have a distinctive place in the educational infrastructure. Important conditions are that associate's degree programs are part of a bachelor's degree program, with at least 120 ECTS, and that they provide a separate diploma-supplement. The accreditation body will assess the programs on the basis of their relevance for the labor market and the extent to which they are embedded in bachelor's programs.<sup>57</sup>

Some national initiatives aim to encourage enrollment of and reduce dropouts among allochtoon students. The Expertise Centrum allochtonen Hoger Onderwijs (ECHO, Expertise center for Allochtonen Higher Education)<sup>58</sup> grants scholarships (*award voor talentvolle allochtone*) to successful students of non-

western background and gives them the opportunity to study abroad or participate in internships. The program maintains a database of their resumes to facilitate potential recruitment for jobs. The objectives are to reward talented students, create role models for others, and help close the gap between autochtoon and allochtoon participation in higher education. Demographics make it imperative for the Netherlands to ensure that the citizens of tomorrow, many of whom will be of non-western descent, are not left behind and will be able to contribute to the economy.

The Dutch government has also produced an action plan to monitor progress toward the Lisbon objectives. For each Lisbon objective, the action plan lists the average EU status, the Dutch status, and the best performing country as a benchmark, then sets national goals to reach the greater Lisbon goals.<sup>59</sup>

In an effort to empower people who are not highly educated to fully function in society, the government passed the Adult and Vocational Education Act (WEB) in 1996. Adult education includes adult basic education, adult general secondary education (VAVO, Voortgezet Algemeen Volwassenen Onderwijs), and courses in Dutch as a second language (NT2). Adult education may lead to a diploma of MAVO (Middelbaar algemeen voortgezet onderwijs, or middle general secondary education), HAVO (hoger algemeen voortgezet onderwijs, or higher general secondary education), or VWO (voorbereidend wetenschappelijk onderwijs, or preparatory scientific education). Courses in Dutch as a second language (NT2, Nederlands als tweede taal) can be taken at five levels.

Finally, the Dutch government gives much consideration to *erkenning van verworven competenties* (EVC)—recognition of acquired competencies. The EVC process includes an assessment through which competencies attained outside traditional educational paths are recognized. This process allows people to follow various paths to obtain a diploma or certificate.

<sup>56</sup> Eleven hogescholen started with the first round of pilots, which were selected on the basis of recommendations from a committee on associate's degrees and assessment of the programs by the accreditation board. Because many more programs were proposed than could be accepted in the first round, the number of pilot programs was increased to 57 in 2007.

<sup>57</sup> E. De Weert and P. Boezeroy, "Higher Education in the Netherlands: Country Report," Center for Education Policy (CHEPS) International Higher Education Monitor, 2007 ([www.utwente.nl/cheps](http://www.utwente.nl/cheps)), retrieved April 2008.

<sup>58</sup> See [www.echo-net.nl/award](http://www.echo-net.nl/award).

<sup>59</sup> Actieplan EU-Benchmarks Onderwijs (Action Plan EU (European Union) benchmarks in Education), ([www.leren-werken.nl/front/docs/eu\\_benchmarks.pdf](http://www.leren-werken.nl/front/docs/eu_benchmarks.pdf)), retrieved July 1 2008.

## **SOUTH AFRICA**

To transform higher education, South Africa must bridge the divide between its apartheid past and a rapidly developing knowledge economy for the future. Numerous policies have been put forth to increase access in higher education, but implementation continues to be a challenge. The South African Universities Vice Chancellors Association (SAUVCA) conducted extensive research on policy implementation and the challenges involved in improving access to higher education for previously disadvantaged communities. The results of the research included the following:

- **Change coordination**—The government has invested much time and money to set up a legal framework for transformation. However, the challenge has been how each institution deals with changes in its own campus population, curricula, and funding. Affluent institutions like the University of Pretoria have invested huge amounts to attract Black students, especially into previously White majors such as veterinary science, climatology, and engineering. Special budgets and sponsorships are available for these students. However, other institutions do not have similar resources.
- **Constraints on change coordination**—The system operates under certain constraints. For example, universities continue to receive applications from students who are ill-prepared for higher education, forcing the institutions to lower their standards/entry requirements or invest more money to train the students in computer literacy or basic academic disciplines. There is also a critical shortage of experienced lecturers to help these students. Coordination and investment are necessary if institutions are to retain and nurture their best staff, as well as the graduate students who will make up the next generation of academics.
- **Access, efficiency, and quality**—Institutions are faced with the task of increasing the number of previously disadvantaged students they accept, making better use of available resources, and enhancing the quality of outputs, particularly graduates' knowledge and skills, and their ability to create new knowledge. Success in these areas will help address the issues of equity and meet the human resource needs of the labor force. However, students from impoverished families are less likely to pursue postgraduate studies because of pressure on them to become income earners.
- **The knowledge economy and the drive for innovation**—The knowledge economy—an economy in which applied information is used in all sectors to improve productivity and seek competitive advantage through innovation—has had a fundamental impact on universities as producers of knowledge. An important issue in higher education is the disparity among institutions—some can afford the highest technology, while others cannot.
- **Quality assurance**—The higher education sector supported the establishment of the Higher Education Quality Committee as the national agency for quality assurance. This measure was considered to be necessary to keep opening the access gates from compromising quality in institutions. It is essential to improve capacity-building in institutions and ensure that they maintain high standards.
- **National Qualifications Framework**—Because of the disparities among institutions, some degrees and certificates are regarded more highly by employers than others. For example, study at a technikon is less highly regarded than study at a university. At the same time, employers want people with practical experience, so universities are struggling to introduce more practical classes to maintain the marketability of their degrees. The National Qualifications Framework helps with the assessment of qualifications.
- **Equity and labor issues**—South Africa's labor legislation—including the Employment Equity Act of 1998, the Skills Development Act of 1998, and the Access to

Information Act of 2000—is based on important principles of democracy and the provision of access to higher education for all South Africans. According to the Equity Act, companies should employ equal number of men and women and of Blacks and Whites. This puts a lot of pressure on institutions to produce more graduates in all fields so that employers can meet their equity targets.

- **Funding**—To open access and enable previously all-White institutions to attract more Black students, the government has introduced a formula whereby institutions receive more funding if they have more Black students. Thus, institutions conduct recruitment campaigns and offer bursaries (funds given for tuition, accommodation, and other expenses) and sponsorships to students. The quality assurance unit and the National Qualifications Framework help institutions ensure that they offer quality programs to the wide variety of students they recruit.

## UKRAINE

An important factor in the government's attempts to improve access is the influence of European-wide efforts such as the Bologna Process. Since it joined the process, Ukraine has been required to report on any measures it takes to widen access to higher education. According to the National Report on the Implementation of the Bologna Process (2006), the number of bachelor's level students who receive state-supported tuition has increased, and preparatory courses for university entrance have been set up in depressed regions. The report says the state has taken the following measures to increase access to higher education for socially disadvantaged persons:

- Increasing scholarships for the final year of study.
- Improving student hostel accommodations.
- Considering the establishment of higher education institutions for low-income groups of the population.

- Conducting a study of disabled students. The Open International University of Human Development, called "Ukraine," generally provides education for such students. It also has some branches country-wide.
- Organizing distance learning at students' places of residence.
- Setting up university departments and holding classes in places where students live.<sup>60</sup>

In 2002, Ukraine adopted the National Education Development Doctrine. The document recognizes education as a priority for Ukrainian national policy and maps out a direction for education reform and improvement of educational services. A crucial point in this doctrine is equal access to quality education, and Ukraine has developed a strategy to achieve this goal by 2012. As part of the Ministry of Education and Science's 10-year program, the Equal Access to Quality Education project was launched in April 2006, with financial support from the World Bank. This project has completely changed Ukraine's approach.

Beyond the mandates of the Bologna Process, the main initiative in Ukraine is the Standardized External Testing Initiative, which received excellent reviews from members of parliament after an analysis of the 2008 test results.<sup>61</sup> The government plans to extend the initiative. As Education and Science Minister Ivan Vakarchuk said, "For the first time, we have a list of all the people with the right to become a student solely by their knowledge, and this list is not small. More than 400,000 people passed the barrier of 124 points. So there will be no problems with the filling of institutes, because the state order is 145,000 places."<sup>62</sup> The ministry has introduced a new

<sup>60</sup> Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, "National Report on the Implementation of the Bologna Process," 2006 ([www.mon.gov.ua/laws/high\\_2007\\_11\\_05\\_07.doc](http://www.mon.gov.ua/laws/high_2007_11_05_07.doc)), retrieved October 2007. Translation by the author (Belyakov).

<sup>61</sup> Our Ukraine Review, "External independent school testing is a big step forward in reforming of Ukrainian educational system," 10, June 12, 2008 ([www.nuns.com.ua/gazette/2008/06/19/our\\_ukraine\\_review\\_10.pdf](http://www.nuns.com.ua/gazette/2008/06/19/our_ukraine_review_10.pdf)), accessed October 2008.

<sup>62</sup> Interfax-Ukraine. "More than 400,000 students win right to enter universities in Ukraine through external testing, says education minister," 12 June 2008 ([www.interfax.com.ua/en/press-center/press-conference/142893](http://www.interfax.com.ua/en/press-center/press-conference/142893)), accessed October 2008.

online information system that allows prospective students to monitor admission information nationwide and discuss any problems in an online forum. In addition, 11 independent NGOs are monitoring admission processes nationwide. This is a level of transparency never before seen in Ukrainian education.

Regarding the special issue of language, Ukraine is currently involved in political discussions with Russia about the possibilities of introducing Russian as a second official language in Ukraine. The language issue became more complicated during the elections of 2004, 2006, 2007, and 2008, dividing the country into several parts. Speculative statements by politicians resulted in some confusion about voters' political and linguistic preferences. Russian-speaking regions took advantage of political uncertainty after the 2006 elections to grant the Russian language a special status.<sup>63</sup> There are ongoing discussions about whether such actions violate the Ukrainian Constitution, which protects Ukrainian as the only official language. At the same time, many students do not have an appropriate knowledge level of any language, which presents an enormous challenge to their admission to a higher education institution. The teaching of Ukrainian to members of ethnic groups is especially weak, so the Ministry of Education and Science started a special program for improvement in this endeavor.<sup>64</sup> Finally, the language issue has affected the External Testing System, in which a number of tests were translated into the languages of national minorities, such as Russian, Hungarian, and Moldovan.<sup>65</sup> For example, 31 percent of students took the math test in Russian, and Polish-language schools received a special Ukrainian-Polish dictionary. However, translation assistance will only be offered during the transition period, which ends in 2009. An appropriate response is urgently needed.

## UNITED STATES

In the United States, numerous initiatives over the years have attempted to increase access to higher education, often with mixed results. The recent report by the Commission on the Future of Higher Education suggests two methods to increase access. The first method—aligning high school graduation requirements with college entry requirements—is a national movement led by a non-profit group, Achieve, Inc.<sup>66</sup> Achieve's American Diploma Project kicked off in February 2005 with a National Education Summit on High Schools. Twenty-nine states are now part of the network, which seeks to align standards and assessments between high schools and colleges. These states have committed to the following four actions:

1. Align high school standards and assessments with the knowledge and skills required for success after high school (12 states have completed this action).
2. Require all high school graduates to take challenging courses that actually prepare them for life after high school (13 states have completed this action).
3. Streamline the assessment system so that the tests students take in high school can also serve as readiness tests for college and work (nine states have completed this action).
4. Hold high schools accountable for graduating students who are ready for college or careers, and hold postsecondary institutions accountable for students' success once they are enrolled (nine states have completed this action).

<sup>63</sup> This is the case, for example, in the Luhansk region, and in the cities of Charkiv and Sevastopol.

<sup>64</sup> Decree of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, #298, 7 April 2008, (<http://www.mon.gov.ua/main.php?query=laws/education/higher/6>).

<sup>65</sup> Ukrinform, "Over 460,000 school leavers participate in independent testing," 23 April 2008 ([www.kmu.gov.ua/control/publish/printable\\_article?art\\_id=128163042](http://www.kmu.gov.ua/control/publish/printable_article?art_id=128163042)), accessed October 2008.

<sup>66</sup> "Created by the nation's governors and business leaders in 1996, Achieve, Inc., is a bipartisan, non-profit organization that helps states raise academic standards, improve assessments, and strengthen accountability to prepare all young people for postsecondary education, work, and citizenship" ([www.achieve.org](http://www.achieve.org)).

FIGURE 4

## Merit Scholarship Characteristics Across States

ELIGIBILITY (SOME STATES OVERLAP)	FUNDING SOURCES	DURATION	MAINTENANCE	AMOUNT AND USE
Top percentile=4	General state revenues=8	4 years / 8 semesters=9	GPA=11	Tuition and fees=7
GPA+SAT/ACT scores=10	Lottery=6	“Standard” degree time=4	Credit hours=3	All education related costs=9
State-mandated=2	National tobacco settlement=2	Two Years=1	“Satisfactory” progress=3	Tuition and book allowance=1
Income Restrictions=3	Interest on land sales=1	One-time payment=3		
Diploma/GED only=2				

SOURCE: CARL KRUEGER, “STATE NOTES: MERIT SCHOLARSHIPS,” EDUCATION COMMISSION OF THE STATES, MAY 2005, [HTTP://WWW.ECS.ORG/CLEARINGHOUSE/61/40/6140.HTM](http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/61/40/6140.htm) (ACCESSED NOV 1, 2007).

Achieve, Inc. and the participating states are making a strategic bet that these actions will improve access to postsecondary education by creating better prepared students. These students may be more likely to take on the challenge of postsecondary education and less likely to need remediation once they are in college.

The second currently popular method of increasing access is state-funded merit scholarships. The State of Georgia began the trend in 1993 with the creation of the HOPE (Helping Outstanding Pupils Educationally) scholarship funded by lottery revenues. Since then, 16 other states have created similar merit scholarship programs to encourage exceptional students to remain at colleges in their home states.<sup>67</sup>

Theoretically, these scholarships also increase postsecondary access for historically underrepresented populations, as the majority of college expenses are paid for if the student demonstrates academic achievement in high school. **FIGURE 4** is a breakdown prepared by the Education Commission of the States on the merit scholarship characteristics across states.

Because Georgia was the first state to enact such a program, it is useful to review whether HOPE merit scholarships have improved access to postsecondary opportunities for those who might not otherwise have had the chance. To date, more than 1.1 million students have received a HOPE scholarship, for a total expenditure of \$3.8 billion.<sup>68</sup>

A 2001 study found that between 1993 and 1997, the HOPE scholarship increased enrollment in Georgia’s university system by 8 percent, or 3,800 students. This increase was felt mainly in four-year institutions. The researchers attribute two-thirds of the enrollment increase to students who decided to stay in-state for college; therefore, only one-third of the increase reflects

increased access.<sup>69</sup> In a later study, the same researchers found that the HOPE scholarship did increase Black enrollment rates at Georgia public and private colleges, but the greatest increases were at Historically Black Colleges and Universities, so diversity did not necessarily increase in other institutions around Georgia.<sup>70</sup> Given these preliminary effects, the intent of the HOPE scholarship remains the same—to allow any academically gifted student in a Georgia high school to attend a Georgia college free. On its face, this intent should increase access, allowing greater gains when high schools improve the academic achievement of historically disadvantaged students so that they qualify for the HOPE scholarship. ❧

<sup>67</sup> Carl Krueger, “State Notes: Merit Scholarships,” Education Commission of the States, May 2005, <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/61/40/6140.htm> (accessed Nov 1, 2007).

<sup>68</sup> Georgia Student Finance Commission, Facts and Figures ([www.gsfc.org](http://www.gsfc.org)).

<sup>69</sup> Chris Cornwall and David B. Mustard, “HOPE Scholarship Affects Where, Not Whether, Students Attend College,” Policy Notes; Carl Vinson Institute of Government, University of Georgia, May 2001.

<sup>70</sup> Chris Cornwall and David Mustard, “HOPE, the Brain Drain, and Diversity: The Impact of the Scholarship on High Achievers and African Americans,” Policy Notes; Carl Vinson Institute of Government, University of Georgia, August 2002.

# Conclusion

This paper began with the premise that access to higher education is a multifaceted concept that implies not only the right of entry but also the need to succeed in the educational path (“access with success”). The authors believe that the transition from secondary to tertiary education has an important effect on access with success, and that historical and demographic developments, as well as the nature of the education system as a whole, influence this transition.

A review of the Netherlands, South Africa, Ukraine, and the United States—which differ strongly in their economic, social, and development positions—suggests that no country can consider itself out of the discussion, despite very different problems relating to access to higher education. Thus, for example, the streamlined nature of the Dutch education system leads students to make early decisions regarding their educational paths, with all the positive and negative consequences attached to that. The South African heritage of apartheid has created the need to ease the transition for certain population groups. In the United States, access costs are comparatively high and entrance requirements for institutions of higher learning are not always aligned with secondary school graduation requirements, leading to disparities in opportunity for students from different kinds of secondary schools. In post-Communist Ukraine, the transition from secondary to tertiary education is being shaped by important reforms of the (high school) exit and (tertiary) entrance examinations, but inequalities remain, primarily because of disparities in access to quality education in rural and urban areas as well as widespread corruption. At the same time, Ukraine has succeeded in introducing Standardized External Testing, which promotes changes in all areas of the national education system.

The many issues described in this paper call for many policy initiatives, and the paper provides an overview of some of the most important initiatives in each of the four countries. Ultimately, our analysis suggests that access is influenced not only by obvious factors, such as the cost of higher education, but also by how the transition from secondary school is managed. Therefore, addressing access issues (which differ from country to country) calls for policies that consider the whole span of the education system. ❧

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