Participation and exclusion: A comparative analysis of non-traditional students and lifelong learners in higher education

HANS G. SCHUETZE[1] & MARIA SLOWEY[2]
[1]*Centre for Policy Studies in Higher Education and Training, University of British Columbia, Canada;* [2]*Department of Adult and Continuing Education, University of Glasgow, U.K.*

Abstract. The dramatic growth in student numbers associated with the shift from elite to mass systems across virtually all developed countries is central to current transformations in terms of structure, purpose, social and economic role of higher education. As a part of this process of expansion and heterogenization, new groups of students who, for a complex range of social, economic and cultural reasons were traditionally excluded from or under-represented in higher education, might be expected to participate in increasing numbers. The paper develops the concept of *non-traditional* learners and demonstrates how an examination of ways in which higher education systems respond to such learners can provide a fruitful basis for a comparative analysis of change in higher education across ten countries- Austria, Australia, Canada, Germany, Ireland, Japan, New Zealand, Sweden, United Kingdom, and the United States. The primary emphasis in the study was on the institutional and policy issues which appeared to either inhibit or support participation by non-traditional learners. On this basis six factors were identified which seemed to be particularly influential with regard to the participation of non-traditional students and the associated moves towards a lifelong learning mode of higher education.

The evidence suggests that, while progress can be reported on a number of dimensions in comparison with a similar analysis of participation by adults students in the same countries undertaken just over a decade earlier, high participation rates do not *automatically* imply that the functions of higher education in social selection and reproduction are obsolete, or that issues of access and equity can be regarded as features of the past.

Keywords: access, comparative higher education, educational policy, institutional change, lifelong learners, non-traditional learners, participation, students in higher education

Introduction

The change from an elite to a mass system of higher education occurred in the last decade of the twentieth century in virtually all developed societies. It is now acknowledged that this expansion is in the process of transforming fundamentally the very nature of higher education in terms of structure, purpose, social and economic role (OECD 1998; UNESCO 1998). Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of this period of dramatic change is that it appears to have occurred with little or no strategic planning, let alone vision (Scott 1995). Moreover, it seems as though the cultural perceptions of higher

education, and in particular the changing nature of its student body, have not kept pace with the marked reality of the reconstruction that has taken place.

The strong *quantitative* growth in student enrolment and the shift in the perception of participation from privilege to right has however led to *qualitative* changes for which the functions and structures of higher education in many countries have had, and continue to be, adapted. One key feature of these developments lies in the challenge posed to universities and other higher education institutions to meet the educational needs of an ever more diverse group of learners.

In the context of these changes in higher education this paper addresses three specific issues: (i) the composition of the student body and, in particular, the patterns of participation of sections of the population previously defined as "non-traditional" students; (ii) the extent to which the concept of "non-traditional" student continues to have meaning in a mass higher education system; and (iii) the implications of "lifelong learning" for the mission and organization of higher education, and the ways in which higher education in general, and universities in particular, may be changing to accommodate these new demands.

The analysis draws upon a recent study (Schuetze and Slowey 2000a) in which public and institutional policies and recent developments in ten countries are described and analyzed- Austria, Australia, Canada, Germany, Ireland, Japan, New Zealand, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States. For reasons outlined below, the countries selected were all OECD member states. While the discussion therefore does not address higher education in the developing countries which constitute around 80% of the world's population and an estimated 50% of all students in higher education (World Bank/UNESCO 2000), there are many reasons to expect that the forces of globalization pose similar challenges, albeit in very different circumstances (Scott 1998). The ten countries in the study can be viewed as relatively homogeneous in so far as they are, for many official purposes, classified as "developed". On the other hand, even where there is a common language and significant historical connections, such as between the UK and Australia, such countries are "... deeply if subtly different as societies and in their higher education systems" (Duke 2002, p. 4). For analytic purposes however it has proved useful to classify them in broad 'families' (Table 1) which, with some rough justice, takes some account of differences in their higher education traditions.

The analysis is based on national case studies undertaken by researchers from ten countries within a common analytic framework. This "joint venture" was the follow-up to a study organized under the auspices of the OECD a decade or so earlier which had compared the levels and the conditions of

Table 1. Participating countries grouped according to broad "families" of higher education systems

Continental and Northern European	Anglophone	North American	South-East Asian
Austria (Pechar and Wroblewski)	Australia (Beckett and James)	Canada (Schuetze)	Japan (Yamamoto, Fujitsaka and Honda-Okitsu)
Germany (Wolter)	Ireland (Collins)	US (Agbo)	
Sweden (Bron and Agelli)	New Zealand (Boshier and Bensemann)		
	United Kingdom (Slowey)		

Names of authors of country studies in parentheses.

adult participation in higher education throughout the same ten countries (OECD 1987). At that time the term adult, or mature student was frequently used as a proxy for sections of the population who were under-represented in higher education. By virtue of their differences in certain key characteristics from the majority of students ("traditional" learners) these adult and mature students could be conceptualized as "non-traditional" learners. The key objectives of undertaking a follow-up study just over a decade later were therefore to describe and analyze the changes in the participation of non-traditional students in greatly expanded higher education systems, along with the conditions which appeared to either foster or limit progress towards greater participation. Although the two studies had slightly different emphases reflecting the changes in higher education over the period (Table 2), there was considerable continuity – reinforced by the fact that several of the authors of the country studies for the 1987 study were also involved in the follow-up 2000 study.

Who are "non-traditional" students?

The overall process of expanding higher education in modern industrial societies has led to a different, more heterogeneous, composition of students in terms of previous education, social and family background, gender, age, life-situation, motivation to study, current and future occupational profiles. This diversity is the result of significant change in higher education, including, in particular

Table 2. Themes and elements of the 1987 and 2000 studies compared

| Themes | Studies | |
	1987	2000
Institutions	Universities	All post-secondary institutions
Programs	Degree programs, continuing (non-degree) studies	Degree, sub-degree, continuing education
Target groups	Adults (25 +)	'Non-traditional' students of all ages
Policies	Access Finance Mode of study Support and services	Same as 1987, plus internet-based, distance and independent study
Environment and context	Information and communication technologies; Changing labor markets for graduates	Internationalization; emerging knowledge-based economy; internet and e-learning; marketization

OECD (1987); Schuetze and Slowey (2000).

- the increasing social demand for higher education and the rapid massification of higher education systems which has widened the patterns of participation in higher education beyond conventional full-time school leavers,

- structural and organizational changes associated with the diversification and increasing marketization of higher education systems, establishment of new institutions and courses of study, opening up access to higher education and the introduction of new forms of teaching and learning,

- the impact of changing labour market requirements, with increasing professionalization, rapid change in occupational structures and rising qualification requirements for many employment opportunities.

As a part of this process of expansion and heterogenization, new groups of students who, for a complex range of social, economic and cultural reasons were traditionally excluded from, or under-represented in, higher education, have come to participate in higher education in increasing numbers. Although the term "non-traditional" students might be used in this context it is subject to differing interpretations. Thus within the framework of the equality of opportunity discourse the term tends to refer to socially or educationally disadvantaged sections of the population, for example, those from working class backgrounds, particular ethnic minority groups, immigrants, and, in the

past, frequently women. While in the framework of the life-cycle discourse, it tends to relate to older or adult students with a vocational training and work experience background, or other students with unconventional educational biographies.

From an internationally comparative perspective, differences between national education systems and other factors (not least the demographic composition of the population) means that the term of "non-traditional" covers *both* different populations *and* different models of participation. Moreover, the meaning of "non-traditional" students and the associated image as an under-represented, marginal group varies with the general participation level in higher education. In countries reaching or exceeding a participation rate of – say – fifty percent of the age group, it might be expected that the distinction between traditional and non-traditional students might inevitably become blurred.

By contrast, before the development of mass higher education it was relatively easy to identify the characteristics of non-traditional students. They were mainly defined negatively, as being different to those of "traditional" students. Thus, the boundaries tended to be drawn around all those who had not entered directly from secondary school, were not from the dominant social groups in terms of gender, socio-economic status or ethnic background, or were not studying in a full-time, classroom based mode.

Non-traditional students in an elite higher education system were, by definition, a minority. With expansion and change in higher education some non-traditional groups have increased in number arguably to a point where they have come to form a "new majority" in higher education – at least in certain types of institutions or programs. The complexity which lies behind the bald participation figures can however readily be illustrated by reference to the specific example of one formerly non-traditional group of students-women. On the one hand women could be said to have moved out of this category, as they now form the overall majority of post-secondary students in almost all developed countries. On the other hand when the analysis progresses beyond the overall statistics into types of institutions and programs attended this conclusion becomes problematic (for example, Agbo 2000; Slowey 2000, Beckett and James 2000).

The figures from all ten countries indicate that expansion has not in fact necessarily resulted in wider access to higher education for all groups. For example, older people without traditional entry qualifications for higher education, people from working class backgrounds, those living in remote or rural areas, those from ethnic minority or immigrant groups appear to have done less well. They are all still largely under-represented in higher education because they still face greater barriers than the "traditional" students. There-

fore, high participation rates do not *automatically* imply that the functions of higher education in social selection and social reproduction are obsolete, or issues of inequality or access are features of the past. The evidence from our study strongly suggests that the massification of higher education has *not* been sufficient to eliminate unequal rates of participation by different social groups. Traditional socially differentiated patterns of participation in higher education are still an issue and must therefore be of policy concern in societies that are committed to opportunities for "lifelong learning for all" (Schuetze and Slowey 2000b; OECD 1996).

As indicated above, the 1987 OECD study showed that the concept of non-traditional students in many countries was particularly associated with adults who with, or mostly without, the conventional higher education entrance qualifications had proceeded directly from school to work and came to higher education at later stages in their lives. But even if "non-traditional" is defined as meaning "adult" there are still difficulties in defining what is meant by adult students. The 1987 report distinguished four categories of "adults" – later used by other studies, such as Kasworm (1993) and Davies (1995).

These categories are:

(1) adult students who enter or re-enter higher education with a prior major break in their formal involvement in learning,

(2) students enrolled in academic studies who represent specific chronological age categories (for example, those over 25 years),

(3) adult students who enter higher education on the basis of mature life experience (gained through work, family and/or community involvement),

(4) adult students who have completed a higher education program or degree of studies at an earlier stage and now re-enter for professional updating or to pursue a second academic area of expertise.

While age is a convenient way of focusing on one of the essential features of "non-traditional" students, the definition falls short of a more comprehensive understanding of what types of learners are included. As some students could be "traditional" in some ways and "non-traditional" in others, it seems more adequate to base the distinction between traditional and non-traditional students on the typical educational biographical sequences a student passes through on his or her route to higher education.

Our analysis identifies three criteria which appear central to the definition of non-traditional students:

Educational biography
The biographical stages of the – in the case of non-traditional learners – mostly winding path to higher education, and the varying significance and motivation of studying in a person's life-cycle.

Entry routes
Access to higher education and time of enrolment: regular (that is, after secondary/grammar school with a school leaving certificate or a regular university entrance exam) or alternative (for example on the basis of work experience or after a special admission test for students without the conventional higher education entry qualification).

Mode of study
The patterns and intensity of studying (actual rather than bureaucratic definitions of full-time or part-time) and the interaction between study and other major commitments, including in particular, work, domestic and social.

While these criteria capture better than a simple age or chronological criterion today's non-traditional student – who tomorrow may be a "lifelong learner" – each needs to be refined in practice to reflect significant underpinning dimensions including socio-economic position, gender, ethinc group, disability and location (rural/urban).

Institutional factors influencing the participation of non-traditional students

The participation in higher education by non-traditional students as defined above is evidently determined by a wide range of social, economic and cultural factors. Given the need to set boundaries, the primary emphasis in our study was on the institutional and policy issues which appeared to either inhibit or support participation by non-traditional learners. On this basis six factors were identified (Table 3) which appeared to be particularly influential with regard to the participation of non-traditional students (Schuetze and Slowey 2000b).

Institutional differentiation of the higher education system: The majority of non-traditional or under-represented groups tended to be enrolled in non-university institutions or programs, rather than traditional (specifically elite) universities. This is particularly true for more practice and vocationally oriented programs.

Institutional governance and control: The extent of institutional flexibility with regard to the organization of studies, contents of curricula and programs, and institutional policies concerning the profile of the institution, recruiting particular target groups, their involvement in such matters as regional development or service for the community are important conditions which influence institutional policies toward non-traditional students. The degree of institutional autonomy and the decentralization of decision-making from central state to the institutional level can be an indicator of the flexibility of governance and control structures. However, there are many national and institutional differences. All the ten countries included in the study provided evidence that the more elite universities are often very reluctant to open up access for non-traditional students. Further, in some countries it was largely state policy which was seeking to intervene to encourage – or even push – universities to open their doors to new types of students.

Flexible (open) access: 'Flexible' or 'open' admission for those without traditional entry qualifications – usually the leaving certificate of the academic stream in upper secondary schools. In some countries non-university institutions offer open or flexible access whereas entry into the traditional university sector tends to be significantly more restricted. Access is more "flexible" to the extent that admission for all applicants is open or where special entry routes for non-traditional students exist which grant admission either on the basis of specific personal characteristics (age, work experience or other qualifications and achievements) or of specific entrance examinations. In this context, mechanisms for the assessment and recognition of prior learning can be instrumental in breaking the monopoly of formal education institutions for the certification of acquired knowledge and learning progress.

Mode of study: Even where access is notionally open, the doors to higher education can remain shut in practice. Many non-traditional learners are employed, live at a distance from the academy and have domestic responsibilities. As a consequence they are frequently unable to participate in traditional forms of higher education characterized by campus-based provision and by services, facilities and schedules designed for young and/or full-time students. The existence of modes of study that accommodate the special needs of non-traditional learners is therefore as important a factor as the admission procedures for their actual participation (and, of course, for the completion of their programs). Examples of such flexible modes of study include open learning, modular courses, credit transfer and part-time study. Most significantly, the new information and communication technologies are projected

to play an increasingly important role because of the potential they offer for interactive channels for distance and self-learning.

Financial assistance and other support: The case study reports confirmed that finance remains an important obstacle in the decision of adults and other non-traditional groups whether or not to study. The absence of financial support is, besides the lack of time and lack of child care facilities, one of the most cited reasons for non-participation. Three particular factors emerge here- firstly, the constraints on many financial support schemes based on age; secondly, gaps in many support systems for part-time or distance students; thirdly, the impact of loan schemes which do not make repayment conditional on higher income after completions of studies.

Continuing education opportunities: Not all non-traditional learners aim to study towards a degree, in fact the majority enroll on shorter courses or non-credit programs. The availability of such courses or programs is one important indicator of the ways in which universities and other higher education institutions seek to position themselves with respect to a system of lifelong learning. Thus, for example, in some countries programs for professional continuing education are largely left to providers outside higher education, mostly adult education institutions, while in other countries certain tertiary education institutions regard such programs as an integral part of their "core" business.

While common trends can be discerned there are significant differences between countries, and between types of higher education institutions within countries, in relation to how these six factors operate in practice. A matter to which we now turn our attention.

Comparative perspectives

To compare the ten countries included in the study with respect to the way they accommodate demand from, and reach out to, non-traditional learners does not mean the assumption of a 'world model' of best practice against which the individual countries might be benchmarked. Differences of culture, traditions and structures must be taken into account in interpreting the data from the country studies. While there is always the danger of summary judgments and over-simplifications, especially when countries are merged in 'families' or typologies rather than evaluated individually efforts have been made to avoid this pitfall as far as possible by discussing the results of the synthesis with the authors of the individual country chapters.

Table 3. Overview of institutional factors influencing participation from 'non-traditional' learners

Institutional factors	Criteria
System differentiation and coordination	– Horizontal and vertical differentiation – Articulation and transfer routes – Student choice and information – No dead-end routes – Equivalence of general and vocational routes – Coordination between different sectors/programs ('seamless web')

Institutional governance	– Institutional autonomy
	  Flexibility
	  Responsibility for lifelong learning assigned to senior administrator

Access	– Explicit policy for lifelong learners – Open or flexible access – Recognition of work and life experience
Mode of study	– Modular courses and credit transfer – Part-time mode – Distance learning – Independent study
Financial support	– Modes of financial support appropriate for non-traditional students, e.g. – Income contingent modes of loan repayment, an – Vouchers for non-traditional students
Continuing education opportunities	– Provision of relevant courses – Appropriate scheduling – Affordable fee levels

In all ten countries included in the study, higher education had expanded by, on average, 40% over the previous decade (OECD 1999) and, as part of this change, access for non-traditional students had, to a greater or lesser extent, also expanded. Nevertheless, although the methodology did not allow for direct statistical comparisons, significant differences in the *general* level of participation of non-traditional students, in particular adults, can be observed in the various countries. With regard *to institutional flexibility*, in broad terms the anglophone countries with higher education systems influ-

enced by the British tradition provide evidence for quite a variety of flexible responses. One of the bases of this flexibility and the larger diversity of the forms it takes lies in the extent of institutional autonomy, in particular university autonomy, which is a more prominent feature, for example, in the UK, the US and in Canada than in the continental European countries or in Japan. In contrast however, the situation in relation to non-university institutions (frequently also newer institutions) tends to be different. Although they may enjoy less autonomy, they often feature programs and modes of delivery that better meet the demand of non-traditional students. In some countries state policies which provide for specific promotion programs and financial incentives for specific target groups appear to have had some effect on opening up access and enlarging participation of non-traditional students.

Closely related to the issue of institutional flexibility is the degree to which higher education systems are diversified or differentiated. Both vertical and horizontal differentiation can permit a greater functional division of labor within the higher education system – typically between a more selective and a more open sector. The traditional high-ranking research universities, according to this policy rationale, can focus on research and initial higher education of a more selective body of students – examples include the elite universities in the US, the U.K. and Japan – leaving the task of providing for non-traditional students to universities with lower rank or to non-university institutions. While elite universities will often admit a limited number of highly talented students from poor economic backgrounds by offering fee waivers and scholarships, and may be engaged in high level continuing professional development, in practice their gates tend to remain closed to the majority of students falling into the category of non-traditional learners as defined above.

There is some evidence that universities in systems that are less vertically diversified, such as in Sweden and Canada, are admitting non-traditional students in larger numbers (Bron and Agelli 2000; Schuetze 2000). In particular, new institutions, universities or non-university institutions, which were established during the expansion periods enroll a majority of students who would not have had access to traditional universities. In countries with highly differentiated post-secondary education systems the majority of non-traditional students tend to be enrolled in non-university institutions, in two-year colleges rather than four-year institutions, and in vocational programs rather than in the academic streams. One of the consequences of the emergence of such new, institutions, is the reduction of pressure on the older and traditional universities to change their institutional access policy.

Prior learning and work experience have been recognized in some countries as equivalent to academic entrance credentials, for example Sweden

(Bron and Agelli 2000). In the UK there are innovative practices in this field targeted in particular at mature students but implementation is unequal across the system as a whole (Slowey 2000). Overall however there is a lack of evidence of major shifts to introduce procedures for assessment of prior learning or work and life experience.

With regard to the *modes of study* there is a great variety in the ten countries. In the US, probably the least regulated and most diversified system of all higher education systems, nearly all possible modes and combinations can be found. In other countries such as Australia and the UK there has been a clear development towards more flexible modes of study. In other countries these changes are very slow, and in those systems that are highly regulated and controlled by the state, such as in Germany and Austria, a high degree of uniformity in the organization of study exists – in spite of the fact that higher education policy in Germany is largely the responsibility of the Länder. While part-time study has become more common during the last decade, there are still some countries which have not established part-time studies and do not recognize part-time students. In particular, Austria and Germany base their organization of studies on the assumption that all students pursue their studies full-time, despite the existence of empirical research which shows that a significant proportion of students carry out their study *de facto* in a part-time mode. (Pechar and Wroblewski 2000).

One of the most notable changes over the last decade or so has been the utilization of *new information and communication technologies* for the purpose of providing opportunities for distance learning and independent study – in particular the internet with its potential for changing traditional on-site modes of participation and learning. As a consequence, distance and open learning is taking off in an unprecedented way and may very well be expected to change the entire system of higher education profoundly. While the US appears to lead the trend in this area (Agbo 2000) there is evidence of rapid development in other countries such as Australia, Canada, the UK. As in the past, open or distance universities (such as the Open University in the UK or its counterpart in Germany), while also using more traditional media for delivery, provide important study opportunities for many non-traditional students. The use of new delivery modes based on the web and channels of electronic communication between the instructor and students, and between the learners themselves is also seen by many an liberation from the yokes of time and distance that kept many non-traditional learners from participating in organized learning activities. However, major questions remain ad to the extent to which these new opportunities can be currently accessed and efficiently used by many potential learners of the non-traditional type (Schuetze and Slowey 2000b).

With respect to *continuing education* opportunities offered by institutions of higher education, there is also a wide range of provision. As many non-traditional students do not primarily wish to study towards a qualification, it is important for them to be able to access programs, courses and institutions outside degree or other credit-earning programs. This observation applies also to so-called "third age" students who enroll in increasing numbers at a university after their retirement. Furthermore, people who already possess an academic degree but wish to enroll in order to update or expand their expertise and knowledge often look for shorter non-degree programs.

Compared with the situation a decade ago, in some respects the provision of continuing higher education seems to have moved from the periphery into the centre. In some countries, especially the US and Canada, the provision of continuing higher education has expanded considerably. One reason underlying this trend relates to the fact that such provision is often operated on a cost-recovery or even profit-making basis and universities and colleges in these systems are increasingly market orientated. In comparison, continuing higher education in Germany, Austria and Sweden is largely under-developed. This is partly due to the existence of a very differentiated and well functioning sector of adult education outside higher education-which, in turn, is one of the reasons why, in particular in Germany, the focus in higher education policy is on academic continuing education rather than on lifelong learning in general (Wolter and Schuetze 1997).

Overall this short review arising from ten country studies suggests it is probably correct to say that despite the dramatic wave of expansion, higher education institutions (in particular universities) in many, if not most, countries do not yet appear to have substantially embraced lifelong learning as their core mission. Table 4 summarizes in broad terms the main findings of this comparative overview.

From non-traditional students to lifelong learners?

The ongoing international policy debate on lifelong learning has brought a new dynamic to the discourse about the future mission – and the necessary reform – of higher education. Despite the fact that the notion of lifelong learning is not only vague but subject to a variety of conflicting interpretations (Coffield 2000; Dohmen 1996; Rubenson and Schuetze 2000; Wolter and Hanft 2001) the focus of lifelong learning on the learner – instead of the institution – and on the learning process – instead of the curriculum – are central challenges for the reform of higher education. The UNESCO report on the learning society (1996) typifies the emphasis on providing opportunities for higher learning and for learning throughout life, as well as giving to

Table 4. Relative ranking of countries by institutional factors

Factors	Degree		
	Low	Medium	High
System differentiation and co-ordination	Austria, Germany, Japan, Sweden	Australia, Canada, Ireland, NZ, UK	US
Institutional Governance	Austria, Germany, Japan, Sweden	Australia, Ireland, NZ	Canada, UK, US
Access	Austria, Germany, Ireland, Japan	Australia, Canada, NZ, UK	US, Sweden
Mode of study	Austria, Germany, Ireland, Japan	Australia, Canada, NZ, Sweden, UK	US
Financial support	Japan, Ireland	Australia, Austria, Canada, Germany, NZ, Sweden, UK, US	
Continuing education opportunities	Austria, Germany, Japan, Ireland	Australia, NZ, Sweden	Canada, UK, US

learners an optimal range of choice and a flexibility of entry and exit points within the system.

While in practice the role of higher education in the process of lifelong learning is frequently reduced to that of professional continuing education, the concept comprises significantly more. Taken at its broadest, it implies no less than a fundamental reform of the higher education system (Watson and Taylor 1998; Duke 2002). Since many of yesterday's "non-traditional" students are today and tomorrow's "lifelong learners" (Schuetze 2001), higher education reform will have to address a number of major issues. These include the following:

1. Learning can no longer be confined to the traditional phases of education during youth, but must extend over the complete lifetime or life-cycle. The traditional assignment of learning roles and learning subjects to specific age roles and life sequences is disappearing. For higher education this change implies that the age structure of the student population will become more diversified. In particular, participation of adults (during their working life) and retired people are likely to further increase.

2. The concept of lifelong learning implies that learning and education take place not only in schools, universities and other institutions which award certificates, diplomas and degrees but also in many other informal and

non-formal social settings and contexts outside the education system. For higher education this change implies that the function of traditional preparatory schools (for example classical grammar schools, lycées, or the German *Gymnasium*) as the main channel and gate will diminish in favour of alternative learning places and routes to higher education.

3. For the skills and qualifications that have been acquired in informal and non-formal learning settings – at the workplace, through the media, in community activities or everyday-life learning – to be recognized, it is necessary to develop procedures for their assessment, recognition and certification. With respect to the admission to higher education this means more procedures for the assessment and recognition of experiential learning, especially that based on vocational education and work experience.

4. Most important for lifelong learners is a greater degree of flexibility of higher education learning opportunities designed to meet the needs of adult and other non-traditional learners. Lifelong learning implies the necessity of improved co-ordination between educational activities and other social involvement during the life-cycle. For higher education this means that the traditional organization of studies (full-time, and classroom-based) will have to become more flexible by introducing, or expanding, methods of instruction and learning independent of place, time and other restrictions.

5. Demand for continuing education opportunities is increasing, including all forms of community and adult education, vocational, training and other types of learning. There is, and will continue to be, an increase in the need for continuing higher education, not only because of the trend towards a knowledge-based economy and society, but also because participation in higher education will result in a greater demand for continuing education.

The concept of lifelong learning thus provides a useful perspective on the issue of non-traditional students. In this framework the "traditional" and the "non-traditional" or lifelong learning modes of access and studying can be perceived as two opposing sides of a scale- with the adoption of the lifelong learning approach containing potentially far-reaching implications for higher education (Barnett 1997; Bourgeois et al. 1999; Duke 1999).

Table 5 summarises and illustrates some of the key areas of contrast between the "traditional" mode of higher education and the "lifelong learning" mode. These include, amongst other teaching implications for the *mission of higher education*, which may be required to choose between an emphasis on the classic disciplines or on a more competence problem-orientated approach; *access*, which needs to become more flexible with

Table 5. The organization of higher education – from traditional to lifelong learning modes

Traditional mode	Lifelong learning mode
Restricted access	Open access
Admission only with academic credentials	Assessment of prior learning
For the young only	For young and adults
Selection for excellence	Learning opportunities for all
Undergraduate-centered	Wide range of programs
Full-time studies	Full-time and part-time learning
Campus/classroom based, on-site studies	Also off-campus/distance studies, self-learning
Linear studies with final examinations	Module-based curriculum, credit system
Discipline oriented, curriculum-centered organization of studies	Problem(-solving) and competence-oriented, student-centered organization
Degree studies	Degree and non-degree studies
Focus on initial higher education	Including continuing higher education
Non-diversified system of higher education	Diversified system of higher education
Question: What university did you attend	Question: What did you learn at your university?

Adapted from S. Yamamoto (2001).

new ways of accrediting learning from aspects of life, in particular for employment *programs* with a greater emphasis on modularization, credit accumulation and transfer; *modes of study* involving an increasing array of part-time distance, mixed-mode and e-learning possibilities; *student support*, involving not only financial support but also the specialist facilities such as guidance, counseling and child care which are vital if previously non-traditional learners are not to remain excluded from many areas of the newly differentiated systems of mass higher education.

Summary

As a part of the process of expansion and heterogenization, new groups of students who, for a complex range of social, economic and cultural reasons were traditionally excluded from or under-represented in higher education, have come to participate in increasing numbers. In this paper we have sought to demonstrate how an examination of the ways in which higher education systems respond to non-traditional students provides a fruitful basis for a comparative analysis of recent developments. The extent to which the notion of the non-traditional student has been replaced by that of the lifelong learner may provide one key indicator against which progress might be assessed in the future. Our analysis across ten countries strongly suggests that tradi-

tional missions, structures and concepts of higher education are indeed under considerable pressure to give way to new forms. In adapting to meet the changing needs of learners however, the underlying tension between the role of market forces and that of public policy remains a critical issue. Despite the differences which can be discerned between the responses of the higher education systems of the ten countries to non-traditional and lifelong learners, two of the key reform objectives of education policy continue to be relevant to all: namely, the role of higher education in contributing to the achievement of greater equality, and the opportunity for individuals to be able to gain access to higher education over the entire life-course. It is vital that progress – or lack of it – towards the achievement of these reform objectives is not obscured by over-concentration on the raw statistics relating to increasing student numbers.

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