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EUA study highlights increasing importance of tracking university students' and graduates' progression paths

The European University Association (EUA) has today published a new study which examines the different initiatives and systems that are used in Europe to track the progress of university students during their studies and after graduation into the workplace.

As the first study of this kind, its aim was to map the state of play in 31 countries, and to provide factual information on the uses and methods for 'tracking'* students' progress at both the national level as well as within higher education institutions. The study, a project which has been led by EUA, is based on a qualitative survey, a series of focus groups, and site visits to 23 European universities in 11 countries.

EUA Secretary General Lesley Wilson said: *"As Europe seeks to increase participation in higher education in response to societal demand and to enhance economic competitiveness, it has become increasingly important for universities to monitor the progression and success of their diverse student populations and the entry of graduates into the labour market."*

"This report highlights that this topic deserves more attention in national and European higher education debates. EUA therefore hopes that it will contribute to raising awareness of the importance of tracking and – through the examples of good practice and the guidelines it provides – support institutions in developing or further enhancing their own institutional tracking approaches."

These are some of the main findings from the study, entitled *Tracking Learners' and Graduates' Progression Paths - TRACKIT*.

- **Tracking initiatives are increasing:** there is a growing interest in tracking and an increasing number of initiatives both at national and institutional level. This trend is driven by a variety of factors such as a shift to student-centred learning; increased focus on employability and entry into the labour market as criteria for assessing higher education provision; growing international competition; and the enhanced technical possibilities for data collection and management.
- The research, however, shows the existence of a **range of different approaches across Europe**. Some countries appear to prioritise the surveying of graduates, others focus principally on student progress. Generally, there seems to be a trend towards combining both goals.
- **Initiatives for national- or regional-level student tracking** are in place in 23 of the higher education systems considered by the project, and in 26 systems for graduate tracking. Some countries have adopted centralised tracking approaches while others have adopted 'shared approaches', where universities participate in the design and implementation of centrally-led approaches.
- **Tracking at university level:** in 30 of the higher education systems, at least some higher education institutions (HEIs) track their students; in 22 systems, all HEIs do so. In 28 systems, some HEIs track graduates, whereas in 7 of the systems, all HEIs track them.
- **Impact of tracking at the institutional level:** tracking was found to contribute to enhancing the quality of the institution, its learning and teaching, support services and its strategic development. It can also help in raising awareness of teaching results, in understanding reasons for student dropout, and in considering professional career prospects for the revision

of curricula. Tracking results were found to be instrumental for improving and devising better targeted student support systems.

- While tracking Information and data are instrumental for a better institutional understanding of issues such as student dropout and employability; it does not necessarily provide ready-made answers, but is often the starting point for further research and follow-up.
- However, a number of **challenges and risks** were also identified, which need to be considered for the improvement and development of tracking. Poor management of tracking, such as a lack of coordination of tracking approaches (over-surveying), poor data management and analysis, and random use and ad-hoc application of tracking results are likely to do 'more harm than good'. The study also highlighted examples where there was a lack of follow-up on results, and difficulties with data protection. Finally, another challenge was determining what level of resources should be invested in tracking.

The study concludes with a series of recommendations to help higher education institutions develop and implement comprehensive tracking strategies and a section analysing future prospects for tracking in Europe.

The TRACKIT study project has been undertaken by a consortium consisting of EUA; the Irish Universities Association/UCD Geary Institute; Hochschul-Informations-System GmbH (HIS); Lund University; the University of the Peloponnese/Centre for Social and Educational Policy Studies; and Aarhus University. It has been co-funded by the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Union. The study is being presented today at a special launch event at the Irish Universities Association in Dublin, Ireland, and also in a session at the European Association for International Education conference (also taking place this week in Dublin).

A full copy of the report can be downloaded [here](#).

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The European University Association, as the representative organisation of both the European universities and the national rectors' conferences, is the main voice of the higher education community in Europe. EUA's mission is to promote the development of a coherent system of European higher education and research.

Notes for editors

*The term 'tracking' used in the study covers all information gathered on students and or graduates with regards to their learning progress, skills acquired, perceptions and jobs over a period of time and through aggregated or individual-level data. This information/data is then analysed and used to enhance learning provision and related services/processes.