Franziska Muche, Maria Kelo, Bernd Wächter

The Admission of International Students into Higher Education

Policies and Instruments

ACA Papers on
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Lemmens

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With the growing demand for higher education in some world regions and increased marketing activities by destination countries, the volume of applications from international students has been steadily increasing over the past decade (in the main destination countries). In some countries and institutions, it has reached a critical dimension: institutions receiving ten thousand enquiries per year are no exception. Many international offices originally designed to manage exchange programmes or administrative structures designed for national admissions are overburdened with this situation. Also, the applicants' countries of origin are ever more diverse, making it more difficult to assess and compare their entry qualifications. All of these issues have made international admissions a major concern amongst many higher education institutions.

While much has been written and said about other internationalisation issues, little research has been devoted to how international admissions are handled in different countries and institutions. The present volume aims to fill this gap. The study on the admission of international students into higher education was conducted by the Academic Cooperation Association (ACA), a not-for-profit European organisation dedicated, amongst other issues, to the analysis of new trends in internationalisation. The work could not have been undertaken without a generous grant from the Stifterverband für die Deutsche Wissenschaft.

Many have contributed to this study. ACA is a member organisation of national-level bodies responsible for the promotion and funding of international exchange and cooperation in education and training. The present study would not have been possible without the support and information provided by contact persons at the ACA member organisations, such as the British Council, the Rectors' Conference of the Swiss Universities (CRUS), the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), EduFrance, the Netherlands Organization for International Cooperation in Higher Education (Nuffic), the Swedish Institute (SI), the International Programme Office (IPK) and the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education (HSV), as well as ACA's non-European members IDP Education Australia and the Institute of International Education (IIE) in the US. It would go too far to mention all the names of those who patiently answered emails, made themselves available for telephone interviews, and provided most valuable information especially in the first phase of the project. ACA is deeply indebted to all of them. We are also grateful to the group of experts who advised the authors in the course of the study: Annette Julius (DAAD), Hanneke Teekens (Nuffic), Jochen Hellmann (University of Hamburg), Barrie Morgan (British Council), Carine Rüssmann (University of Lausanne), Ekkehard Winter and Volker Meyer-Guckel (both Stifterverband). Most importantly, this volume would not have seen the light of day without the support from individual higher education institutions. We would like to express our special thanks to all the administrators and academics who helped organise the institutional site visits and made themselves available for interviews. Likewise, we would like to thank the higher education authorities, internationalisation agencies and associations visited in the course of the study. Finally, the study could not have been prepared without the strong support from those who worked behind the scenes: the employees of the ACA Secretariat, especially Maaike Dhondt and Anna Quici, and Adam Higazi (University of Oxford) who edited the final text. We hope that all those who have contributed to the study find an adequate reward in the present volume.

1 Executive summary

The present study was prepared between August 2003 and September 2004 by the Academic Cooperation Association (ACA). Its main author, Franziska Muche, was supported by Maria Kelo and advised by ACA director Bernd Wächter. The study was financed by a generous grant from the Stifterverband für die Deutsche Wissenschaft, a German think-tank specialising in higher education.

Introduction (chapter 2)

The study is devoted to policies and instruments used in the admission of international degree students in Australia, France, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States, as well as to specific aspects of foreign student admissions in the United Kingdom. The internationalisation debate has so far been predominantly focused on mobility, structural reforms, attractiveness, and marketing. The importance of adequate admissions and selection procedures for the new international clientele has been widely neglected. Individual higher education institutions and national bodies are now starting to revise their procedures and are investigating good-practice models used in their respective countries and abroad. Yet, research into how international student admissions are handled in different countries has so far been scarce.

The aim of this study is to examine policies and instruments in the selected countries, and identify effective and transferable admissions models – that is, examples of good practice within different institutional and national contexts. The study aims to identify a range of models and procedures that can be used to efficiently organise foreign student admissions and selection. Two clarifications are necessary: first, in reality there are no “text-book” admissions systems. The models identified in this paper therefore refer to individual aspects of an admissions system rather than to a generic procedure that would be applicable in all institutions. Second, this is not a comparative study. There are few, if any, homogeneous “national” admissions systems, but a wide variety of institutions which operate within a given national context. Within the scope of the present study, it would have been unrealistic to attempt a representative sample for any one country, and it would be mistaken to generalise about “typical” national procedures or their quality on the basis of the examples used.

A number of clarifications are used to delimit the scope of the study:

- **Admissions:** two aspects of admissions are referred to in the present study. First, admissions are understood in operational terms as the management of enquiries, the management of applications and the selection process. Admissions are distinct from student support, which refers to the assistance provided to the students from the moment they have accepted an offer until actual enrolment. Second, in a more analytical delimitation of the term, admission needs to be distinguished from “eligibility”, which refers to the assessment of applicants’ qualifications with a view to determining whether they meet the minimum requirements for a given higher education programme. Eligibility is a necessary, but not always sufficient, condition for admission to higher education. Admission refers to the decision on the actual participation of the applicant in higher education.

- **Higher education:** The study concentrates on the first stage of tertiary education, which does not lead directly to an advanced research qualification, or in other words, on level 5 A and B of the international standard classification of education (ISCED). The term “undergraduate” is used for programmes leading to a first university degree, with a minimum duration of three years in the present study. Consequently, the term “postgraduate” is used for programmes where a first university degree of a minimum duration of three years is a minimum requirement. Here, the focus lies on Master’s programmes. In exceptional cases, mainly for research universities with a strong focus on doctoral studies, the doctoral level has also been taken into account.
- **International or foreign students:** the term international or foreign student is used for students with a previous qualification from one country who move to another country for the purpose of studying an entire degree programme, be it at undergraduate or postgraduate level.

Data collection / methodology

The data and information used in the present study were collected by means of

- desk research, including identification and review of the scarce relevant literature, perusal of official documentation and Internet searches;
- telephone interviews with members of the Academic Cooperation Association (ACA) and other institutions on-site;
- face-to-face interviews in the course of site visits to selected higher education institutions, to higher education authorities, internationalisation agencies and associations.

Country overviews: a bird’s-eye view of admissions (chapter 3)

This chapter consists of short overviews of policies and practices linked to foreign student admissions in each of the countries included in the study, namely Switzerland, France, the United States, Australia, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Sweden. Foreign student admissions often depend more on the institutional context than on the national context. However, all countries included in the present study have some characteristic features that condition and help understand the respective institutional admissions procedures and international strategies. The different country sections consider foreign student numbers, the impact of national policies and other influences on foreign student admissions, national-level admissions procedures and common initiatives, general characteristics of institutional admissions procedures for domestic and foreign students at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, frequent admissions requirements, and differences between foreign and domestic student admissions.

The rationale of international student admissions (chapter 4)

The rationale for the admission of foreign students can be divided into two "subgroups": first, general driving forces of international student recruitment; and second, the rationale of actual admissions and selection processes.

The general driving force behind the recruitment of foreign degree students is all the more relevant as numerous institutions have for a long time focused on student mobility, and hence on foreign exchange students. At most institutions, several motivations are mentioned. These range from commitment to development policy to financial (market-driven) considerations; from the building of an international profile to demand-driven recruitment; from the need to compensate for a lack of demand at the national level to an "equal opportunities for all" approach.

The rationale of admissions and selection processes refers to outcomes, i.e. the characteristics of the admitted foreign student cohort. First, foreign students can be admitted on the same basis as domestic students, and hence with a qualification that is as close as possible to the national entry qualification. Second, students can be admitted so that they are likely to succeed in a given programme. Third, foreign students may be selected from a pool of applicants who all meet the requirements. In this case, admitted students should be the best from a "global pool", in an attempt to foster academic excellence. Additional considerations are the composition of the classroom and the creation of a sense of responsibility among those involved.

The importance accorded to each of the rationales influences the "design" of an admissions system. However, in most cases, there is not a clear causal relationship between a set of rationales and foreign student admissions as a whole. The motivations behind foreign student recruitment and the different rationales of actual admissions procedures are interlinked, and the same general rationales can translate into very different practices.

Information and enquiry management (chapter 5)

Dealing with enquiries and systematically following up on an initial contact with applicants represents one of the biggest workloads for the staff at international and admissions offices, and can easily become unmanageable as the number of foreign enquiries and applications increases. The models implemented by institutions to manage enquiries differ. They are shaped by the volume of enquiries and applications received and the policies, budgets and equipment in place to deal with them. Enquiries may be managed either within a university or through an external company. Within an institution, the international office, the admissions office, a central information desk, administrative units or academics at the different departments can be in charge of responding to and following up on queries. Even national-level agencies may deal with (general) enquiries as part of their information and counselling activities.

Depending on where enquiries are handled, different kinds of tools are used to streamline the process. Most institutions emphasise the importance of clear and well-communicated criteria to allow self-assessment by the candidate and avoid unnecessary queries. There is also a strong emphasis on detailed and user-friendly web portals, which may also offer information in different languages. Some institutions have even leased highly developed web-based customer service software. Standardised emails and letters, as well as automated mailing of information packages are also quoted to be helpful. Where an external company is in charge, detailed protocols ensure compliance with the institutional policy.

The organisational structure of the admissions process (chapter 6)

The organisational structure of the admissions process refers to the levels and units that play an active role in the process and to where and by whom decisions are prepared and taken. Higher Education admissions in general and foreign student admissions in particular can be organised at different levels – institutional, sub-national (usually within a discipline, although the regional level is another logical option) and national.

In most cases, **higher education institutions** are the most important actors in the admissions process. At this level, the main questions (in organisational terms) are whether foreign student admissions are centralised or decentralised, and what type of unit, e.g. an admissions or international office, is in charge.

Centralisation or decentralisation of foreign student admissions refers to the degree of involvement of various levels of a given institution. At the majority of visited institutions, a central administrative unit has the main if not complete responsibility for the admission of foreign applicants into undergraduate programmes. However, the level of delegation usually varies between undergraduate and postgraduate levels, and many institutions with a completely centralised system for the undergraduate level work with a hybrid system for the postgraduate level, which involves both central and faculty-levels. A decentralised admissions system usually corresponds to (and makes sense for) major institutions with strong, large faculties. Such institutions may also have quasi-decentralised systems, where a central unit merely fulfils the role of a “dispatcher” or does a final check.

The type of unit in charge of foreign admissions can be a general admissions office, an international office, or a university-owned company. Some institutions deliberately refuse to treat foreign applicants as a separate category and argue that all students should be admitted on the same basis, using the same office and procedures. Others emphasise the importance of a specialised entity able to oversee the whole process related to foreign student intake. In line with this choice, it is mostly either the admissions or the international office that deals with the admission of foreign students. Some major institutions that recruit fee-paying international students have “outsourced” admissions, marketing, and support structures for foreign students to a company owned by the higher education institution. They consider university structures too slow and inapt for the provision of a satisfying “customer service” or to ensure a good market position.

Foreign student admissions processes in different higher education institutions tend to have common features, and hence, a potential for economies of scale that can be attained through networking. **Networks or common procedures for foreign student admissions** have been identified within disciplines and at national level. Whereas at national level, cooperation is usually limited to clearing activities, numerical selection, or automated tests, networks in one specific discipline may cooperate in more individualised joint actions like targeted recruitment or interviews. Within a discipline, requirements and procedures can be streamlined more easily. Applicants (or target groups) share similar profiles and previous qualifications. Finally, good secondary schools or higher education institutions are well-known or can be more easily identified and this knowledge can be used for targeted recruitment or the assessment of qualifications.

Examples of **cooperation within a discipline** are found in France: two in the field of engineering and one network of management schools. n+i is a network of more than 50 engineering schools and university-based engineering programmes with a coordinating unit based at EduFrance. The network is in charge of foreign student admissions, marketing, recruitment, and orientation. The other engineering network, ParisTech, is a regional network of eleven Paris-based engineering schools. The network currently focuses on China, and recruitment is facilitated through partnerships with selected Chinese higher education institutions, which undertake a preselection. The Centre international d’admission aux études de management CIAM, the French Graduate Management Admissions Board, a consortium of five major French management schools, was organising the recruitment and admission of foreign students for its member institutions until 2004. The CIAM was closed mainly due to the growing competition between its members.

The engineering networks are regarded as beneficial: the traditional admissions model of the French *grandes écoles* makes direct admission of foreign students difficult. Consequently, there are separate channels, or individual assessments, for foreign students seeking admission into French higher education institutions. The networks facilitate these procedures. The problems that have led to the closure of the CIAM show that a network can only function as long as the spirit of cooperation is maintained and not eclipsed by competition. Participating institutions need to be ready to agree upon common criteria and they need to be aware that they are recruiting from the same pool of students.

There are different types of **national-level action in the admissions process:** admissions procedures can be run either partly or entirely at national level and affect all applicants or only those with a foreign qualification. Joint or unified actions at national level may only comprise the administrative and organisational part of the admissions procedure, or include a selection procedure. For postgraduate admissions, the role of the national organs is usually limited to different kinds of support structures, like service points abroad or guidelines for the evaluation of qualifications.

In the UK, the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, UCAS, processes applications for undergraduate programmes from both domestic and foreign applicants. UCAS is only in charge of the administrative part of the admissions procedure: it does not set requirements or make admissions decisions, which is up to the higher education institutions.

The Swedish VHS or National Admissions Office for Higher Education is an example for a national-level body that runs the entire undergraduate admissions and selection procedure for Swedish higher education institutions for both domestic and foreign undergraduate applicants. Unlike in the UCAS-model, higher education institutions do not see applications or applicants before enrolment, and admissions decisions are made at national level.

The French preliminary admissions *procedure or procédure d'admission préalable* is an example of a national-level procedure that only applies to foreign undergraduate applicants. Foreign students from non-EU-countries wishing to enrol for the first time on an undergraduate course at a French public university need to apply through the French embassy in their home country almost one year prior to enrolment.

The majority of the countries included in the study are represented by national agencies with offices abroad, as for example EduFrance, IDP, or the British Council, which can support higher education institutions in foreign student recruitment and admissions. Some of these agencies have set up special service points to take charge of credential evaluation and run language tests. This is seen as particularly important in China, due to the volume of applications and the increasing number of cases of fraud. Two examples of such service points are the French CELA, the *Centre d'Evaluation Linguistique et Académique* and the Dutch NESOs or Netherlands Education Support Offices.

In most countries, national bodies such as the agencies responsible for international cooperation in higher education, ministries of education, or the rectors' conferences, assist their higher education institutions in the evaluation of foreign qualifications. These bodies usually host the national ENIC-NARIC office (European Network of Information Centres on academic recognition and mobility / National Academic Recognition Information Centres). In most of the visited countries, the national bodies only provide information and advice on foreign education systems and qualifications. Higher education institutions are largely autonomous in their decisions on the admission of foreign students and on the recognition of education undertaken abroad.

Assessment and selection procedures (chapter 7)

This chapter explores how and on which basis final admissions decisions are made, in what way teaching and research staff are involved in assessment procedures, and by what means the applicants' potential is assessed.

Assessment procedures, academic involvement, and admissions tools can vary according to where admissions decisions are made. The "normal" case is that applicants submit their applications to the host institution, where admissions or academic staff assess it. However, institutions that actively recruit foreign students and engage in marketing activities abroad often link admissions procedures to these activities. In this case, applicants may be preselected or made an offer in their country of origin, either at education fairs or through targeted recruitment at secondary and higher education institutions.

Admissions staff frequently make decisions on undergraduate admissions. If they are involved at all, academics may just set the criteria and see borderline cases. At the postgraduate level decisions on admission are mostly taken by academics. At this level, academic judgement is seen as both necessary and decisive in the actual admissions process. Admissions decisions can be made by the programme directors or by committees composed of several teaching and research staff, or they can be delegated to academic admissions tutors or international delegates.

In all cases, the most common assessment procedure is a case-by-case assessment of application dossiers. The content of these dossiers – usually the applicant's entry qualification, transcripts of courses, a language certificate, and motivation and reference letters – can vary between institutions, as can the importance attached to each of the components. Qualifications and academic potential may be judged against preset standards or used to rank different applications.

An entry qualification which is equivalent to the national one is usually a condition for a foreign applicant's eligibility for admission. Higher education institutions use different methods and refer to a wide range of information sources to determine the equivalence and check the authenticity of foreign qualifications.

Language command is an obvious issue in foreign admissions, and proof of sufficient knowledge of the teaching language is usually requested as part of the application. The language criterion may be an unconditional requirement, or only have relative importance in the admissions process. The latter is often the case for programmes where linguistic perfection is not necessary, like engineering, or for institutions that provide extensive language training or bridging courses.

Additional tools, like standardised tests, subject-specific entrance examinations, or interviews, can be used to assess a student's eligibility, to gather additional information as a basis for assessment or as a decisive "second stage" after an eligibility check has been successfully passed. Applicants can also be asked to sit an entrance examination to compensate for gaps in their education.

The timing: closing dates or rolling admissions (chapter 8)

Preset deadlines and "rolling admissions" are the two main models used at the visited institutions to time admissions.

Institutions or programmes that work with a deadline accept applications until a preset closing date. After that, applications are assessed together. Hence, applications can be compared, and the best candidates from a pool of applicants selected. Early deadlines facilitate a smooth planning of academic activities, and allow enough time for visa procedures and other necessary preparations of a stay abroad. "Rolling admissions" mean that applications are assessed as they come in rather than "stored" until a closing date. Interested candidates can apply at any time. If there is a capacity limit, students will be accepted until this limit is reached. Rolling admissions are often used in systems where admission purely depends on an eligibility check, but can also be highly "selective", as applications can be compared with preset standards and thresholds. Rolling admissions substantially reduce the seasonal workload of admissions staff and academics involved in admissions, and ensure quick turnaround times. This frequently helps the applicant, who receives a quick response, but it is mainly driven by a market rationale.

Some institutions have opted for a combination of both procedures. They work either with rolling admissions until a given deadline or with several subsequent deadlines for one intake. In both cases, planning is facilitated and enough time can be left for a visa procedure if necessary. Where there are several deadlines, a selection from a reduced pool of applicants is possible after each deadline. This periodically reduces the workload, allows decisions to be made and communicated quicker, and gives candidates more flexibility to match an application with their own timetable.

Managing the volume of applications: additional tools and "filters" (chapter 9)

Managing the volume of applications has become one of the most common problems in foreign student admissions. This situation has forced most institutions to rethink the management of foreign applications. The visited higher education institutions have introduced measures to help deal with rising application numbers and reduce the number of non-serious and poor applications.

First, these measures include clearly set and communicated criteria that allow students to assess their chances of being accepted prior to applying. Second, a sufficient staffing level of the units in charge of foreign admissions is regarded as important. Seasonal workloads, in particular, are a big problem, and understaffed admissions offices are often forced to find other means to streamline the admissions process and reduce workload, for example through online applications and automated emails. Third, some institutions collaborate with agents in the applicants' countries of origin. The main purpose of working with commercial agents is to increase foreign student numbers, but the trained agents are also intended to work as filters through education counselling. Fourth, various institutions charge an application fee to cover administrative costs and reduce the number of unserious applications. Some underline that application fees entail additional administrative work and cost time, and that collecting the fee from international applicants can be difficult.

Finally, many of the visited institutions run or are considering an online application system. These help ensure quick turnaround times, may be more accessible for prospective students, and reduce paper piles and workload for the admissions staff. Due to the greater risk of fraudulent cases and non-serious applications, some of the visited institutions prefer to work only with an internal system of online registrations linked to a database, which is accessible by all staff members involved in admissions and assessment.

2 Introduction

2.1 Background and aims

From the domestic to the international outlook

Only a short time ago, higher education around the world was mainly domestic in outlook. Higher education systems were "isolated" in a national framework. Today, the situation is radically changed. Within some world regions, efforts at cooperation like those of the European Union contributed to this change. On a worldwide scale, the change came about as a result of the "globalisation" of education. One, if not the major, outcome of this development is a steep rise in the mobility of students, i.e. in study outside of the country of citizenship or earlier residence. While outside of Europe "study abroad" was until recently a marginal phenomenon, the number of "international students" worldwide has now grown to about two million, according to estimates by UNESCO and OECD. A recent study by IDP Australia[1] forecasts the global demand for "international higher education" (i.e. for study abroad) to rise to 7.6 million by 2025. This trend is largely the result of a dramatic rise of demand for higher education and a parallel shortage of adequate provision (in terms of quantity and quality) in a number of large "emerging market" countries.

At the same time, national campaigns, such as those conducted by GATE-Germany, the British Council, NUFFIC, EduFrance, or IDP Australia, have put higher education institutions onto the global market. Be it for economic reasons or for the academic dream to attract the brightest from a bigger pool than the national one: more and more countries and higher education institutions deliberately recruit their students at a global level. Their aim is not only to attract as many students as possible, but to attract qualified students.

At this point admissions become important. At any rate in Europe, the internationalisation debate for a long time has been focused on mobility and later on structural reforms, attractiveness, and marketing. Admissions link marketing and the actual enrolment of a student, and their importance is often neglected. They are the filter where the best students or at least those who are likely to succeed can be picked. However, this mechanism only works if an admissions system has been adapted to the new international clientele.

The globalisation of education, the steep rise in student mobility, and the marketing efforts of some institutions, contrast sharply with the often unchanged national focus of admissions systems in many countries and institutions. In the same way as higher education used to be domestic in outlook, admissions procedures were entirely orientated towards the national qualifications

1 Cf. A. Böhm et. al., *Global Student Mobility 2025: Analysis of Global Competition and Market Share*, IDP: Sydney 2003

framework. This affects operational issues such as the time frame for admissions and selection processes. It also impacts on content-related matters, such as entry requirements that specify subject clusters derived from and only possible under the national education system. In numerous countries and institutions, a national focus remains predominant, if not unchanged.

One could argue that countries and institutions should do their homework before stepping out onto the global stage. Indeed, many of them have included a revision of their admissions procedures in their marketing and recruitment strategies. Where this has not happened, numerous problems have arisen: some institutions are being flooded by applications they cannot handle; others struggle with fraud problems or do not know how to assess foreign qualifications; in others visa regulations represent a significant time management obstacle.

Two examples illustrate this situation: a poll carried out by the DAAD in 200 German higher education institutions shows 462,000 inquiries and 192,000 applications for the winter term 2001/02. 74,000 applicants were finally admitted, out of whom 43,000 actually enrolled.[2] The high number of enquiries might be considered a success for the marketing strategy, but in fact, the applicants may still find many obstacles in their way that make marketing activities look absurd. In addition, many institutions have difficulties in defining the right criteria and assessing qualifications. The "brightest" sometimes might not even be admitted, because they remain unidentified.

In Australia, educational marketing has brought up other, admissions-related issues. Global Student Mobility 2025, a series of recent studies carried out by IDP Australia, predicts up to 858,800 international students in Australia in 2025 (up from 115,000 in 2003) under an optimistic scenario. But the series also includes a study on supply strategies and on how higher education institutions will cope with such increased demand. Sessions at the 17th Australian International Education Conference, which took place in October 2003, had titles like "The Looming Crisis in International Admissions: "Managing volume, seeking diversity and considering yield", or "Is the student you get the student you expected?"[3] In short, the higher education institutions' limited capacity and steadily growing international student numbers have brought admissions and selection procedures into the limelight.

Thus, "international admissions" have made their way onto numerous national agendas and into public debate. Individual higher education institutions and national bodies are revising their procedures and investigating workable

2 Source: Deutsche Universitätszeitung, 15-16/2002, p.33

3 See conference proceedings of the 17th Australian International Education Conference at http://www.idp.com/17aiec/. The conference is organised by IDP Education Australia, an independent organisation which is owned by 37 of Australia's universities. For the publications see A. Böhm et. al.: *Global Student Mobility 2025: Analysis of Global Competition and Market Share*, IDP, Sydney 2003 and D. Meares et. al.: *Global Student Mobility 2025: The Supply Challenge*, IDP, Sydney 2003 at http://www.idp.com/marketingandresearch/research/article414.asp

good-practice models in their respective countries and abroad. However, identifying such good-practice models requires relevant literature that looks beyond the borders of one particular country. With a few exceptions, most studies or books dealing with “access to higher education” refer to national students or focus more on social issues. The present publication aims to fill this gap. The countries included in the study are Australia, France, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, the United States, as well as specific aspects of foreign student admissions in the United Kingdom.[4]

The aim of the study

The aim of this study is to examine policies and instruments in the selected countries, and identify effective and transferable admissions models – that is, examples of good practice within different institutional and national contexts. The study aims to identify a range of models and procedures that can be used to efficiently organise foreign student admissions and selection. It seeks to understand the parameters that shape decisions to adopt particular admissions systems, e.g. the scope of an institution, and how the different national frameworks help or hinder institutional admissions procedures.

At this point, two clarifications are necessary. First, there are no “text-book” admissions systems. Rather than to the whole process, the models identified refer to individual aspects of an admissions system. Second, this is not a comparative study. Preliminary research showed that countries tend to have heterogeneous admissions systems rather than a “national” or nationwide admissions system.[5] The norm is that admissions procedures of higher education institutions are influenced by their national (traditional, legal and political) context but their operations are differentiated making it hard to generalise in national terms. Within the scope of the present study, it would have been unrealistic and mistaken to generalise about “typical” national procedures or their quality on the basis of the examples used. For the same reason, it was decided to refer to good practice and not to best-practice models.

The different debates over admissions procedures for foreign students tend to focus on similar questions:

- Should foreign students and national students be handled in the same way and by the same units?
- Should the same procedures apply to undergraduate and postgraduate students?
- Is the aim to filter out students who are likely to succeed or to identify the best?

4 In the United Kingdom, the clearing system UCAS is of particular interest as a model to rationalise administrative admission procedures. No site visits were carried out to individual institutions.

5 The results of this research contributed to a publication on foreign student admissions by the German Academic Exchange Service, the DAAD. Cf. DAAD (ed.): *Betreuung, Zulassung, Ausländerrecht*, series Die internationale Hochschule, volume 7, Bertelsmannverlag, Bielefeld 2004

- What parts of the admissions process should be centralised at institutional / national level, and what should be the role of academics?
- What capacity and competence is necessary to successfully handle this process?

The answers might be interlinked and condition the choice of a specific admissions model or at least the choice made regarding certain aspects. The study addresses these and other questions.

2.2 Definitions and clarifications

The present study deals with the "admission of international students into higher education". The following terms require clarification:

- admissions;
- higher education;
- international student.

Admission between student recruitment and student support

From the first contact between a higher education institution and a potential student until the first day of classes, several stages can be determined. A first stage includes general and targeted marketing. At this stage, the higher education institution is the active part. From the moment the candidate shows an interest in an institution or a certain programme, the process becomes interactive. This second stage includes enquiries, and admissions and selection processes. When a student has accepted an offer, he or she might need help with the visa regulations, accommodation, cultural and linguistic adaptation etc. This third stage, providing assistance to the student until actual enrolment, but also during his or her studies, is called student support.

This study focuses on the second stage, i.e. admissions are understood as the management of enquiries, the management of applications and the selection process.

Where there are overlaps, other stages are taken into account. For example, marketing activities are of interest if there are mixed teams of admissions and marketing staff, if marketing staff are authorised to make decisions on foreign student admissions or where targeted marketing and recruitment are closely interlinked with the subsequent admissions procedures. Student support is addressed in the context of international student recruitment networks or programmes, and in relation with the role of international offices.

Admission systems: open vs. selective admission

The above explanations define the operational and temporal scope of the study. A content-based approach is necessary for an analytical delimitation and definition of the term “admission”. The *Explanatory Report to the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region* (Lisbon Convention) delivers the following definition of access and admission to higher education:

> “The term “access” implies the assessment of applicants’ qualifications with a view to determining whether they meet the *minimum* requirements for pursuing studies in a given higher education programme. Access is distinct from admission, which concerns the individuals’ actual participation in the higher education programme concerned.”[6]

The present study uses a slightly different terminology but follows the same principles: the term “eligibility” is preferred to “access”, because the common definition of “access” relates to general participation rates, or entry to higher education by students who do not have standard qualifications (for example mature students).

The terms “eligibility” and “admission” denote different steps in the same process towards participation in higher education. Eligibility is a necessary, but not always sufficient, condition for admission to higher education. In an open admissions system, the concepts of eligibility and admission coincide. All candidates fulfilling the stipulated requirements are admitted. In this case, the “hurdles” the foreign applicant has to overcome are linked to the recognition of qualifications and to visa regulations.

In a selective admissions system, however, admission might be limited to a certain number of places or candidates. Thus, eligibility denotes only the right to compete for admission and to gain entry to the pool of qualified candidates from which the successful applicants are selected. Selection may be automated, based on a ranking of candidates according to their marks. A second option is a case-by-case system in which staff members or committees within the higher education institution concerned make an individual selection.

This may sound like a clear-cut picture, but the scenario is rather complex:

- ♦ In practice, the limits between open and selective admissions systems are blurred, at least as far as international students are concerned. Even in an open admissions system, a committee of academics may decide whether a candidate’s qualification is equivalent to a national qualification, and thus undertake a quasi-selection.
- ♦ Admissions systems can operate at different levels, namely at programme, faculty, institutional, sub-national (regional or field-specific) or national level. Characteristics of admissions systems may vary within and between the different levels.

6 *Cf. Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region. Explanatory Report*, http://conventions.coe.int/treaty/en/reports/html/165.htm

- Different admissions systems may be in place for the undergraduate and the postgraduate level.
- The number of available places or the requirements for admission to a programme may vary over time and thus a programme may be open or selective according to capacity limits.

Thus, the theoretical division into open and selective admissions systems helps to understand the underlying rationale of each model, but cannot be the basis for a clear and representative classification. The “models” described in the present study are models in the sense of examples within a certain context, but cannot be representative for an entire country, and sometimes not even for their respective institution.

Higher education and the different levels taken into consideration

The study concentrates on the first stage of tertiary education, which does not lead directly to an advanced research qualification, or in other words, on level 5 A and B of the international standard classification of education (ISCED).[7] This classification does not sufficiently account for disparities between qualifications in different countries/continents. Within Europe, the three-cycle structure of the Bologna process should ensure a common frame, but at this stage, there are still considerable differences not only between countries and institutions, but also between faculties. Some consider a Bachelor a first degree, others only a stage on the way to the Master’s degree, which is considered the “real” first higher education degree; in some cases being admitted to a programme is already considered a first university degree. In addition, short-cycle first degrees add to the complexity.

In the present study, the term “undergraduate” is used for programmes leading to a first university degree, with a minimum duration of three years. Admission into shorter programmes (e.g. community college or pathway programmes) has not been included. Some cases of admission into an advanced year of a Bachelor’s / undergraduate programme are considered, as this is common practice at numerous institutions if a candidate is not admissible to a Master’s programme.

Consequently, the term “postgraduate” is used for programmes where a first university degree of a minimum duration of three years is a minimum admissions requirement. The focus is on Master’s programmes. In exceptional cases, mainly for research universities with a strong focus on doctoral studies, the doctoral level has also been taken into account.

International students

The present study concentrates on international (or foreign) degree students, i.e. students with a previous qualification from one country who move to an-

7 Cf. ISCED 1997, http://www.uis.unesco.org/TEMPLATE/pdf/isced/ISCED_A.pdf, pp. 28

other country for the purpose of studying an entire degree programme, be it at undergraduate or postgraduate level.[8] This delimitation is important for various reasons:

- ♦ A student with a foreign passport is not necessarily a mobile student. Therefore, the place of acquisition of the previous qualification is decisive.
- ♦ Especially in Europe, numerous higher education institutions pursue an internationalisation strategy focused on exchange students and organised mobility. Foreign degree students are often not perceived as a priority. However, they represent a much higher responsibility for the host institution. Whereas in the case of exchange students the sending institution makes the selection, this is, in principle, not the case for foreign degree students.[9]

Admission becomes an issue – and sometimes a problem – when higher education institutions have to deal with "normal" applications from students with a foreign qualification. This is the focus of the present study. The study uses the terms "international student" and "foreign student" as synonyms.

For the EU countries included in the study, another categorisation of interest: Citizens of other EU countries have to be treated in the same way as nationals when it comes to admission into higher education. Still, because of language and equivalence issues, the procedures for EU students might differ from those in place for national candidates. The three categories domestic or national student, EU student and non-EU student have been made explicit wherever relevant.

2.3 Methodology

The present study was prepared between August 2003 and September 2004 by the Academic Cooperation Association (ACA). Its main author, Franziska Muche, was supported by Maria Kelo and advised by ACA director Bernd Wächter. Preliminary research to further define criteria and collect information about the selected countries was carried out in August and September 2003.

The following means of information gathering were employed in the present study:

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8 Regrettably, this definition cannot always be consistent with the use of data on foreign student numbers. OECD, for example, uses the term "foreign student" for country reporting data for "a student who is enrolled on a programme in one of its institutions but does not have the citizenship of that country". The definition used in the present study corresponds to the OECD definition of a "non-resident foreign student" (opposed to resident foreign students, who are for example in the country as a result of prior migration). At present, only for a few countries there are data that specify foreign student numbers for both categories. Cf. OECD: *OECD Handbook for Internationally Comparative Education Statistics*, OECD, Paris 2004, p.42

9 The following pages will show that some institutions have opted for the enhancement of partnerships with foreign schools / higher education institutions to ensure a quality selection of their foreign degree students.

- desk research, including identification and review of the scarce relevant literature, perusal of official documentation and Internet searches;
- telephone interviews with contact persons at member organisations of the Academic Cooperation Association (ACA) or other institutions on-site;
- an expert consultation;
- face-to-face interviews in the course of site visits to selected higher education institutions, to higher education authorities, internationalisation agencies and associations.

So far little has been written on admissions instruments and policies directed towards international students. Therefore, the main elements of the preliminary research were Internet searches, email enquiries, and telephone interviews with contact persons in the countries covered by the study. These were international education specialists at ACA member institutions, national agencies, and universities.[10] Contact persons and Internet searches helped identify relevant official documentation, as well as the scarce relevant literature, which enabled the authors to obtain a first overview of international admissions policies and procedures in the selected countries.[11] The contact persons helped with initial orientation, and provided feedback on the findings. Analyses of the first findings were gathered in country overviews, and contributed to a publication on the admission of foreign students by the German Academic Exchange Service DAAD.[12]

The results of the preliminary research were presented to a **group of experts** in October 2003. The experts discussed the first findings and gave advice on further proceedings. They revised the choice of countries, provided advice on the scope of the study and on the choice of institutions. The expert consultation highlighted the difficulties of a comparative study of admissions policies and instruments where the range of different institutional approaches is so wide within each country. It was therefore decided to focus on different institutional approaches and on how different national frameworks help or hinder foreign student admissions.

To follow-up on the expert consultation the authors carried out **site visits to higher education institutions** in the countries selected for the study. The

10 The members of the Academic Cooperation Association are major national organisations active in the promotion of internationalisation and cooperation in the field of higher education. Namely, information and support was provided by the ACA member organisations British Council, the Rector's Conference of the Swiss Universities (CRUS), the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), EduFrance, IDP Education Australia, the Netherlands Organization for International Cooperation in Higher Education (Nuffic), the Swedish Institute, the International Programme Office and the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education (HSV). For the US, apart from the Institute of International Education (IIE), ACA has worked with contact persons at several international organisations, universities and the State Department.

11 Most relevant is the following publication: West, Anne (coordinator): *Higher Education Admissions and Student Mobility within the EU – ADMIT*, London: LSE, Centre for Educational Research, 2001. A summary of the study is available at http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/CER/pdf/cmp18.pdf.

12 DAAD (ed.), op. cit.

contact persons in the countries helped identify the higher education institutions to study and relevant contact persons at the selected institutions.[13] In total, the authors of the study visited 24 institutions[14] in six countries and conducted interviews with about 150 persons, based on standardised interview guidelines. At each institution, all or most of the following types of persons were interviewed:

- senior policy planners, usually either the rector, the vice-rector or vice-president (international);
- the head or further staff of the international office, administrative admissions staff at central level;
- academic staff (usually programme coordinators or deans of departments) involved in the admission of foreign students, and administrative staff at departmental level, preferably from those departments with the highest intake of foreign students.

Wherever possible, the authors visited **higher education authorities, national agencies and academic exchange services** or, at least, interviewed some of their staff involved in international recruitment or admissions strategies by telephone.[15] These visits served orientation purposes and, where applicable, provided information on national-level procedures.

The detailed results of the study will be presented in the following chapters, which provide short overviews on the admission of foreign students in each of the visited countries (chapter 3) and identify various models for aspects of the admissions process. As a background to these models, the rationale of foreign student admissions will be explored (chapter 4). Models for the following aspects of foreign student admissions are discussed: information and enquiry management (chapter 5), the organisational structure of the admissions process (chapter 6), assessment and selection procedures (chapter 7), the timing of foreign student admissions (chapter 8) and additional tools and “filters” to manage the volume of applications (chapter 9).

13 These are higher education institutions of different type, size, and geographic situation, with high numbers of foreign students and / or a deliberate international policy. If interesting admission procedures directed towards foreign students could be identified beforehand, this was taken into account.

14 Cf. Annex 1 for a list of institutions visited.

15 Cf. Annex 2 for a list of higher education authorities, internationalisation agencies and associations visited.

3 Country overviews: a bird's-eye view of admissions

This chapter consists of short overviews of policies and practices linked to foreign student admissions in each of the countries included in the study, namely Switzerland, France, the United States, Australia, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Sweden. Foreign student admissions often depend more on the institutional context than on the national context. However, all countries included in the present study have some characteristic features that condition and help understand the respective institutional admissions procedures and international strategies. The different country sections consider:

- foreign student numbers;
- national policies on foreign students and other aspects that may affect foreign student admissions, e.g. special features of the higher education system, the legal or financial framework;
- national-level admissions procedures and common initiatives;
- general characteristics of institutional admissions procedures for domestic and foreign students at under- and postgraduate level;
- standard admissions requirements;
- differences between the admission of foreign and domestic students.

3.1 Switzerland: attempts to streamline diversity

The section on Swiss higher education for foreign students on the website of the Swiss Rectors' Conference (CRUS) warns foreign applicants: "The number of students at Swiss universities is constantly increasing. For foreign students it is therefore not always possible to be admitted to a university, despite the increasing international mobility."[16] Switzerland, the non-EU country in the very heart of Europe, does not actively market its higher education institutions, nor does it try to attract foreign students. One would therefore expect its foreign student numbers to be low, but the country has the highest percentage of foreign students in Europe. Approximately 16 percent of all students earned their prior qualification in another country, and 21 percent have a foreign passport. At the postgraduate level, two out of five students in Swiss higher education are foreign students. In addition, 35 percent of the teaching and research staff are foreign.[17] Switzerland participates as a "silent partner" in EU programmes in the field of higher education, figures among the Bologna signatory states and has ratified the Lisbon Convention. Although there is currently no explicit government international education

16 Cf. http://www.crus.ch/engl/Study.html

17 Source: http://www.statistik.admin.ch/stat_ch/ber15/indik_hsw/ind10302d_1_synth.htm. These figures are slightly more precise than those presented by the OECD, which reports 17 percent foreign students for Switzerland. Cf. *Education at a Glance*, Paris: OECD 2003, p. 281

policy, there is a consensus that international students are desirable for Switzerland. Swiss students benefit from an international campus and foreign graduates will later act as ambassadors for the country.[18]

Against the background of this astonishing degree of internationalisation, the lukewarm welcome to foreign applicants expressed in the above message of the Swiss Rectors' Conference comes as a surprise. One explanation could be the present funding system of Swiss higher education, which does not favour the recruitment of foreign students. Swiss institutions demand only a modest tuition fee, which, although slightly higher for foreign than for national students, is far from being cost covering. Federal or cantonal funding is linked to the mission of higher education institutions: federally run and funded institutes of technology are supposed to provide (mainly technically oriented) higher education to Swiss students. Accordingly, cantonal universities are subsidised by the canton in which they are located and their basic mission is to provide higher education to people from that particular canton.[19] For every Swiss student coming from another canton, the university receives a payment from the canton of origin. For foreign students, there is no such compensation.[20] Formerly, fees for foreign students existed, but these were abolished in order to better position Switzerland in an international context. Thus, in financial terms, foreign students are an additional load for Swiss higher education institutions, whereas in other countries financial incentives are among the main drivers of foreign student recruitment. The Swiss Rectors' Conference is very aware of the problem and is working on proposals to the government(s) to rectify the situation.

In principle, the Swiss admissions system is an open one. The *Matura*, the Swiss upper secondary qualification, is considered a first degree of higher education, not a final secondary school leaving certificate, and opens unrestricted access to higher education. The general aim of admission into higher education is not to discriminate against any students but to admit foreign students on the same conditions as Swiss students.[21] This applies to selection criteria as well as to tuition fees (not counting the modest additional fees for foreign students). Therefore, in undergraduate admissions the basic rationale is to make sure that foreign candidates hold a qualification of a general cha-

18 Cf. Interview with Professor Jean-Marc Rapp, president of the Swiss Rectors' Conference CRUS.

19 Switzerland has a dual system of university and higher professional education, the latter delivered at the *Fachhochschulen*. However, the *Fachhochschulen* have so far not been very active with regard to internationalisation. Those in border areas with France and Germany are an exception, but they cater for applicants from one additional and culturally very similar country than for an international public. Therefore, foreign admissions are of less relevance in the *Fachhochschulen* sector in Switzerland, and it has not been included in the present study.

20 An institution's degree of internationalisation is taken into account in the basic university funding. However, the related sum remains far below the contributions made in the framework of the intercantonal university agreement.

21 Medical studies are the only exception: due to the high demand by Swiss students, international students are not allowed to study medicine.

racter that is equivalent to the Swiss *Matura* and that they could study the same subject in their home country. Thus, if there is an additional examination like the Spanish *Selectividad* or a selection mechanism like the German ZVS in the country of origin, candidates must prove that they have participated in the respective national procedure and that they would have been granted a place at a university in their home country in the chosen subject.

Swiss institutions are autonomous in their decisions, i.e. every institution decides on their admissions procedures, capacity, and equivalence. Admissions procedures for international students therefore vary between institutions. As a general rule, admissions to undergraduate study are dealt with by administrators at central institutional level. Academics are only involved in the admission of postgraduate students.

There are also differences between the individual universities' requirements for applicants from different countries and world regions. Applicants from a number of Asian countries, for instance, might be admitted to some Swiss universities on the basis of a secondary school leaving diploma with a particular set of subject clusters, while other institutions might require a Bachelor's degree for admission into the undergraduate level. Traditionally, requirements are similar at institutions within each of the major linguistic regions (German, French and Italian-speaking Switzerland) and at the two federal institutes of technology.

The CRUS has published general guidelines for the recognition of foreign school credentials that allow access to higher education (1992, amended in 1994).[22] These guidelines are meant to inform institutional admissions decisions and standardise procedures and requirements, but they do not infringe on the institutions' autonomy. They are, however, clearly the basis of admissions practices at the visited higher education institutions. Furthermore, there are attempts to coordinate admissions requirements in the Kommission für Zulassung und Äquivalenzen, a national committee for admissions and equivalences. The committee is composed of the admissions staff of the 12 Swiss universities and coordinated by the CRUS. It meets regularly and aims to streamline Swiss admissions procedures and requirements and to put them in line with the Lisbon Convention. This includes, for instance, the attempt to have the same requirements at all Swiss universities for candidates from a given country, and to work with the same deadlines. At present, applicants intending to take up studies in the autumn apply in May, June or July, depending on the university and the level of study.

Apart from this "streamlining attempt", there is a further centralising element in the admission of foreign students into undergraduate programmes: if an applicant's qualification is not considered equivalent to Swiss requirements, he or she can take part in a central examination organised jointly by Swiss

22 Cf. http://www.crus.ch/deutsch/enic/Zulass/richt.html

universities in Fribourg and in the optional preparatory courses preceding the exam. The federal institutes of technology organise their own entrance examinations for candidates whose qualifications are not recognised. In both cases, the exam is based on the Swiss *Matura*. The aim of the entrance examinations is not to select the best candidates, but to ensure the equivalence of entry qualifications with the Swiss *Matura* and to make sure that students are able to succeed in the Swiss system. There is only one exception to this rule, at the University of St. Gallen, where only the best foreign applicants are admitted, on the basis of either an entrance examination or the results of a standardised test.

In postgraduate admissions, the differences between Swiss universities are even more pronounced. The respective admissions procedures often vary between the different faculties of one and the same institution. On top of this, most institutions are in the process of reforming their postgraduate admissions procedures in the process of the introduction of the new two-cycle degree structure. At the same time, old structures are partly persisting, in a way that there are now three types of Master's degrees in Switzerland: the "Bologna Master" (essentially a "long" five-year degree), the postgraduate pre-doctoral diplomas (*Diplôme d'Etudes Approfondies* – DEA) and the Executive Master, designed for professionals. Increasingly, postgraduate courses are also offered in English, but mostly in combination with the local language.

Generally, linguistic requirements vary, depending upon the canton language, between German, French, or Italian. Candidates must prove adequate knowledge of the language of instruction. Also, each canton has different regulations regarding visa procedures, a fact widely criticised by higher education institutions.

3.2 France: embassies manage non-EU undergraduate applications

Recent developments in French international education policy have been exciting: France had always been a magnet for international applicants, but the country suffered a decrease in foreign student numbers in the 1990s, when numbers fell from 13.6 to 8.5 percent. Now the trend is going upwards again, with 12.7 percent or 180,418 foreign students in the academic year 2002/03.[23] The reason for the upsurge reflects a parallel change in political course. The 1998 "Chévènement law" eased the general entry and visa regulations for foreign students. Around the same time, the government also established the agency EduFrance, whose mission is to promote France as a study destination and which launched an intensive international marketing campaign. Regional "European university poles" were set up to coordinate international activities of universities, student mobility and support services.

23 Cf. http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/education/etudiants_etrangers/index.html

The French admissions landscape is characterised by a "jungle of responsibilities". There are multiple actors who have or wish to have a say in matters related to the admission of foreign students, namely several ministries (amongst them those for education, foreign affairs, and home affairs), EduFrance, Égide, the CNOUS and its regional branches CROUS, the university rectors' conference, the *grandes écoles'* conference, the CEDEFI for the engineering schools, just to mention a few.

This strong involvement of national-level actors might be attributed to the fact that the aim to attract international students is regarded as highly political in France and very much linked to French foreign policy. The reasoning is that today's foreign students in France will be tomorrow's political and economic elites in their countries of origin. They will help to strengthen the ties between France and their countries and form a "network of friends".

The legal framework imposes certain structures and regulations on the admission of foreign students. For instance, most traditional degrees are "national degrees", which are accredited and registered with the corresponding admissions and selection procedures. In some "sensitive" fields, such as medicine, the ministry in charge even fixes quotas and organises a concours, a nationwide examination, after the first year of study. "Institutional degrees" allow more flexibility for the individual higher education institutions.

For both foreign and national applicants, admissions rules and procedures depend, in the first place, on the type of institution. There is a considerable difference between the universities and the *grandes écoles*, the elite institutions.[24] This duality somehow reflects a society that is at the same time egalitarian and elitist. *Grandes écoles* are very selective in their admissions practice. Universities are autonomous in their decisions, but their admissions practices are based on a principle of open access and "non-selectiveness" that results from policy and legislation. This is mainly due to the fact that the French *baccalauréat* is considered as both the final certificate of upper secondary education and the first qualification in higher education. Therefore, it provides unrestricted access to universities. High failure and dropout rates at the end of the first year do however suggest that an implicit selection takes place during the first year of study. Only half of the students manage to leap into the second academic year.[25]

For admission to undergraduate programmes at French universities, applicants from non-European Union countries undergo a two-stage procedure, the so-called *demande d'admission préalable*. In the year prior to commenc-

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24 There are short cycle degree programmes, sometimes within universities, that are also selective, for example the *Diplôme Universitaires de Technologie* DUT or the *Brevet de Technician Supérieur* BTS. For the reasons explained in chapter 2 (cf. definition of higher education), these programmes will here be neglected.

25 Vaniscotte et. al.: *La Mobilité Étudiante en Europe, Mythe ou Réalité*, Paris: Epice 2003, p. 212. This publication builds on the outcomes of above mentioned ADMIT study coordinated by Anne West.

ing their studies, they apply through the French embassy in their country of origin, where applicants have to sit a language test. The embassy also forwards the application to two universities of the student's choice. The main reason for the embassies' involvement is not to ease the life of French universities, but to control migration flows into France. One consequence of this procedure is that admission of non-EU candidates takes place at a much earlier time of the year than admission of EU and French candidates.

The procedure is different for French nationals and European Union citizens. These candidates, as well as all candidates for postgraduate study, apply directly to the university of their choice. For undergraduate studies, the institution first admits regional applicants. If there are no capacity limits, holders of a French qualification in most cases can mostly simply enrol. With capacity limits, the candidates for the remaining places are selected based on merit and the suitability of their prior qualification.

Universities are free to decide which foreign qualifications to recognise. Faculty-based committees of teaching and research staff usually assess the content of a foreign candidate's application. Central or faculty-based *scolarités* play a purely administrative role. In principle, faculties check if the applicant fulfils the admissions requirements, that is, if he or she has a qualification equivalent to a French *baccalauréat*, or of a first university degree for postgraduate courses. Even in admission to undergraduate programmes, the subject emphasis of the prior qualification is important in some fields of study, since the French *baccalauréat* is discipline-specific. Although academics are supposed to only check the equivalence of a qualification, frequently a quasi-selection takes place.

The case of the *grandes écoles* is very different: All of them have competitive and selective admissions procedures. Most French students access the *grandes écoles* at second-cycle level through a so-called *concours*, a major entrance examination, after two years of equally competitive *classes préparatoires*. Some younger *grandes écoles*, mainly engineering and business schools, also recruit students directly at *baccalauréat* level. Hardly any foreign candidates take this traditional entry path through a *concours* and the *classes préparatoires*. The majority of *grandes écoles* with international ambition actively recruit foreign students. With some exceptions, these are candidates who already have a first university degree and can be admitted directly into a higher level. Admission is also competitive, but either carried out individually *sur dossier* and by means of an interview, or by means of a separate *concours* for foreign candidates. Sometimes, international students are only admitted via specially designed bridging programmes. These bridging courses are often taught in English.

The majority of teaching at higher education institutions takes place in French. The number of English-language-taught programmes is increasing, but most of them are still bilingual. In general, candidates must be able to demonstrate a good command of French. All French universities accept the DALF *(Diplôme Approfondie de Langue Française)* as proof of competence in French. Alternatively, candidates who do not have to sit a language test at the French embassy in their home country can be asked to do so at the receiving university. Yet, this is not a rigid requirement, and many candidates are exempted or may be allowed to adjust their level of French when already in France.

Regarding the financial framework, there is again a big difference between universities and *grandes écoles*, and also between private and public institutions. Universities only charge a low enrolment fee. Fees at public and private *grandes écoles* are considerably higher and vary. As a general rule, the same fee levels apply to domestic and foreign students. However, some institutions charge international students additional fees if they are offered special support, such as bridging or language courses.

3.3 United States: institutional autonomy and global competition

The US is the leading destination country for foreign students. According to OECD data, 28 percent of all international students in the world study in the United States, twice as many as in the United Kingdom, which comes second[26]. However, marketing activities of other English-speaking countries, the creation of English-language-taught programmes in other countries, as well as the post 9/11 political situation now threaten the leading position of the United States.

In 2000, President Clinton issued a memorandum on the US international education policy, which underlined the significance of international students for the country. It was the first initiative of its kind. Clinton called on the authorities to improve the transparency of American educational facilities and to eliminate unnecessary obstacles, for instance during visa or admissions procedures. However, one-and-a-half years later, the events of 11 September led to increased visa restrictions, the effects of which have not been overcome. Procedures have become lengthier and more expensive and have already had a strong impact on the number of international students at US institutions, which is now stagnating after years of high growth.

US universities and their international officers continue to underline the importance of international students both for the diversity of their student bodies and for their resolve to attract the best students from a global pool. In addition, the economic relevance of international admissions is seen as very high. International students contribute significantly to national, state, and local economies and to the financial health of their schools. According to a study by NAFSA (The Association of International Educators), the 583,000 international students enrolled at US post-secondary institutions in the academic year 2001/02, along with their dependents, spent nearly US$12 billion

26 *Education at a Glance*, Paris: OECD, 2003, p. 275.

(almost € 10 billion) on tuition, other fees, and living expenses, making international education the fifth-largest US service sector “export”.[27]

While there has also been national-level interest in and recognition of the importance of international students to the nation, government policy efforts have never had a great influence on the policies and practices of individual institutions. In legal terms, the American universities are highly autonomous: they are self-accrediting and self-governing institutions. Decisions on admissions criteria, evaluation of foreign degrees, tuition fees, as well as institutional policies and aims vis-à-vis internationalisation and admissions, can all be taken at the local level. Several agencies operating at the national level offer “tools” (e.g. recommendations on certificate recognition, guidelines for evaluation, etc.) to help universities in their decisions, but ultimately they are free to decide for themselves how and to what extent to apply them.

Within an institution, the faculties, departments and even programmes can decide independently on their specific criteria and selection procedures, as long as they are in line with general institutional policy, or minimum criteria. The aims, criteria, and practical organisation of the admissions process often also depend on the type of institution. Private universities tend to apply the same procedures and same criteria to all students, national and international alike, while public institutions have to strike a balance between the financial considerations and the need to internationalise, and their specific mission to serve the local community and hence facilitate access of students from their own state.

Even though the US is a prime example of an extremely diverse system, some general common features can be identified. Over 130 colleges and universities accept the Common Application Form, available on the Internet, in addition to their own form. At the undergraduate level, most universities require a broad basic knowledge demonstrated in transcripts, which describe contents of the courses taken in secondary school. Usually, students need to show that they have an equivalent to the US High School diploma, and some institutions require the student to have it evaluated by an external company at their own cost. Students are mostly asked to provide two or more recommendation letters of head masters or teachers, and to include a personal essay in their application dossier. Often, though not always, a good result in one of the national standardised tests is required. The most frequently used test is the SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test).[28] US and foreign applicants complete the same tests. International students have the possibility of taking the examination in their own country, and some universities exempt them from taking it altogether. The cost of the standardised test is on the student.

27 Cf. *Toward An International Education Policy For The United States: International Education In An Age Of Globalism And Terrorism*, Washington: NAFSA, May 2003, http://www.nafsa.org/content/PublicPolicy/USIntlEdPolicy/NIEP2003updateFINALwebversion.htm

28 For a description of the SAT and other standardised tests see http://educationusa.state.gov/undergrad/admissions.htm.

Universities also require proof of English language proficiency. The most common means to demonstrate this is with a sufficient score (limit set by the university) in the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). The TOEFL is also a condition for obtaining a student visa.

Similar regulations apply to postgraduate programmes. Here importance is attached to good study results at undergraduate level as well as on professional experience or research activities. Among the standardised tests, the GRE (Graduate Record Examination) is most frequently used, together with the GMAT (Graduate Management Admission Test) for Business Studies. The tests are mostly computer adaptive, i.e. they adapt to the quality of the answers of the tested. The importance of the test results in the overall assessment of the application depends on the faculty or department. Indeed, not all students are required to take these tests, and the results are rarely used as the only selection criterion. Teaching and research staff usually play a significant role in selection, which is also based on grades of the undergraduate degree, a personal statement of interest, recommendation letters, and previous research experience. Sometimes interviews are also carried out to confirm the suitability of the candidate for the programme in question.

Generally, the degree of decentralisation within an institution is different at the undergraduate and postgraduate level. While undergraduate selection is often carried out at the central institutional level – either at the admissions or at the international office – with very little or no involvement of academic staff, selection of postgraduates usually takes place in the faculties and departments, with academic teaching staff playing an important role. The exact division of labour and degree of decentralisation or centralisation differs between institutions.

Postgraduates constitute the lion's share of international students in the USA: 13.3 percent of all postgraduates are foreign, while only about 2.7 percent of undergraduate students are international students (making up 4.6 percent of the total of the student body).[29] While many institutions are generally pleased with this trend, some universities are trying to increase the undergraduate student body, also through international enrolments.

3.4 Australia: separate admissions for international candidates

Over the past decade, if not for longer, the Australian approach has been characterised by "aggressive recruitment strategies"[30] on the international education market. This strategy has been successful. Today, Australia is

29 Hey-Kyung Koh Chin (ed.): *Open Doors 2003: Report on International Educational Exchange*, New York: Institute of International Education, 2003. According to OECD figures, foreign students make up 3.5 percent of total student numbers in the US. Cf. OECD, op. cit., p. 281

30 This term is for instance used in the policy statement *Toward An International Education Policy For The United States: International Education In An Age Of Globalism And Terrorism*, Washington: NAFSA, May 2003, http://www.nafsa.org/content/PublicPolicy/USIntlEdPolicy/NIEP2003updateFINALwebversion.htm

among the leading destination countries for international students. According to OECD statistics[31], 13.9 percent of Australia's students are foreign. Australian sources even identify 21.5 percent of all students enrolled as foreigners.[32] These sources take into account that many Australians study only part time, whereas international students pursue full-time studies, and that there is a considerable number of foreign "offshore students"[33] at Australian campuses in other countries. Since the 1990s, international students in Australia have had to pay tuition fees covering the full cost of their studies. The introduction of cost-covering fees constituted a paradigm change. Previously, Australia's policy on international students was focused on development cooperation, and found expression in scholarship programmes for third-world students. Moreover, quotas limited the number of foreign students. Partly due to Australia's geographical location, its early international education policy aimed at the development of mutual understanding to underpin Australia's trade, diplomatic and political efforts, as well as research and scientific exchanges and collaboration.

While not having given up its development commitment altogether, the early cooperation ethos has today been largely substituted by an economic rationale. With an overall value of over five billion Australian Dollars (almost € 3 billion) in 2003, education is today Australia's third largest service sector "export".[34] Among other things, this change was brought about by the introduction, in 1989, of the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS), a university financing model that forced Australian universities to look for alternative sources of income. Fees from international students became one of these. While almost negligible at the beginning, revenue from international students today accounts for about 25 percent of the budget of many higher education institutions and has become an essential motivation for the recruitment of international students. It redefined international education as an export commodity. This has resulted in considerable competition between Australian universities and a palpable reluctance to engage in mutual cooperation. However, this is changing at present, as the volume of international applicants is steadily increasing.[35]

In legal terms, Australian universities are highly autonomous. They are self-accrediting and self-governing institutions. However, the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) regulates the provision of education

31 Cf. *Education at a Glance*, Paris: OECD 2003, p. 281

32 Cf. *International Students in Australian Universities – Semester 2, 2003*, Sydney: IDP Education Australia, November 2003 ,
http://www.idp.com/marketingandresearch/research/internationaleducationstatistics/article411.asp

33 Offshore students are students who are studying at the campus of an Australian university, but not on Australian territory. Some Australian universities have the bulk of their international students on offshore campuses, situated mainly in Asian countries.

34 Cf. *Australia's Exports of Education Services*, Annual 2003 report, IDP Education Australia,
http://www.idp.com/marketingandresearch/research/internationaleducationstatistics/article403.asp.
This amount includes tuition, fees and living expenses of international students and their dependents.

35 Böhm et.al., op. cit.

and training services to overseas students in Australia through the Education Services for Overseas Students Act (ESOS). Institutions need to have their courses registered in the CRICOS Database, for which there are prerequisites. The aim of the ESOS Act is mainly to protect the interests of those coming to Australia on student visas, by providing tuition and financial assurance and ensuring a nationally consistent approach. It also aims to ensure students attend classes and do not misuse student visas for immigration purposes as a matter of migration.[36]

Unlike domestic candidates who need to apply through "Tertiary Admission Centres" (regional clearing systems) in the state where they want to study, foreign candidates apply directly to the university of their choice. Yet, many of them take advantage of the offer of private or public agents such as IDP Australia, which offers online application and counselling services. These services are free of charge for the applicant, but not for the university that finally "wins" the student. Another common admissions tool is an "invisible" clearing house system, the "service centre" in Melbourne, which is an e-contact centre dealing with inquiries operated by six Australian universities.

Australian universities are free to decide on the equivalence of foreign qualifications. Most of them use the country guidelines issued by NOOSR, the National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition based at the DEST. The guidelines date from 1996; some of them are being updated at present. Originally, they were not oriented towards admissions but towards professional recognition, and are therefore more widely used for admission into postgraduate studies. NOOSR also organises training sessions all over the country, where the NOOSR staff explain how to assess international qualifications and give updates on the guidelines. Bigger universities often have their own internal experts or databases.

At all Australian universities, international applicants are dealt with as a separate category in the admissions procedure. This is due to the financial framework. Unless they are awarded a scholarship, international undergraduate students always pay full fees, whereas Australian undergraduate students can apply for funded HECS-places through tertiary admission centres until a set deadline.[37] This leads to an interesting constellation: whereas international students are usually admitted if they satisfy the minimum formal requirements (open admissions system), Australian students compete over a limited number of places in a merit-based process (selective or *numerus*

36 The latter is also overseen by DIMIA, the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, that is dealing with the visa procedure. Visa requirements are not only of legal and financial character, but also include English language requirements (IELTS) and requirements relating to the level of previous study, a fact viewed rather critically by higher education institutions. Apart from these restrictions, the procedure is relatively quick: a visa request can be made via the Internet, and will be processed within five to ten working days – time-frames that institutions in other countries can only dream of.

37 This is being changed at present: more Australian full fee payers will be allowed. In a way, international students have been an "area of trial" for the introduction of more full fee-paying places.

clausus admissions system). As a rule, the minimum entry requirements are set at a level that ensures the student can be expected to succeed on the course (minimum requirements). Since Australian applicants compete with each other, the *de facto* entry requirements for Australians are often much higher than those for international students. At the postgraduate level, Australian and international candidates apply directly to the institution, but the latter are still being handled by the international office.

To be admitted for study at an Australian university, foreign applicants must demonstrate that they satisfy the demands set by the institution for prior educational qualifications. Usually, these are clearly communicated in the institution's information material so that the student is able to assess him or herself prior to applying. In certain subjects, prerequisites or subject cluster requirements may be necessary, i.e. applicants must prove that they have studied a given range of subjects during their prior education. Transcript records are always required, as are sometimes also motivation or recommendation letters. A decent mastery of English has to be demonstrated by means of the IELTS or TOEFL tests. If the applicant does not fulfil all requirements, there is usually a second access route, via English language courses and bridging or preparatory courses. Rather than select only a few, the approach is to find the right course for the right student.

3.5 The Netherlands: focus on the Master's level

In 2003, the Netherlands proudly announced that the number of foreign students in Dutch higher education went up to almost 30,000, up 18 percent on the previous year. This is widely attributed to the country's deliberate and determined internationalisation policy. Since the early 1990s, both the institutions and the government have fostered the internationalisation of higher education. Building on the government's overall foreign policy, one of the main objectives of international policy in education is to enhance the quality of Dutch education, both in order to strengthen the position of Dutch higher education institutions on a global education market and to educate graduates who function in an international social and labour environment.[38]

Another noteworthy internationalisation aspect is the high speed with which the country is introducing the Bologna reforms in general and the new bachelor-master degree structure in particular. The corresponding bill was passed in 2002, and the new structure is now obligatory for all higher education institutions. The Netherlands is also a European leader in the provision of programmes taught in English.[39] The rapidly rising number of these pro-

38 Cf. *Bison Monitor of International Mobility in Education*, The Hague: Nuffic 2003, http://www.nuffic.net/Files/031009%20ENGLISHBISONMonitor2.pdf. According to OECD figures, there are 3.3 percent foreign students in the Netherlands. Cf. Education at a Glance, Paris: OECD 2003, p. 281

39 Cf. Friedhelm Maiworm, Bernd Wächter, *English-Language-Taught Degree Programmes in European Higher Education*, ACA Papers on International Cooperation in Education, Bonn 2002.

grammes might soon become a headache for the competing "major English speaking destination countries". In the future, most Master's programmes in the Netherlands are to be offered in English. Both aspects have important implications for the recruitment of foreign students. First, the focus in recruitment is clearly on postgraduate (Master and PhD) students, at least in the university sector. The *hogescholen* (non-research college-type institutions in "professional" education) are also very active internationally. In line with their vocation, these institutions recruit foreign students also or even mainly at the Bachelor level. Second, institutions may charge amounts for English-language-taught programmes which are considerably higher than the modest standard Dutch tuition fee rate. This applies both to Dutch and foreign students, but it adds an additional motivation for the recruitment of the latter.

The Netherlands Higher Education and Research Act regulates the admission of holders of foreign qualifications. Beyond that, higher education institutions are autonomous in their admissions decisions, but they have to apply international agreements such as the European Convention on the Equivalence of Diplomas leading to Admission to Universities of 1953 and a few bilateral agreements, e.g. with Germany. The Lisbon Convention on recognition, soon to be ratified by the Netherlands, will give more flexibility to institutions than the 1953 treaty. Whereas today qualifications from signatory countries of the 1953 treaty have to be considered as equivalent to a *Voorbereidend Wetenschappelijk Onderwijs* (VWO), the Dutch upper secondary qualification, the Lisbon Convention only obliges institutions to be transparent and to give an explanation in case of refusal.

Most higher education institutions have specialised administrative personnel that have built up considerable experience in the evaluation of foreign qualifications. In case of doubt, they can avail themselves of the expert services of the Netherlands Organization for International Cooperation in Higher Education (Nuffic). There are regular meetings between Nuffic and institutional admissions staff to discuss admissions procedures and the handling of different foreign diplomas. Academic staff is usually involved in admissions matters only at the postgraduate level. Undergraduate admissions are dealt with by administrative staff at the central or faculty level. The organisational handling of the admission of foreign students varies from institution to institution.

In general terms, the Dutch admissions system is a rather open system, with an emphasis on offering equal opportunities to applicants. The minimal qualification level of first-year undergraduate students is ensured by subject cluster requirements. Applicants must prove that they have studied a given combination of subjects in secondary school, which are required for admission to the chosen study programme. This rule also applies to foreign applicants and can represent a considerable hurdle, even though missing qualifications can be replaced by passing additional tests. For admission into medical studies, for instance, applicants must prove enrolment in mathematics, physics, biology, and chemistry. For applicants from countries with a more generalist upper secondary school curriculum, such as Germany, this is a condition almost impossible to fulfil. At present, NUFFIC is studying the possibility of lowering these requirements for the major countries of origin affected by this regulation.

A *numerus clausus* system (termed *numerus fixus* in the Netherlands) regulates admissions to medical studies and to a number of other programmes with a limited intake. The allocation of places is based on the results of a lottery among the formally eligible applicants; earlier achievement (grades) is not taken into account.[40] In a pilot project in operation since 2000, this model has been challenged: half of the places were assigned in a so-called "decentralised" way by higher education institutions, partly to the best secondary school graduates, partly according to other criteria set by the institution.[41] First results display that there is hardly any difference in later academic achievement between the students admitted on merit and those admitted by means of the lottery.

For admission to English-language-taught programmes, requirements are more tailored to the international clientele. A sufficient command of English is an important requirement. This is mostly to be demonstrated by a set minimum score in the TOEFL test, but Dutch institutions also accept other examinations, such as the IELTS. Since most programmes are at the postgraduate level, a Bachelor's degree or its equivalent and, in some cases, proof of professional experience is required. Motivation letters, and sometimes interviews, are also used as admissions tools.

More recently, the cost and duration of visa procedures have been in the limelight, as they are thought to have negative repercussions on the recruitment of foreign students. The websites of many higher education institutions and of NUFFIC advise foreign applicants to plan their study in the Netherlands one year ahead of the start of the programme.[42] Entry regulations in the Netherlands are more cumbersome than in many other European countries, as a report with the telling title *The Time & the Trouble* confirmed.[43] There are initiatives to improve the unsatisfactory situation: in the "fast-track procedure", for instance, the university or hogeschool puts in the visa application on behalf of the student, collects his or her documents, and provides a guarantee statement to the authorities. The "fast-track procedure" usually

40 For more information on the procedure see the website of the Informatie Beheer Groep (IB Groep or Information Management Group at http://www.ib-groep.nl/studiepunt/showcontent.asp?cid=1000004543. The IB Groep manages the Dutch student loans system, as well as the lottery for *numerus fixus* programmes.

41 The Bachelor's programme in International Business at the University of Maastricht is an interesting example. The faculty aims to enhance the international character of the programme by positively discriminating towards international applicants within the fifty percent admitted directly by the institution. See also http://www.fdewb.unimaas.nl/publicrelations/bachelor/admission_application/index.htm.

42 See for example http://www.nuffic.nl/immigration/

43 Cf. *The Time & the Trouble*, The Hague: Nuffic 2000, www.nuffic.nl/immigration/pdf/timetrouble.pdf

takes four to six weeks. The vast majority of visas for foreign students are now issued this way.

3.6 Sweden: English language Master's and free tuition

In the last few years, Swedish higher education institutions have increased significantly the number of Master's level programmes offered in English: the Swedish Institute's *Master's Programmes 2004/2005* course catalogue[44] lists some 200 such programmes. According to OECD data,[45] the percentage of international students in the whole student body grew from 4.5 percent in 1998 to 7.3 percent in 2001. These figures have continued to increase.[46] Through the English-language Master's programmes, the universities have been able to attract students from a wider number of countries: before, when all or nearly all programmes were taught in Swedish, most foreign students came from the other Nordic countries (Norway, Finland, Denmark, and Iceland). This is still the case for undergraduate programmes, as nearly all of them require Swedish proficiency (there are only five complete undergraduate programmes taught in English in 2004-2005).[47]

In 1993, a reform was passed to decentralise admissions to institutions, which were given the freedom to set their own admissions criteria. However, in reaction to concerns over the legal rights of applicants and in order to make the rules more transparent, more uniform national rules on eligibility, selection, and admissions have been applied from 1997 onwards. Institutional freedom to set any of these criteria is now very limited, especially at the undergraduate entry-level. A recent amendment to the Higher Education Ordinance[48] gives universities and university colleges the right to decide on selection criteria for only up to ten percent of the places in education programmes addressed to new students.[49]

The Higher Education Act sets the framework for institutional internationalisation: it states that higher education institutions should promote a better understanding of other countries and international matters in their activities.[50] Moti-

44 *Master's Programmes 2004/2005*, Swedish Institute, Stockholm 2004, http://www.sweden.se/templates/SISArticle_7739.asp

45 *Education at a Glance*, Paris: OECD 2003, p. 272

46 Sweden had for many years concentrated on exchange students and only lately has made a shift to attract international degree students.

47 For the autumn 2004 entry, out of the 7,000 foreign students applying for undergraduate programmes (taught in Swedish), 1,000 came from Norway and Finland. The total number of applications processed was 115,000, which means that foreign students made up about 6.1 percent of the total. Many more international students applied for Master's programmes directly at the universities, but there is no national data on their numbers.

48 State regulations for the education system are set out in the Education Act, the Higher Education Act and in a number of ordinances. This ordinance dates from 1993 and it is up-dated frequently through amendments.

49 Cf. *Reforms in higher education – a more open system – summary of government bill 2001/02:15*, Ministry of Education and Science Sweden.

50 Cf. http://www.sweden.gov.se/content/1/c6/02/15/40/d894190c.pdf, p. 2

vations of individual institutions to engage in internationalisation are based on the willingness to increase diversity and thereby enrich the campus life, and to improve quality, especially by attracting high-level future researchers by means of the new Master's programmes. Swedish universities are not allowed to charge tuition fees to any students and they receive the same sum of subsidy from the government for each student regardless of nationality. There is therefore no direct financial incentive for universities to recruit international students. Of course, their presence can have indirect financial benefits: they can "save" departments that fail to attract enough national students and thereby help institutions to sustain the total student numbers necessary for maintaining their current staff levels. It is not to be discounted, however, that in the not-too-distant future non-EEA/EU students could be charged tuition fees.

Swedish higher education is divided into undergraduate and research degrees. For the time being, there is no legal notion of a Master's degree: currently, the "Master's level degree" is usually reached after five to six years of integrated full-time university study. This may change with the further implementation of the Bologna reforms. In the meantime, universities can offer separate Master's programmes in English. The individual courses making up a Master's programme can also be followed by Swedish students as part of their study programme, but in most cases more than half (and in some cases even 90 percent) of the students attending the entire programme are foreign.

Undergraduate applicants to Swedish higher education can choose between applying for full programmes (consisting of a set of individual courses), or to individual courses. The admission to undergraduate *programmes* is centrally handled by the VHS (National Admissions Office for Higher Education), with the exception of the five English-language undergraduate programmes, for which selection is done at the institutions. The selection of students for each programme is based on a numerical assessment. This requires that all foreign high-school diplomas be "translated" into the Swedish system by decimal, to allow for an accurate ranking of students. The service is free for students, who can ask for an evaluation of their diploma also independently of an application to a university. The universities, on the other hand, pay a service fee in proportion to the number of programmes and students. All undergraduate programmes dealt with centrally require Swedish proficiency for which proof must be given when applying. This is one of the reasons why most international undergraduate programme students in Sweden come from the other Nordic countries.

The admission of undergraduate students is based on general and specific criteria. The first are the same for all programmes and universities, whereas the latter are programme-specific and intended to make sure that the students are able to follow the programme in question, i.e. they consist, for example, of a requirement in the form of a given level of mathematics or foreign languages in upper secondary school. The specific criteria are to be stated clearly in the prospectus, and they are usually the same for similar programmes in different institutions. Students are ranked on the basis of their qualifications (grades and/or university aptitude test results). If the number of applicants exceeds the number of places, those ranked highest are admitted to the programme. The institutions are not involved in any way in the selection or admission of the undergraduate students for full programmes. The admission to individual courses (both at entry and at advanced level) is by contrast handled directly at the institutions.[51]

The Swedish admissions policy gives all students (international and national alike) a chance to take the *Swedish scholastic aptitude test (SweSAT)*[52], which is organised at most institutions twice a year, as an additional opportunity to gain access to higher education at undergraduate level. Indeed, one third of all places for undergraduate programmes are awarded on the basis of the test results (as opposed to high school grades). While open to everybody, this test is in practice rarely taken by international students, as it requires excellent command of the Swedish language. Indeed, those students who do take the test usually come from the Nordic countries.

The case is different for the Master's level. Because of the increasing number of programmes taught entirely in English, the nationality spread is much wider at this level. The responsibility for the admissions and selection of Master's students rests entirely with the institutions, and within the general eligibility framework, the institutions are free to decide the selection criteria, as well as who is to carry out the selection. Most commonly, the admissions office or the international office checks the eligibility of the student, while teaching and research staff carry out actual selection. Foreign grades are converted into Swedish grades in the eligibility check process by means of a table or a formula prescribed by the National Agency for Higher Education (HSV). The universities can, however, freely decide in individual cases on the student's eligibility. Letters of recommendation, pieces of written work, personal statements, etc. can also be taken into account in the selection procedure.

As a general rule, the procedures for the admission of foreign and domestic students are the same, with the exception that in most cases foreign applicants must prove a sufficient proficiency in Swedish and/or English, depending on the language of instruction of the programme or course in question. This requirement can be waived on the discretion of the department. As explained above, because of the language requirement, international competition for places at the undergraduate level is very limited.

An interesting feature of international admissions at postgraduate level is that due to the current higher education structure in Sweden (the Master's

51 The institutions have to respect the national admissions criteria for entry-level courses. For courses requiring previous university study (advanced courses) universities are freer to apply their own evaluation.

52 The National Agency for Higher Education is responsible for the test.

level does not exist yet as a separate level), the number of Swedish students applying for the ready-tailored Master's programmes is very low. Swedish students often attend the same courses as the Master's programme students, but as part of their integrated undergraduate study. Therefore, while assessed on the same criteria, Swedish and international students in practice compete in different categories for places at the postgraduate level.

3.7 United Kingdom: a central admissions service for undergraduates

Traditionally, British higher education has displayed a considerable degree of "internationalisation". In earlier days, a high standard of teaching and research and the reputation that went with it, as well as the former colonies as a large pool of international students contributed to this. More recently, this trend has been sustained and even strengthened. British institutions, as well as national-level organisms, such as the British Council, have started to market British higher education worldwide and to actively recruit students. Today, the UK boasts a total of 270,000 foreign students[53] (equivalent to 15 percent of its overall student population), making it the second destination of international students in the world after the United States. Some institutions, such as the London School of Economics, have a share of foreign students in excess of 50 percent.

UK internationalisation approaches are linked to considerations of quality, on the one hand, and the funding mechanisms governing British tertiary institutions, on the other. The "quality orientation" means that institutions seek to attract the most talented students possible, regardless of whether they are British or foreign. Obviously, this applies to prestigious universities, for example those belonging to the "Russell Group", much more than to institutions of lesser reputation.

The funding aspect is largely a result of the fee policies in the UK. Unlike in a number of other countries, higher education in the UK[54] is not free of charge for students. After a recent reform of the UK higher education law, universities will be able to charge a "top-up" fee of up to £ 3,000 per year for domestic (and EU) undergraduate students from 2006 onwards. At present, the fee amount is considerably lower. There is no such limit, and there will not be any in the future, for non-EU students. At the postgraduate level, institutions are already now free to fix the level of their fees, and will remain so. The above makes it clear why to attract international students can be financially beneficial for higher education institutions. First, the fee income from international non-EU students is on average higher than from UK students. Second, programmes with fewer students than the agreed quota receive less than the

53 Cf. data for the year 2003/03 of the Higher Education Statistics Agency quoted in British Council, *Vision 2020. Forecasting International Student Mobility*, London 2004, p. 11

54 The information and figures below refer to England and Wales. Scotland does not charge fees from its own nationals and from EU citizens at the undergraduate level.

normal government subsidy, making it attractive to fill up these places with foreigners. Third, the ceiling for undergraduate tuition fees from 2006 onwards is being perceived as rather low by some of the more prestigious institutions, who are therefore toying with the idea to either increase their share of postgraduates, or to admit a higher proportion of non-EU international students.

There is no legislation in the UK which deals directly with admission to higher education. Institutions are autonomous in the admission and selection of their students – but they are required to act in accordance with indirectly relevant legislation pertaining, amongst other things, to sex, race, and disability. In addition, in quantitative terms (student numbers), admissions are indirectly controlled by the state by means of funding mechanisms: universities receive a contribution for every student they recruit. Student numbers are pre-agreed, and institutions are penalised if they recruit more than the pre-agreed number.[55]

While universities and colleges are autonomous in deciding whom to admit and whom not, national-level institutions are not totally absent from the admissions process. But their roles are limited to those of administrative facilitators and decision support mechanisms. The most important one of these bodies is UCAS, the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, the service of which is described in detail later in this study. UCAS deals exclusively with undergraduates, from the UK as from other countries. Postgraduate applications are exclusively dealt with by the institutions themselves, as are applications to music schools. Participation in UCAS is not obligatory for universities and colleges, but the vast majority of institutions avail themselves of the organisation's services. Applicants apply through UCAS to up to six programmes of their choice. UCAS forwards the applications to these institutions and communicates their decision to the applicants. The applicants in turn communicate their choice (if they make any) to UCAS, which informs the institutions. In a lesser way, a second national-level entity, the UK NARIC, offers administrative support. Unlike UCAS, the NARIC deals exclusively with foreign students. Essentially, the NARIC supports institutions to assess foreign educational credentials and advises them on their comparability with UK qualifications. It also helps universities and colleges to identify forged documents. The NARIC becomes active only when institutions demand its services.

Inside the higher education institutions, the process of selection and admission of students is predominantly a matter for academics. This does not mean that there are no central-level or faculty-based administrative units involved in the process. But these mostly play the role of an administrative

55 Universities are generally free to recruit students to study any discipline, with the exception of medicine, dentistry, and initial teacher training, where quotas apply. If institutions fail to attract and admit an agreed minimum number of students in these subject areas, a deduction is made from their state grant. The information contained in the previous two paragraphs is taken from the *Second Report for Work Package 1: Legislation, Policy and Statistics*, August 1999 of the ADMIT project (op. cit.).

support, and usually do not have a say in the admissions decisions. This applies both to the undergraduate and to the postgraduate level. As is obvious, the central role of the academics in the admission of international students places a heavy (time) burden on the academics involved. Despite this, it has so far been kept up, not the least because it is seen as instrumental in securing the low drop-out rates in UK higher education.

The exact criteria applied vary from one programme to the other. In general, a logic based on academic merit is the guiding principle. Secondary school grades play a central role, as may more personal statements, such as motivation letters or essays. In principle, the criteria applied to international students are the same as those applicable to UK applicants. On top, proof of a sufficient command of the English language by means of the TOEFL or IELTS is usually required. While short-listed UK students mostly go through a personal interview, the selection of foreign students is predominantly paper-based. There are (usually) no quotas for foreign students (except in medical disciplines), who are in free competition with UK nationals.

While an institution is free to admit as many students as it likes to any of its programmes, most British higher education institutions limit the number of places per programme. Unless there are fewer applicants than places, admissions are usually competitive. In a highly diversified system (in quality and prestige terms) such as the UK one, this means that the degree of competitiveness and the requirements on the prior achievements of applicants vary considerably between institutions.

4 The rationale of international student admissions

Various aspects and questions can influence an institution's approach to the admission of foreign students. What is the role of international students at an institution? Is there a need to recruit them, and if so, for what reasons? Are they paying customers or future ambassadors (or both)? Why and in what way may they help shaping an institution's international profile? Building up on these questions, others arise, more closely linked to the actual admissions process. How many and what kind of students should be admitted? Should only the best applicants be selected, or is it sufficient to make sure that applicants have a good chance to succeed? Should they be given the same opportunities as domestic students? Who should be responsible for the admissions process? Many more issues could be raised in this context. In an ideal world, a given higher education institution would have a deliberate internationalisation policy, answer all these questions systematically, and develop the rationale of admissions and selection processes on this basis. In practice, this is rare, but a range of frequently quoted "motivations" can be identified. The rationale for the admission of foreign students can be divided into two "subgroups":

- First, the rationale of having foreign students in the institution at all. It might be part of the institutional policy, or part of government policy and result in corresponding incentives or obligations for higher education institutions.
- Second, the rationale of actual admissions / selection processes. It builds on the first, more general rationale, and refers to the anticipated outcomes of the way the admission and selection of foreign students is organised at the institutional level.

4.1 The general driving force behind foreign student recruitment

The driving force behind foreign student recruitment refers to the rationale of having foreign degree students in an institution at all. This is all the more relevant as numerous institutions have for a long time focused on student mobility, i.e. on the intake of foreign exchange students as part of their internationalisation strategy. At most institutions, several motivations were mentioned and more or less emphasised depending on the position (and sincerity) of the interviewee. These range from commitment to development policy to financial (market-driven) considerations, from the building of an international profile to demand-driven recruitment, from the need to compensate for a lack of demand at national level to an "equal opportunities for all" approach.

Political drives: commitment to foreign and development policy

The ambition to educate foreign elites and potential future "ambassadors" of the host country is one possible driving force behind foreign student recruitment. This serves the national interest and, with the prestige and connections that come from educating foreign elites, the institutional interest. It is particularly emphasised in France, but also applies in other countries. Whether institutions have internalised this rationale is sometimes difficult to ascertain: they may simply be repeating government statements. In practice, considerations of this kind might be linked to the financial framework and influence the establishment of scholarship programmes or decisions of whether or not to apply tuition fees to foreign students. In addition, it can translate into the aspiration to send competent and motivated people back to their countries.

Financial considerations: foreign students pay tuition fees

In many countries and institutions, fee income from foreign students has become an important motivation for the recruitment of international students. However, it would mostly be quoted amongst other rationales, as diversity, international profile, etc.

Financial considerations may be a driving force in different ways:

First, institutions may have to recruit foreign students as an additional source of funding. This is, for instance, the case for all Australian universities: an asset in the beginning, fee income from international students is now a set part of higher education institutions' budgets that are agreed upon with the government.

Second, in a similar but less compelling way, financial considerations may play a role where institutions are allowed to charge higher fees for foreign than for national students. Examples are UK institutions or US public institutions. For UK institutions, the fees payable by EU and domestic students are laid down by the government, but universities can charge substantially higher tuition fees for "overseas", i.e. non-EU students. On average, these amount to approximately £ 7,500 or € 11,300 a year.[56] Public US institutions may even charge higher fees for all "out-of-state" (hence also foreign) students. The latter are, on average, charged three times as much as in-state students.

Third, some institutions might only be allowed to charge fees (or charge substantially higher fees) for a number of specific programmes. MBA programmes at Swiss higher education institutions are an example, or the English-language-taught programmes at Dutch universities. These programmes often specifically target international students.

Fourth, for private institutions, fee income is a general incentive for student recruitment. However, as all students are usually charged the same fees, there is no specific financial incentive for the recruitment of foreign students, apart from the fact that they enlarge the pool of potential candidates.

56 For an overview of fees for international students cf. http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/statistics/fees/survey03-04.asp

Fifth, for institutions that are not allowed to charge substantial tuition fees there is no direct financial incentive to recruit international students. In Sweden or France, for instance, government subsidies do not depend on the nationality of the student cohort. Still, financial considerations can play a role, as foreign students can be charged for additional services. Also, there might be an indirect incentive to recruit international students: for programmes where places are not filled by national students, international students can help to fill the classes and hence the university can keep up its total numbers of both students and staff.

Sixth, financial considerations may also discourage institutions from recruiting foreign students: this is the case in Switzerland, where cantonal universities get additional subsidies for students from other cantons but not for foreign students.[57]

Internationalisation: the enhancement of an international profile

Be it as a consequence of a longstanding tradition or recent trends, most institutions believe in the intrinsic value of internationalisation and in its positive effect on the overall quality of an institution. For some institutions, especially those with a strong focus on research, being a university has always meant to be “universal” and hence international. For others, internationalisation is closely linked to innovation and part of a modernisation strategy. In both cases, the recruitment of foreign students is an important component of building an international profile: it means operating on a global stage and having an international and multicultural body of students and graduates, who may even stay at the institution as research and teaching staff. The building of an international profile can be driven by different, though interlinked, motivations. First, it can be linked to quality considerations and global recognition. Second, it can be mandatory for specialised institutions and departments because their field requires an international approach. Finally, local, i.e. non-mobile students can be confronted with an international environment.

An institution may aim to enhance its international profile because it allows a certain “quality assurance” and puts the institution’s activities and standing in an international context, as opposed to an “isolated” national position. Global recognition and reputation building are part of this rationale, but also the recruitment of well-qualified students. An institution that widens its recruitment beyond the national pool is more likely to get good quality students. Some institutions in smaller countries where national demand might be insufficient for given programmes, like in Switzerland, Sweden or the Netherlands, strongly emphasise this aspect. Diversity and “being international” is also seen as a criterion for quality as such. Students (and staff) of different

57 Basic subventions to Swiss universities take into account the percentage of foreign students at an institution. However, the sum falls far behind the intercantonal redistribution of income (see chapter 3.1).

nationalities and backgrounds contribute with their experience and make sure that various points of view are represented. At institutions in non-English speaking countries, e.g. in the Netherlands, the rationale of having foreign students for quality matters is reinforced by the fact that most of the specialised literature and hence course texts are in English, and goes hand-in-hand with the introduction and reinforcement of English-language-taught programmes. All of these quality-related aspects are particularly important for research institutions, for their universal approach to scholarship and the often quoted aim of recruiting and preparing future “world leading scholars”.

Second, an international profile is simply mandatory for a range of specialised institutions or specific programmes. In these cases, the above explained quality rationale is further emphasised by the specific requirements of the respective field. Business and engineering schools are a good example, but also programmes like International Relations or Applied Languages. Business schools, in particular, tend to operate and compete with each other at international level. This is demonstrated by the proliferation of the international rankings of schools. Furthermore, these institutions need to cater for an international graduate profile requested by the labour market, an aspect particularly emphasised by French engineering *grandes écoles* like the *Ecole Nationale des Arts et des Métiers* ENSAM or *the Institut National de Sciences Appliquées* INSA Lyon. In order to achieve this, curriculum internationalisation, mobility and the continuous contact and exchange of experience with other nationalities are considered vital.

Confronting local students with an international environment is a third general motivation for the building of an international profile. Mutual enrichment, the exposure of staff to a multicultural environment, curriculum internationalisation and the ambition to provide an international study experience for both national and foreign students are arguments that are often quoted. The presence of foreign students might also motivate national students to gain experience abroad. This is particularly emphasised at small, regional institutions like Dalarna University in Sweden or the University of Ballarat in Australia, where internationalisation is part of a whole modernisation package, born out of the competitive disadvantage of being on the periphery. They see internationalisation not as an end in itself, but as a means of institutional profiling and attractiveness enhancement.

Some institutions quantify a projected international profile and work with **targets**, i.e. percentages of foreign students to be reached at a given time. Targets can be department-specific or institutional. Entrepreneurial institutions often use targets, and, in many cases, there is a link between quantified targets and budgetary considerations. For example, most Australian universities have set targets for international student numbers, and these are directly linked to the institutional budget. Some of them treat this information as confidential. However, a frequently quoted scope is 25 percent both as a target and limit of foreign student numbers. This may vary hugely between different departments, but most business schools and departments work with targets. The French private business school *Ecole de Management* EM Lyon, for example, aims at achieving the profile of a “European school” with a target of a foreign student population of 50 percent by 2008.

Sustainability: secure the student body and research base

Institutions might need to recruit students from a bigger pool than the national one for some programmes or faculties for which demand at national level, especially in smaller countries, is not high enough. Some science departments at a number of Dutch or Swedish institutions, for instance, would not get enough students to justify their continuation if they only relied on national applicants. In a similar way, many highly specialised offerings can only survive if they aim at an international target group.

Also, the university sector and especially those universities that are heavily geared towards research often need to recruit foreign students to secure their research base. They therefore focus on the postgraduate sector, and their drive for the recruitment of good Master’s students is to create a pool of potential PhD candidates, of whom not enough could be recruited from the domestic market. The Dutch Wageningen University or the Swedish Kungliga Tekniska Högskolan KTH, the Royal Institute of Technology, are good examples. In line with this policy, many research institutions have quantified targets for the recruitment of postgraduate students in general rather than for foreign students specifically. . The Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, the Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule ETH Zürich, as an “international research university”, aims to raise the percentage of Master’s and PhD students to half its student population, but does not specify targets for the recruitment of foreign students.

Equal opportunities: no discrimination of foreign students

Offering equal opportunities to all applicants may be more of a general underlying philosophy than an explicit strategy to recruit foreign students. In general, no discrimination is the credo, i.e. students should be admitted because of their qualifications and potential, regardless of their background or nationality. Non-discrimination may equally be part of an “open access” system or integral to selection. Most highly selective institutions, e.g. private US universities like New York University, do not discriminate against international students in order to recruit the best students from a global pool.

Although almost all institutions state that no applicants should be discriminated against on the basis of nationality or place of prior education, this argument is often emphasised by institutions that do not systematically recruit foreign students. These can be institutions that attract large numbers of foreign students anyway because of their reputation or location. Another slightly different example is publicly funded institutions whose mission is to offer, in the first place, higher education opportunities to local students. This is for instance the case of Swiss cantonal universities like the universities of Basel or Lausanne, which neither seek to attract foreign students nor discriminate against them. Foreign students should have the same opportunities as Swiss students, if they hold an equivalent entry qualification, and the same opportunities as they would have in their home countries: they need to prove that they could study the same subject there.

In practice, many publicly funded institutions with a strong egalitarian tradition and in principle open to all applicants need to make sure they strike the right balance and do not disregard local students. For instance, some US public institutions with an international reputation (and hence competitive selection) face conflict with the local community as international students are seen as taking places off the state students. Some institutions have responded by making admissions criteria for international students higher than for nationals. In Sweden, for eligibility international students are treated on a par with national students. In practice, however, the inclusion of national students is still seen as very important: at Dalarna University, all eligible Swedish students get a place, and remaining places are awarded to the best eligible international students. The Royal Institute of Technology would always grant a place to the very few Swedish students who apply to English-language-taught Master's programmes, as long as they meet the minimum requirements. French public universities receive international undergraduate applications earlier in the year. Despite the "open doors policy", foreign applicants are often admitted under stricter criteria in order to leave enough places for nationals.

Demand-driven international admissions

Many European institutions have international policies focused on exchanges and the enhancement of mobility. This is, for instance, the case with some of the visited Swiss higher education institutions and French public universities. Especially in the latter, awareness of the importance of foreign degree students is increasing only as the number of international applications forces institutions to react. Thus, suitable admissions and selection procedures are often put in place in response to demand and are not the result of deliberate policy decisions. Most of these institutions do not systematically recruit foreign students. Having said this, a similar argument was raised by some major Australian universities with a very explicit international agenda, like Monash University. In these cases, large student demand reinforces and influences existing policy and leads to the establishment of ever more developed structures for international admissions.

The above stated rationales do not exclude each other but appear in different combinations and with different priorities. Most Australian universities are very frank about the financial motivation of foreign student recruitment, but also emphasise the importance of confronting local students with an international environment and creating cross-cultural awareness, or aim at recruiting the best possible quality students from all over the world. Policy and international staff emphasise that these rationales are not only "window-dressing", although no one would deny the importance of financial motivations. French engineering schools, like INSA Lyon, recruit foreign students to build an international profile because it is mandatory in the field, but also state that they want to educate ambassadors for France. The private New York University does not need to recruit foreign students actively because of the high demand, but the institution aims at getting the best students from a global pool. This goes hand-in-hand with offering equal opportunities for all: all applicants are assessed on the same premises and by the same staff, and all students pay the same fees, regardless of where they come from. Finally, many Swiss universities, like the University of Lausanne, focus on exchange students, and hence, the admission of foreign degree students is demand-driven. Similarly, non-discrimination policies are in place and foreign applicants are admitted on the same premises as domestic students. In addition, a generally favourable attitude to the internationalisation of the student body and the conviction that Swiss students benefit from an international campus are underlined. The faculty level rather emphasises quality aspects and the necessity to recruit from a bigger pool than the national one to get good quality students.

The different rationales underlying foreign student recruitment are linked and influence admissions and selection processes.

4.2 The rationale of the admissions and selection process

The rationale of the admissions and selection process refers to its outcomes, i.e. the **characteristics of the admitted foreign student cohort**. First, foreign students can be admitted on the same basis as domestic students, and hence with a qualification that is as close as possible to the national entry qualification. Consequently, admitted foreign students should have the same state of knowledge as national students. Second, students can be admitted so they are likely to succeed in a given programme. In this case, the admitted foreign students will not necessarily have the same knowledge as domestic students, but their preparation meets the requirements of the programme they applied for. Third, foreign students may be selected from a pool of applicants who all meet the requirements. In this case, admitted students should be the best from a "global pool", in an attempt to foster academic excellence.

These outcomes are linked to the way admissions and selection are organised at a given higher education institution. Additional considerations are the composition of the classroom and the creation of a sense of responsibility of those involved. Other, frequently quoted additional rationales in this context are rapidity, transparency, and avoidance of fraud.

Admit students with qualifications as close as possible to the national entry qualification

Literally every admissions process contains a first eligibility check, where the equivalence between a foreign applicant's qualification and the national entry qualification is assessed. Yet, at some institutions, this eligibility check is identical with the entire admissions procedure, and no subsequent selection takes place. This is the case in countries with an open system for national applicants, like the French university sector, Switzerland or the Netherlands, and especially at the undergraduate level. Domestic applicants get a place if they are holders of the respective national upper secondary qualification *baccalauréat*, *Matura* or *VWO*. Hence, for international applicants the policy is to admit them if they can present an entry qualification that is equivalent to the national entry qualification.

The University of Lausanne, for instance, considers its "open doors policy" a fairer and more reliable approach. The first year is seen as a preparatory year with a control at the end, and only one repetition is permitted. The reasoning: the university does not want to take the responsibility for how many people it has to educate in a certain discipline. In accordance with the "non-discrimination" or "equal opportunities" approach, foreign students are admitted on the same premises as Swiss students, i.e. with qualifications as close to the Swiss *Matura* as possible.[58] As the quality of the *Matura* as an upper secondary qualification is highly valued, this is also regarded as a guarantee for getting good quality students. Also the examination held in Fribourg for students who do not pass the eligibility check is based on the *Matura*. This trend is reinforced by the fact that, at the institutional level, undergraduate applications are handled by the central administrative structure. The same would be true for most Dutch institutions.

If academics assess undergraduate applications, as is the case at French universities, the same underlying principle of equivalence can be slightly more flexible. While "only" the equivalence to the *baccalaureat* is checked, a quasi selection takes place, especially as there is no established definition of what "equivalence" really means. The latter becomes even more evident at the postgraduate level, where academics assess applications at almost all visited institutions.

In some cases where a selection takes place, like in Sweden, equivalence to the national entry qualification may be emphasised. For students applying for

58 Foreign students wishing to study in Switzerland also have to prove that they could study the same subject in their home country (see chapter 3.1). Interestingly, at French public universities, the opposite is the case: if a student could factually study the same subject in his or her home country, this is often used as a reason for refusal.

undergraduate programmes, the procedure and criteria are exactly the same as for national applicants. As the selection is done by means of a merit-based ranking, as accurate as possible a "translation" of the foreign applicant's upper secondary qualification is done for precise numerical comparison with domestic students.

While it might seem easy to gain a university place in systems where "only" an equivalent entry qualification is required, the admissions process can be a considerable hurdle for foreign students. This is especially true if the applicant's qualification and the national upper secondary qualification follow a different logic, e.g. field-specific or general. To a lesser extent, the situation is similar at postgraduate level: if an equivalent of a national Bachelor's degree is decisive for admission, aspects like its duration, the exact number of credits, and the chosen specialisation are emphasised. Frequently, foreign applicants have to "become part" of the national system and compensate for the gaps in their curriculum before they can commence their studies.

Admit students who are likely to complete a given programme

To recruit students who are likely to succeed in the chosen programme is a rationale that is frequently quoted by both admissions and academic staff in several countries and institutions. It is often the case for institutions that are somehow situated "half way" between an open admissions system and a highly selective system, aspiring not to recruit the very best, but still good and motivated students. "Duty of care" is frequently mentioned in this context: if an admission offer is made to a student, the institution or department is actually expressing its confidence that this student will be able to succeed in the chosen programme. This is especially important for foreign students, who may have to make a major investment or leave a family behind.

In practice, this rationale is closely linked to, and often identical with the principle of equivalence. French and Swiss universities, in particular, follow the logic that an equivalent to their national upper secondary qualification, together with a proof of language skills, should ensure a student's potential to succeed in a given study programme. Teaching and research staff who assess a qualification's equivalence would aim to make sure that students have sufficient academic skills to succeed, or otherwise reorient them towards a lower level or different specialisation.

"Finding the right match"-philosophy is common at most Australian institutions. An often-quoted aim is to avoid a student wasting his or her and others' time and money. Hence, good chances for success should be ensured by adequate admissions requirements and by finding the right programme for a given applicant. Some Australian universities also monitor the performance of student cohorts of different nationalities and adapt their requirements accordingly. The main concern of these universities, like of some of their US counterparts, is often not to recruit the best students, but to increase their foreign student numbers while keeping good standards. They therefore try to get more applications so as to be able to do some selection.

Even though in literally all cases an equivalent qualification to the one requested from national applicants is a basic requirement, this is much less emphasised and regulated where the main rationale is an applicant's capacity to succeed. In other words, the point of reference is not the national qualification, but the requirements of a specific programme. Especially where applications are assessed on an individual basis, programme-specific aspects gain importance, e.g. the motivation of a student as reflected in a motivation letter or in an interview, work experience, or proof of previous academic or creative work. This rationale is frequently found at the undergraduate level or for postgraduate programmes with a professional focus.

Academic excellence: selection of the best from a bigger pool than the national one

Academic excellence as a driving force is linked to the above explained quality rationale of recruiting the best students from a global pool. Many US institutions, for example, aim to select the "world's best students", and therefore need to attract a wide international pool of applications. Institutions in other countries, especially where a financial motivation is missing, like in Sweden, often do not aim at attracting large numbers of international students, but rather to increase the number of good applications and be able to select the best.

Academic excellence is emphasised most at postgraduate level. Institutions with a strong research focus in all visited countries see Master's programmes as a means for getting good foreign doctoral students and maybe future "world-leading researchers". Having said this, there are some exceptions to this rule: INSA Lyon, a French engineering school, for instance, focuses on recruitment at undergraduate level, arguing that this would leave more time to educate international students and bring them to a good quality degree level. Like at most French *grandes écoles* with an international profile, foreign students are selected through specifically designed separate *concours* or competitive selection procedures.

This rationale translates into highly selective admissions systems, which work either by means of high standards and demanding requirements, or through specifically designed selection procedures. It influences an institution's policy and might lead to the creation of more English-language Master's programmes, like for instance in the Netherlands or in Sweden, or of specific and highly selective channel programmes for international students as in the case of some French engineering schools like the above mentioned INSA Lyon. It influences the way foreign students are recruited: usually, these institutions do not participate in fairs, as these are believed to increase only the number of weak or mediocre applications and not those of best quality. Instead, institutions go for targeted recruitment at renowned foreign schools or higher education institutions. Also, the selection of the academically best and most suited students for a programme usually requires the involvement of academics, especially at postgraduate level.

Additional aspects: responsibility and composition of the classroom (diversity)

The rationale to **create a shared responsibility for the admitted students at the institutional side** was mentioned by several actors at French and Dutch institutions as an argument for the involvement of both academics and administrative staff in the admissions process, and for a clear definition of their respective roles. The reasoning is to see the admissions process as an integral part of and not as something prior to a given programme. Programme directors, who will later teach and tutor the students, should be responsible for their admission, be it through direct involvement or through setting clear criteria, and ensure that the chosen students are (at least) likely to succeed.

Students also expect to complete their programme if they are admitted. If they experience difficulties on the course, they should be able to address those academics or administrative admissions staff who admitted them and discuss if their difficulties are due to a non-relevant background or insufficient previous qualifications. The admissions process should therefore be organised in a way that those in charge, i.e. administrative admissions staff and academics, feel responsible for their decisions.

Diversity, i.e. a balanced spread of different nationalities in the classrooms, is an often-quoted rationale for the admission of foreign students. It is linked to building an international profile, particularly to its quality-related aspects and to the creation of an international campus. In the words of an interviewee, "quality comes alongside with diversity. There is nothing worse than monoculture".[59] Nonetheless, none of the visited institutions works with official quotas per nationality or world region, nor would government regulations permit them. Diversity is rather pursued by means of targeted marketing and recruitment activities.

There are a few exceptions to this rule: at the Dutch Hanzehogeschool, an institute of higher professional education, applicants for a programme in international communication are handpicked by the academic responsible. As the importance of diversity in the courses is inherent to the programme, no more than three to four foreign students of the same nationality will be granted admission. Also at some American institutions, a balanced spread of nationalities was mentioned as a criterion for selection between equally good

59 Cf. Interview with Alexander Bergmann, Dean of HEC Lausanne

applications: the Union College, for example, tries to have a balanced spread of different nationalities in the classrooms.[60]

In Australia, diversity is a particularly “hot topic”: Australian universities have experienced a strong growth in international student numbers over the past years, with students coming predominantly from Asian countries. To date, no official quotas or caps[61] limit foreign student numbers at Australian institutions. A limit of 25 percent is being discussed, and some institutions are starting to introduce caps e.g. in Business Studies, the subject with most foreign applicants. To guarantee an acceptable quality standard is only one motivation for the introduction of caps. Especially where there is a high demand from a single region or country such as China or India, institutions try to maintain some diversity in the courses for academic reasons and to avoid over-reliance on a single market.

4.3 Different rationales and foreign student admissions: a causal relationship?

The importance accorded to each of the rationales influences the “design” of an admissions system. The different models for the rationalisation of administrative admissions procedures and for the selection of foreign students that will be presented in subsequent chapters relate back to these rationales. For example, only where financial considerations play a role would an institution consider outsourcing all actions linked to foreign students – such as marketing and student support – to a company. In most cases, there is not a clear-cut causal relationship between a set of rationales and foreign student admissions as a whole.

First, the motivations behind foreign student recruitment and the different rationales of actual admissions procedures are linked. For example, a truly international profile will only be achieved if there is diversity in the classrooms, and diversity, in turn, may be directly associated with the quality of an institution. Quality, sustainability and academic excellence are all important where not enough good students can be recruited at the national level. If admissions and academic staff feel responsible for the admitted students, they will make sure that these are likely to succeed and vice versa.

Second, the same rationale can translate into very different practices:

- ♦ Equal opportunities are emphasised in open and selective admissions systems. In open systems, the equivalence of foreign entry qualifications with the national ones is crucial and may be assessed by administrative or teaching and research staff. Equal opportunities based on merit or

60 However, at many US institutions, diversity as an admissions rationale is often understood in terms of ethnic diversity (of US ethnic groups, rather than international as such), first generation university goers (i.e. people whose parents have not been to university), and gender balance.

61 Caps refer to the maximum percentage of foreign students per programme, department, or institution.

potential may also translate into a highly selective system, in line with a strategy to recruit the best students regardless of nationality.

- ♦ A highly individualised assessment process of the applicant's potential and motivation or a more administrative assessment of the equivalence of an entry qualification can both help determine if a candidate is likely to succeed.
- ♦ If academic excellence is the aim, a selection takes place. If applications are assessed individually, academics will play a more important role in the actual selection process. Automated testing systems or rankings based on marks can also be the main tools in highly selective systems.
- ♦ Diversity can be ensured through an individualised selection procedure, but also at an initial level through targeted marketing, or even formal or informal quotas.
- ♦ The argument for shared responsibility is associated with the involvement of both administrative staff and academics in the admissions process.

The two most important decisions to be derived from a set of rationales might be:

1) if national and foreign students are treated in the same way or if different procedures and separate organisational structures are used for national and foreign students.

In this sense, some institutions have gone as far as to close down their international office, stating that the entire institution has an integrated international focus. At others, the international office is only in charge of mobility programmes, whereas the admission of degree students is handled separately. At the other "extreme" of the scale, the international office or a company deals with international admissions in a totally separate way from national admissions.

2) if the focus of an institution is on the undergraduate or postgraduate level.

A university with a strong research focus will usually try to delegate undergraduate admissions to (central) administrative staff but establish more sophisticated admissions procedures for the postgraduate level. Institutions or programmes that deliberately focus on the recruitment of undergraduate students, which might be the case for engineering or business schools, may have very elaborate admissions procedures for the undergraduate level.

The following are examples of cases where the admission of foreign students follows a clear institutional policy.

Wageningen University, a specialised technical university, defines itself as a research and quality-oriented international institution. Foreign student numbers at Wageningen have been growing steadily over the past years, and are now at 30 to 40 percent. Formerly, the university had an international office and offered special programmes for international students. This was changed in a deliberate policy decision, and all international actions were moved to the university's core business and integrated into different departments (e.g. the Education department including student affairs, educational marketing, strategy development, etc.). In line with its research focus, Wageningen concentrates on the postgraduate level in its targeted recruitment of foreign students. Whereas the few foreign applications for Bachelor's programmes are handled centrally, applications for Master's programmes are distributed to the different departments after a first central eligibility check and assessed by committees of academics. All Master's programmes are taught in English. As is the case for English-language-taught programmes at all Dutch institutions, there is also a financial incentive for foreign student recruitment.

The French Engineering school INSA Lyon is equally quality-oriented and also defines itself as an international school, but builds its foreign student intake on a very different policy. With 25 percent of its student body being foreign students, 48 percent at research level, it claims to have the highest percentage of international students in France. Unlike most grandes écoles, the INSA engineering schools, five in total in the whole of France, mainly recruit students at the undergraduate level. This policy also applies to foreign student recruitment. The argument is in line with one of the institution's missions: the preparation of engineers for the labour market. Especially in the case of foreign students, it is considered important to allow enough time for a quality preparation, to allow the students to become "normal" INSA students, go abroad on exchange programmes, etc. Therefore, although the institution also admits foreign students at postgraduate level, much more sophisticated and elaborate recruitment and selection procedures are in place at the undergraduate level. These include targeted recruitment two years beforehand at a network of schools in the source countries, recommendation letters by schoolteachers and pre-assessment by national correspondents, etc. In addition, the bulk of foreign students are admitted into special regionally oriented "channel" programmes that correspond to the first two years of study. These are also open to French students, and facilitate curriculum internationalisation and the building of an international campus. These programmes, as well as the admission of foreign students, are coordinated by the international office and are completely separate from the admission of French students. The latter are admitted in a national, merit-based *concours*, where hardly any foreign students would be able to compete.[62]

62 Higher education institutions may focus on the recruitment of foreign undergraduate students for the most different reasons. Indiana University Purdue University at Indianapolis (IUPUI), for example considers that international undergraduates contribute more to internationalising the campus, as they attend lectures and mingle with local students to a greater extent. International undergraduates are also preferred for financial reasons: most of them pay full tuition fees, whereas postgraduate students are frequently funded by the school.

Not all institutions have such a clear-cut strategy, and in many cases, the different elements of an admissions system have been developed in response to problems, e.g. the volume of foreign applications. Furthermore, in countries where financial considerations play a predominant role, e.g. in Australia, there is often not a clear focus on the postgraduate or undergraduate level, but a very clear separation between international and national students. Drives like the need to make quick decisions, transparency and customer service – market-related considerations – have resulted in the establishment of companies, such as at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) and at Monash University, or at least of a highly sophisticated international office like at Deakin University. The struggle is for ever more “delegation”, i.e. capacity to make decisions without the need to send applications to the faculties, in order to ensure a quick turnaround. All other rationales, like diversity, curriculum internationalisation, and getting the “best possible quality students from all over the world” are also emphasised at Australian universities.

5 Information and enquiry management

Dealing with enquiries and systematically following up on an initial contact with applicants represents one of the biggest workloads for the staff at international and admissions offices, and can easily become unmanageable as the number of foreign enquiries and applications increases.

The models implemented by institutions to manage enquiries differ. They are shaped by the volume of enquiries and applications received and the policies, budgets and equipment in place to deal with them. The main decisions in this context refer to:

- where and by whom enquiries are handled;
- what "tools" are used for enquiry management.

Enquiries may be managed within a university or by an external company. Within an institution, the international office, the admissions office, a central information desk, administrative units or academics at the different departments may be responsible for responding to and following up on queries. Even national-level agencies may deal with general enquiries as part of their information and counselling activities.

Depending on where enquiries are handled, different kinds of tools are used to streamline the process. Most institutions emphasise the importance of clear and well-communicated criteria to allow self-assessment by the candidate and avoid unnecessary queries. Much is being invested in detailed, user-friendly web portals, accessible in different languages. Some institutions have even leased highly developed web-based customer service software. Standardised emails and letters and automated mailing of information packages are also quoted to be helpful. Where an external company is in charge, detailed protocols ensure compliance with the institutional policy.

The following **examples** clarify different possibilities of enquiry management.

5.1 Managing large volumes of enquiries: special measures

Large institutions with high foreign student numbers may need to put in place special measures for enquiry management. Some major Australian universities are good examples, with their enormous increase in foreign student numbers, and budgets that are closely linked to foreign student intake.

First, all visited Australian universities emphasise the importance of clearly communicated criteria and thresholds or entry scores to allow future students to assess their own qualifications and chances of being admitted.[63]

63 For undergraduate admissions, for instance, the University of Melbourne, publishes prerequisite tables with subject clusters required for a number of programmes and different types of score levels on its website and in its brochure: "minimum levels" for the different programmes, so-called "guaranteed levels" students are always granted a place with, and "indicative scores" students would have good chances with. Cf. chapter 7.3.2

Second, two interesting approaches to enquiry management were identified at the visited institutions:

- ♦ outsourcing enquiry management to an (invisible) service centre;
- ♦ employment of a web-based customer service hosted by the institution.

A number of Australian universities have outsourced enquiry management to the **service centre**, an e-contact centre responding to and managing relationships with prospective students on behalf of educational institutions.[64] The service centre manages enquiries and maintains the contact with candidates until they actually apply, then forwards the application to the institution. The idea is to use web-based technology to streamline enquiry management and combine it with a highly personalised service. The centre's work is based on detailed protocols issued by universities to ensure compliance with each university's policy. For special cases, the service centre gets back to a specific contact person at the university. The centre is invisible to applicants and operates entirely in the name of each client university: one staff member at the centre represents each of the participating institutions.

Of all the visited universities, Monash University, La Trobe University and Deakin University are subscribed to the service centre. Monash University had been among the early users. Eventual problems with the service centre resulted from the lack of an allocated contact person at Monash University that would be responsible for liaising with the centre. Hence, the centre was sending too many enquiries back to the university, often to several staff members at the same time, generating additional and parallel workloads. This has now been changed, with one person employed to channel the communication with the centre and a single email contact for questions. In order to prevent the centre from getting back to Monash too frequently, the protocols have been revised, further detailed and updated.

Deakin and La Trobe University have only just joined the centre and report satisfaction. Deakin joined the centre because it could not have afforded to employ enough people to handle the hugely increased numbers of enquiries internally. La Trobe even regards the centre as the institution's "life saver": it handles more then 10,000 enquiries per year exclusively for La Trobe, and 25 percent of the commencing international students come through the service centre. Both institutions say they have learned from the earlier users' faults, and emphasise the importance of clear protocols and contact persons.

The University of Melbourne, another major Australian institution with a considerable volume of enquiries to handle, has deliberately opted against sub-

64 Initially, the service centre was a collaborative initiative between the Good Guides Group and five Australian universities who were experiencing a dramatic increase in inquiries from prospective international students. At present, these are Macquarie University, Monash University, Queensland University of Technology, University of South Australia, La Trobe University, University of Newcastle, and Deakin University. The centre was originally established as a call centre, based on the use of traditional communications means i.e. telephone, fax, letter. For more information cf. http://www.thesc.info

scribing to the service centre. The reason: Melbourne defines itself as a quality-oriented, traditional university and wants to maintain the control over its enquiries, hence would not let somebody from outside the institution reply on its behalf. Instead, the university has established a front desk staffed with two people and decided to lease the **web-based customer contact system** *Right Now* – used by companies such as British Airways, the Deutsche Bank and Reader's Digest – and slowly being discovered by the university sector in the US and Australia.[65] This solution is reported as cost-effective as the service centre.

The web-based customer service works on the basis of a dynamic, "self-learning" knowledge base. It combines different communication tools like web-based "self-service" email and call management. New content can be automatically generated, published and categorised, and "customer information" obtained. As a web portal, the service works with a frequently-asked-questions (FAQ) system. Whoever clicks on "queries" on the web page of the admissions office is directly led to the FAQ section,[66] which also contains contact addresses at the faculties. Applicants can also put up their own folders and, at a later stage, enquire on the status of their application.

In Australia, as elsewhere, however, many institutions do not receive enough applications or enquiries to justify these kinds of measures. The University of Ballarat, for instance, which has not opted for either of the two versions explained above, handles enquiries at its international office.

5.2 Internal strategies for enquiry management

Although many institutions may be confronted with a substantial number of enquiries from foreign candidates, most of them are not in a position to employ highly sophisticated measures like the ones explained above. However, there are various ways to streamline the management of enquiries internally, in line with an institution's general organisation of foreign student admissions.[67] The following are examples of several ways to handle enquiries in a more "home-made" manner.

Most universities work with a general information desk and additional structures of various kinds.

At the Dutch University of Groningen, for instance, **decentralised admissions offices at faculty level and a central information desk** situated at the university's international office are in charge of enquiry management. The central information desk replies to general queries about the university, study opportunities in general or practical issues. Specific enquiries are forwarded

65 Fordham University, UCLA, the University of Texas, the University of South Florida in the US and the University of Southern Queensland in Australia use the same system. Cf. www.rightnow.com

66 Cf. http://unimelb.custhelp.com/cgi-bin/unimelb.cfg/php/enduser/std_alp.php

67 The organisation of foreign student admissions, e.g. whether it is centralised or decentralised at institutional level, will be explained in detail in the following chapter.

to the faculties. At the Faculty of Economics, for instance, an admissions office equipped with several employees deal with enquiries. To streamline this task, this office uses standardised mails and letters: about 50 standard letters can be easily adapted. At the first enquiry, a candidate would always get the information package. The package is sent to overseas locations by email; in Europe also brochures with standard letters are used. Personalised contact follows with one out of three candidates. The benefits of this personalised follow-up and the efforts to avoid treating students as a “number” are very much emphasised as an advantage of the decentralised system (see chapter 6.1.1).

At EM Lyon, a similar **central information desk** is in place: the *Service d’Information et Promotion* (information and promotion service). The service registers each enquiry in a database and sends out an information package at the first enquiry. Again, the importance of self-assessment on the basis of published criteria is emphasised. The service also provides information on general academic issues, admissions requirements and procedures, deadlines etc., as well as practical information. Once enquiries get more specific, a more personalised follow-up is ensured by **five international delegates, one per world region**. These international delegates reply to enquiries in accordance with their “geographic responsibility”. In addition, enquiries may be forwarded to the *responsables pédagogiques* of each programme – academics responsible for the academic organisation of a programme, sometimes instead of teaching.

A general “study information desk” is also in place at Wageningen University. Here, a very **elaborate webpage** helps to streamline enquiry management. Extensive detail is provided on study possibilities, and information can be requested online from the study information desk. Each information request is linked to automated data entry, asking for the candidates’ personal data as well as previous education and wished-for programmes at Wageningen. Wageningen also works with university representatives in the sending countries, who provide information and facilitate applications for the university.

Enquiries are usually dealt with **at the office in charge of foreign student admissions**. At the Hanzehogeschool, for instance, enquiries and admissions are both handled by the **international office**. The volume of enquiries may be reduced through targeted recruitment, as in the case of INSA Lyon. At Leiden University, a front desk that is part of Leiden University Worldwide Programmes, LUWP, complements the general information desk. LUWP is a **company** that manages the university’s English-language-taught programmes (see next section). Hence, information directed to the bulk of international students is handled there, as part of their (also separately handled) recruitment and admissions.

At all visited Swiss universities, the **admissions office** itself deals with enquiries. In Lausanne, one person is responsible for email enquiries. A series of standardised replies is used to streamline the process. The other staff members take it in turn to deal with incoming applications and enquiries, instead of specialising by field or country of origin.[68] The Swiss Federal Institute of Technology ETH also handles enquiries at the admissions office, in spite of very limited resources. They emphasise good enquiry management as a means of orientation and as a first filter of applications. The undergraduate (and Master's) admissions office deals with approximately 6,000 enquiries per year and 800 applications. Following up on the standard information package, detailed questions are answered personally, and telephone appointments are made with candidates who ask for admission into an advanced semester (recognition of prior studies). At the ETH, work division is done by level of study: there is a separate office for the doctoral level and professional MBAs.

Many institutions try to ensure a more **personalised follow-up** after the student has had the first contact, and **involve teaching and research staff** at the second stage. This is the case at many American and British institutions, and is a general practice at postgraduate level. Especially after an applicant has been made an offer, academics may keep contact with the future student and show their availability to answer to any questions. This is partly to increase the chances that a good student will accept, and to help improve the ratio between offers and acceptances. A good example of such personalised follow-up is the School of Public Affairs and Environmental Sciences at the American Indiana University Bloomington, which runs one of the largest US Public Affairs schools Master's programmes. The school would send candidates a postcard every two weeks after the first contact (an enquiry or an expression of interest in the programme), expressing that they are still interested in receiving the student's application and later, if admitted, that they are looking forward to welcoming them. The school also offers to organise email or telephone contact between applicants and the academics and current students of the school; it arranges visits with a full-day programme for applicants; it also runs a weekly two-hour online chat room with a member of its administrative staff during the selection procedure. This is meant to provide a forum for the new students to get more information about the programme, the school, the university, or life in Bloomington. It also demonstrates interest in the students, and helps to keep a link with them. After an admission offer is made, constant email contact is kept with the students. If they choose another university, they are asked to complete a survey to find out the reasons behind their choice.

5.3 National and discipline-specific structures

Regional or discipline-specific **networks**, or even **national level agencies**, may play a role in managing information and enquiries.

68 A similar system of working "in turns" at a front desk and to answer phone enquiries is used at the University of Basel. Their policy is to refer email enquiries back to the university's (German language) website; additional questions are answered orally.

Where recruitment and admissions have been outsourced to a field-specific network, the network also helps deal with enquiries. This is the case of the French n+i, a network of engineering schools, set up to streamline and improve foreign student recruitment. Chapter 6.2.1 will provide extensive detail on this network.

Examples of **regional networks** are the *pôles universitaires* in France, created to compensate for the fragmentation of French higher education institutions and universities within one city or region. The "poles", more active in the "province" than in the capital, provide information on study opportunities in their respective region. This concerns study opportunities at the poles' members, i.e. higher education institutions, as well as information on the region in general and practical details on living conditions, the health insurance system, etc. The poles provide general information – enquiries about specific programmes and institutions have to be sent to the higher education institution.

In a similar way, the role of **national bodies** is to provide general level information about study opportunities at the higher education institutions of the country they represent. This is referred to as "education counselling" and is one of the missions of organisations like EduFrance, Nuffic, the British Council (or, more specifically, EducationUK), EducationUSA and the Swedish Institute. Education counselling takes place alongside promoting exchange and cooperation in higher education, educational marketing, providing assistance to institutions in the evaluation of foreign credentials, etc. Most of them provide information on their websites and have representatives or offices in the main sending countries.

EducationUSA, for example, is a network of more than 450 Department of State-affiliated educational advising centres. Many of its staff have either studied in the US or been trained by the US State Department. The centres are located in US Embassies and Consulates, Fulbright Commissions, bi-national centres, non-governmental organisations, libraries, and universities. The advisers provide information about (accredited) higher education institutions in the United States but do not work as agents or recruiters. They explain the admissions processes of American higher education institutions through regularly scheduled presentations. They may also help students on an individual basis to choose an institution, find financial aid opportunities or apply for a student visa.[69] EduFrance, the Australian Education International network or the British Council all work in a similar way.

IDP Education Australia is the only organisation that also works as an agent and, after an initial counselling period, encourages candidates to apply online through the organisation's website. IDP staff define the organisation as

69 This can be subject to a fee. Cf. http://exchanges.state.gov/education/educationusa/uniadvising.htm

“mouthpiece” of Australian universities, one of their missions being to help the students in their decision making process.

Initiatives by national or regional bodies can help higher education institutions reduce the amount of very general enquiries. Yet, particularly in a competitive environment, most institutions prefer handling enquiries themselves, and many prefer their national agencies to work at a generic level.

6 The organisational structure of the admissions process

The organisational structure of the admissions process refers to the levels and units that play an active role in the process and to where and by whom decisions are prepared and taken. Admissions can be organised at different levels, namely the institutional level, the sub-national level (usually within a discipline, although the regional level is another logical option) and the national level. The role and influence of each level often depends on the national context. In the US, for instance, institutional autonomy has a long-standing tradition, and institutions want to (and do) handle admissions locally. In Australia, the competitive environment has led to a palpable reluctance on the institutional side to cooperate and share information. In France, the national level has always played an important role and takes an active part in the admission of foreign undergraduates into public universities. Also the examples of discipline-specific cooperation in foreign student admissions have been identified in France. This chapter will discuss different “models” and possibilities for the organisation of foreign admissions at the mentioned levels.

6.1 The institutional level

In most cases, higher education institutions are the most important actors in the admissions process. At this level, the main questions (in organisational terms) are:

- if foreign student admissions are organised in a centralised or decentralised way;
- what type of unit, e.g. an admissions or international office, is in charge of foreign student admissions.

Frequently, the general organisation of foreign student admissions and support results from the overall organisational structure and size of an institution. Bigger and more traditional higher education institutions are often more decentralised, i.e. the departmental level has more competences and functions, whereas younger and smaller institutions usually rely more on the central level. The role and existence of an admissions or international office may depend on institutional traditions, or can be the consequence of a deliberate decision. Where large units are in charge of admissions, the internal division of work is another matter of interest.

6.1.1 Centralised and decentralised systems

The centralisation or decentralisation of the admissions procedure for foreign students refers to the degree of involvement of various levels of a given institution. These are the central level, usually either an admissions or international office, and the faculty or departmental level, which may have a separate international or admissions office or simply be involved through individual (or committees of) academics. Although there may be different levels of decentralisation within one model, the main issues are where an application is received and processed, where admissions decisions are made, and from where a final offer is sent out. Hence, there are three main possibilities, or models, to organise the admissions process:

- a centralised system;
- a hybrid system;
- a decentralised or faculty-based system.

In a **centralised system**, the central unit is in charge of the entire admissions process and makes an admissions decision without forwarding applications to academics or even departments. It has full delegation authority, i.e. is entitled to assess applications and make offers. The level of delegation usually varies between the undergraduate and the postgraduate levels, and many institutions with a completely centralised system for the undergraduate level work with a hybrid system for the postgraduate level.

In a **hybrid system**, the central administrative unit interacts to some extent with faculty staff and academics. At least as far as the postgraduate level is concerned, this is the norm, and both the central administrative and the faculty-based academic staff have a role in the process.[70] In this case, the central unit can have different levels of delegation: first, it may decide on equivalence of degrees and have the last word in admissions decisions. Second, it may only give a recommendation on equivalence, and decisions on admissions are at least formally taken by academics. In this case, however, the academic's "signature" can often be a pure formality, and the decision is *de facto* taken by the central unit.

In a **decentralised or faculty-based system**, a department or faculty-based administrative unit interacts with teaching and research staff of the same department or faculty. In a truly decentralised system, the units based at central level, as for instance an institution's international office, are not involved in the admissions process at all. Delegation modes may be similar to those mentioned for a hybrid system, except that administrative admissions staff are situated at faculty level and deal only with admissions into the programmes offered at the faculty or department. There are also "quasi-decentralised" systems where a central unit has purely administrative competences, and admissions decisions are taken by faculty administrators or academics.

The grade of (de-)centralisation can refer to two different but interlinked questions: first, where the administrative unit in charge of admissions is

70 The background of those involved can make it difficult to cut a clear line: "administrative staff" may have an academic background or not, and "academic staff" may be from the field but not active in teaching or research anymore.

situated, i.e. at central or faculty level, and second, how responsibilities are divided between this administrative unit and the academic staff.

The following examples clarify different forms and levels of centralisation in foreign student admissions.

The centralised system: admissions at the heart of the institution

At the majority of visited institutions, a central administrative unit has the main if not complete responsibility for the admission of foreign applicants into undergraduate programmes. This is considered appropriate in cases where applicants are admitted on the basis of clearly set criteria. If a selection is carried out at this level, it is usually based on numerically measurable criteria rather than academic capacities. Admissions do not therefore require the involvement of academics. On the contrary, it is deemed appropriate that no time is taken off academics' other duties for undergraduate admissions. In addition to taking the load off academics, advantages of a centralised system are rapidity (no time-consuming to-and-fro between the central level and the faculties) and transparency, as there is only one contact point for applicants, one admissions policy, and one responsible unit. Knowledge of different national secondary and higher education systems and the corresponding certificates is concentrated at one place and can be more easily documented and transferred.

A centralised system for the admission of foreign students can be found in different contexts: first, in open systems where admissions are based on equivalence with the national entry qualification, second, at institutions where candidates are selected on the basis of numerical criteria, and third, in a market-driven environment where a quick response is essential. Also for smaller institutions with a lack of international experience, a centralised model can be more appropriate.

Examples for the first case are in place at all visited Swiss higher education institutions. At the University of Lausanne, for instance, faculties or academics are not involved in undergraduate admissions – neither with the setting of criteria nor with the evaluation of the applications. The admissions office deals with all applications.[71] This is in line with the general "no discrimination" policy: all applications are handled at the same unit, emphasis is placed on the equivalence of entry qualifications on the basis of clear and documented criteria, and no selection takes place.[72] The second case, a selection based on numerical criteria, is in place for undergraduate admissions at Indiana University Bloomington. The central unit carries out the whole selection

71 For the time being, this applies to admissions into a *Licence*, a Bachelor's programme and even the Bologna Master (seen as an integrated degree in Switzerland).

72 Also at the universities of Wageningen and Leiden, central admissions staff review undergraduate applications. In line with the general policy focus on the postgraduate level, departments are "not interested" in the admission of (the few) foreign undergraduate students.

without any review of papers by the departmental staff, whether academic or not. The decision is based on guidelines developed by a Board of Trustees.

Nearly all visited Australian institutions could work as an example for the third case. A centralised system is used for undergraduate admissions and the struggle at the central unit is for more "delegation", i.e. authority to assess applications and make offers on behalf of the departments for as many programmes as possible at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The main aim is to achieve quicker turnaround times and to avoid double handling of applications. For admissions into undergraduate programmes at Deakin University, the international office that is responsible for admissions has an important level of delegation for "straightforward cases", i.e. for those cases that clearly do / not meet the admissions requirements. The same applies to postgraduate programmes by coursework.[73] A similar structure is in place at the University of Ballarat. The involved actors feel that for a small university with little experience with international student issues a central and integrated coordination through the international office is the best way to ensure a smooth running of operations and increase international experience.

In all institutions with centralised systems, applications for admission into the second or third year of studies are usually the "borderline" where a centralised system for the undergraduate level becomes a hybrid system. Departments decide on "advanced standing", i.e. the award of a given number of credits based on recognition of prior learning. They are also involved where the artistic value of a portfolio has to be assessed, and sometimes get to see borderline cases, i.e. applications that are just below a set entry criterion. Hence, even in a centralised system there is always a minimum of interaction between the central admissions or international office and the academic staff at the faculties.

Cooperation or power-game? The hybrid system

A hybrid system based on the involvement of both a central unit and faculty-based staff is the common model for admissions into the postgraduate level at most of the visited higher education institutions. At the postgraduate level, academic involvement is deemed both appropriate and necessary: with few exceptions, admissions officers do not feel they are competent to assess students' specific capacities, nor to select those best suited for the programme in question. Usually, the academics carry out their selection after the central-level office has checked for the equivalence of degrees and the completeness of the application form (e.g. language certificate, application fee, official

73 For the postgraduate level, the institution distinguishes between postgraduate programmes by coursework and postgraduate programmes by research. Applications for postgraduate programmes by research are always forwarded to the faculties. For postgraduate programmes by coursework, the international office has delegated authority for a considerable number of programmes, and claims for more delegation (in the same way as undergraduate level) for others. Only for research-based programmes at Master's or PhD levels, is the necessity of departmental involvement uncontested.

transcripts, etc.). Even if no selection takes place, decisions on equivalence are considered more of an academic matter at the postgraduate level and may have to be at least approved by academic staff. The actual weight of a central unit and the level of delegation can vary substantially between the different institutions, depending on the institutional context and factors like size or the traditional role of faculties, or on national regulations.

The advantage of hybrid systems for postgraduate admissions is that they combine some of the benefits of centralised systems with an admissions decision based on academic judgement. The general idea of a hybrid system is that of a work division, where the central unit is responsible for the administrative parts of the admissions process and hence takes this load off the faculty-based (teaching and research) staff, who merely look at the academic content of an application. In the best cases, where communication structures and responsibilities are clearly defined, this works well as a co-operation model. However, the involvement of different actors and levels can also lead to a power game where central and departmental levels struggle for more authority, or accuse each other of being too rigid and bureaucratic (the central level) or too slow with their assessment (the departmental level).

In some cases, a **central unit takes the final decision on the equivalence of the applicants' entry qualifications** and academics can only select between applicants who fulfil these basic requirements. Examples can be found in Sweden: a Bachelor's degree (or its equivalent) is a legal requirement for an award of a Master's degree, and this is checked at the central level of each institution. A department cannot admit students into a Master's programme without a Bachelor equivalent. At KTH, applications arrive at the admissions office where the general requirements (equivalent degree, English certificate, etc.) are checked. Only eligible applications then go to the departments where they are assessed in terms of content (transcripts, reference letters, grades, etc.). Although grades are evaluated at the departments, the admissions office gives advice on how to rank the formally eligible students, or which grades should be considered as too low for the university's standards. The department nominates the candidates, and the admissions office formally decides on their admission. In practice, the department's nominations are approved, and if there is a disagreement between the department and the admissions office, it needs to be discussed and settled.

At the University of Lausanne, like at most Swiss universities, a degree of a minimum of four years is an institutional requirement for admission into postgraduate programmes. This is part of the "formal admissions criteria" and set at the central level of the institution, and checked at the admissions office. Even if the faculty receives an application, it first has to be sent to the admissions office for formal checking. In case of disagreement, e.g. if a course director wants to admit a student with an insufficient prior qualification, the admissions office has the "last word" and can refuse to admit the student.

In a similar way, most of the visited US institutions aim to ensure that applicants fulfil the institution's general requirements for postgraduate students. The admissions office at New York University Graduate School checks if an applicant has a Bachelor's equivalence, after which the departments do their selection. The Graduate School then sends the formal offer of a place. Also at Indiana University Bloomington, the admissions office does the credential evaluation for most postgraduate courses, after which the departments carry out their selection. The final word is at the admissions office, which checks that the protocol has been followed, e.g. that the departmental decision has been approved by the Graduate School.[74]

At other institutions, the **central unit carries out an eligibility check and gives a recommendation on equivalence**, but forwards all applications to the faculties. The decision on admission is at least formally taken by academics. This, too, may be the result of a legal requirement: Dutch law, for instance, requires that an academic admissions board must take decisions on Master's-level admissions. At the Wageningen University, incoming applications for Master's programmes are formally checked at the central unit, then forwarded to the departments with a pre-advice form containing background information and a recommendation regarding the equivalence of the applicant's degree. An academic committee at faculty level takes the final decisions on equivalence and admission.

Although not a legal requirement, this model is also common practice at most of the visited Australian universities, namely for admission into those (mainly postgraduate) programmes where the central admissions unit has no delegated authority. This is more frequently the case at bigger institutions with strong faculties, for example at Monash University. Monash International, the central unit responsible for foreign student admissions at Monash University, has only delegated authority for two faculties – Business and Information Technology – and in most cases only for undergraduate programmes. For all other faculties and all postgraduate programmes, applications are formally checked (for completeness, authenticity, etc.), entered into a database, pre-assessed, and forwarded to the faculty. Most faculties have parallel offices for international admissions, which either forward the application to an academic staff member or make a decision based on admission protocols defined by a faculty-based education committee. After the final decision is made by the faculty, the formal offer is again sent out by Monash International. At most Australian universities with a central international office or company (cf. chapter 6.1.2) and strong faculties, the question of delegated authority can be a power game. Whereas at least for the postgraduate level, the academic side considers their judgement as necessary, the central unit, especially the marketing staff, is struggling for more delegation to the central level in order to streamline and accelerate the admissions process.

74 A graduate school is the postgraduate section of a university, which can service several faculties.

Decentralised admissions: the realm of the department

In a completely decentralised or faculty-based system, applications are received and processed directly at faculty level, without any involvement of central level units. Administrative admissions staff are situated at faculty level and only deal with admissions into the programmes offered at the faculty or department. Within a decentralised model, administrative staff and academic staff can cooperate in a similar way as in a hybrid system, only that in this case all actors are "physically" situated at faculty level. This allows admissions staff to be more specialised and knowledgeable in a specific field. In addition, interaction with teaching and research staff can take place in a more informal way because of the "physical proximity". A decentralised admissions system usually corresponds to (and makes sense for) major institutions with strong and sizeable faculties. Such institutions may also have quasi-decentralised systems, where a central unit merely fulfils the role of a "dispatcher" or does a final check.

The only visited higher education institution with an entirely decentralised model is the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen. The decentralised admissions model corresponds to the traditionally devolved structure of the institution. Within the university, each faculty works in a slightly different way, according to its needs and equipment. At the Faculty of Economics, for instance, admissions officers are responsible for one or two programmes each. For undergraduate admissions, admissions officers have the complete responsibility.[75] Applications are assessed individually, and admission is based on equivalence and meeting predefined subject requirements, e.g. in Mathematics. In case they are unsure if an applicant meets these requirements, admissions officers can informally consult the programme directors, and the latter also have to decide on recognition of prior studies. For postgraduate admissions, for example for International Business and Economics, the admissions officer preassesses the applications and gathers background information. Only the applications that fulfil the formal criteria are assessed and decided on by an academic evaluation board (cf. chapter 7.2). Central-level units at the university, for instance the institution's international office, do not interfere in the admissions process.

The decentralised structure is seen as advantageous by both central and faculty-based staff for various reasons. First, as far as the Master's level is concerned, a central-level unit could only carry out a first formal check and would then have to forward applications to the faculties in compliance with Dutch law. Second, from the first contact with applicants, a more personalised follow-up is possible due to smaller numbers of applicants and the limit of one field of study, and incomplete applications can be kept track of more

75 These make up a more substantial share of applications than at other Dutch institutions / faculties, as the faculty offers English-language-taught programmes in International Economics and Business at Bachelor level.

easily. Third, informal contact with academics can make the process more streamlined and solve problems by simply walking over to their offices. Fourth, as faculties handle admissions, faculty staff feel responsible for the admitted students and take the initiative to solve possible problems. Fifth, close cooperation between academic staff and admissions staff is easier – for example when a new programme and with it new procedures or criteria are introduced – and facilitates the creation of trust and the subsequent delegation of responsibilities to the admissions staff.

Either to benefit from the advantages of decentralisation or from a grown university structure, some institutions have **quasi-decentralised admissions models** with a minor central administrative element. Applications can be sent directly to the faculties or programmes. For the MBA programme at Indiana University Bloomington, for example, programme staff do credential evaluation and directly select applicants. The latter had previously been carried out by the central unit, but was considered too lengthy a process by the department. The central admissions office now only verifies whether students have a Bachelor-equivalence, but only at the end of the process. At the Swedish Uppsala University, some Master's programmes use a specific application form, which has to be sent directly to the department and is available online or on request from the department. The department, in most cases the programme director, does a first screening, and only then forwards applications to the central unit for a formal eligibility check, after which the academics carry out a selection at the department.

At other institutions, the central unit merely acts as a "dispatcher" for most or all programmes. At the University of Melbourne, the central admissions office only has delegated authority for undergraduate programmes if candidates meet the so-called "guaranteed scores" – high entry scores that are preset by the faculties. For all other undergraduate and all postgraduate programmes, the admissions office only does a preliminary formal check, and is responsible for data entry. Applications are then forwarded to the faculties, where different selection officers (not always academics from the field) are responsible for admissions into postgraduate and undergraduate programmes. A reason for this system is the university's quality and traditions-based approach, as well as its long-established collegiate structure and size, all of which result in a strong role for faculties in the admissions process.

The importance of academic judgement in admissions decisions is also strongly emphasised at French public universities. The function of the legally required central *scolarité générale* (translated as admissions office or registry) is merely to send out information packages and application forms, and to check if applications are complete.[76] All applications for all levels of study

76 The *scolarité générale* handles applications for the French first and second cycle (Bachelor's and Master's programmes are still not the norm). Applications for the third cycle have to be sent directly to the faculties.

are forwarded to the departments, where they are distributed to (committees of) academics by the departmental *scolarités*. Hence, the only function of the *scolarité*, at the two visited public universities, is to transmit and register applications. At the University Val de Marne Paris 12, this situation is considered problematic by the central admissions staff, who frequently send out application forms and information packages to students who clearly would not qualify for admission. At the University Jean Moulin Lyon 3, academics report the workload and decisions on equivalence of a qualification to be a problem, but find it difficult to imagine that non-academics would carry out an assessment and decide on admission.

Return from (de-)centralisation? System changes and their reasons

In most cases, a centralised or decentralised organisation of foreign student admissions depends on the grown overall structure of an institution, but it can also be based on a deliberate decision and previous experience with either system. This becomes particularly evident when institutions change entirely or partly from one system to another. The reasons for such a change reveal problems in the previous system and suggest solutions as found by the institution in question.

At the University of Groningen, the Faculty of Economics is merging with the Faculty of Management and Organisation. The admissions offices are also merging, and a joint working group has been set up to elaborate the concept for this new joint admissions office. The aim of the team is to streamline and harmonise the admissions policy, entrance requirements, and admissions procedures of the programmes offered by the two faculties, especially for international candidates. New tools, like an online registration (not application) system and database, are being discussed to help follow up applications and create a knowledge base. The new “Admissions and Credentials Evaluation Office” will most probably be composed of an international admissions and credentials evaluation office, a domestic bureau dealing with Dutch applicants, and a service desk dealing with enquiries, student support, etc., and collaborate closely with the new joint “International Exchange Office”. The merger can be used for further improvement and institutionalisation of admissions procedures and to increase transparency. According to central international policy staff, these kinds of mergers would also work for other, smaller, faculties, and combine the advantages of centralised and decentralised systems.

The Swedish Royal Institute of Technology, KTH, previously worked with decentralised admissions, and all foreign postgraduate students had to apply directly to the (English-language-taught) Master’s programmes at different departments, each with their own application form and procedures.[77] This was changed, and now students need to fill in a common on-line application

77 A final eligibility check of the selected students was always carried out by the central unit, in compliance with Swedish law (see above).

form, in which they can indicate their three programme preferences. The form goes first to the admissions office, which checks for eligibility, then to the appropriate programmes which do their own selection on academic criteria, suitability for the programme, etc. This change was made in response to several problems with the previous system. First, people could previously apply and be admitted to different programmes at the university.[78] This created confusion for the administration and kept many places reserved for the same student. Second, it was felt that there had to be an institutional approach with a common admissions policy, as well as a common entry port to KTH, to create a feeling of "belonging" to the university. Third, the new system helps guarantee more equality in treatment of all students. There will now also be a common database, into which both the admissions office and the department can insert their comments and thereby follow each case as it passes through different stages and offices.

Also the Dutch Hanzehogeschool has changed from faculty-based admission of foreign students to a centralised system. This institute of higher professional education now works with a hybrid system, and the central international office deals with enquiries, puts the files together and checks for completeness of applications, makes the final offer to the student, and is in charge of student support with regard to visa, accommodation and other issues. Academic programme coordinators at the departments only look at the applicants' academic background and decide on admissions into both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The institution had experienced several problems with the former decentralised system: first, applicants as well as the programme coordinators responsible for the selection often had a different contact person for every step of the process. Dutch candidates had to enrol at the central student administration; EU candidates had to pass through a faculty-based office before enrolment and non-EU applicants through the central international office. With the new system, the international office is responsible for both EU and non-EU students and has defined one contact person for each group. This was considered as reassuring for candidates and helpful for programme coordinators. Second, responsibility for admissions was spread over too many different units to be done effectively, and delays were long. Third, no track was kept centrally of how many and which students had been admitted, as these went directly from the faculties to the enrolment office. Fourth, for newer and less established programmes the paperwork and bureaucratic procedures represented a considerable workload. This is now completely taken over by the international office, which can also provide advice on foreign qualifications.

Finally, the University of Basel was formerly working with a hybrid, quasi-decentralised system: after registration of the applications at central level,

78 One common problem that still appears is that students sometimes apply for programmes that require very different backgrounds. Hence they have either not understood the requirements correctly, or they are not being very honest about their experience.

admissions committees at the faculties had to see and approve every application. Then, the central level and the faculties jointly decided that knowledge about foreign qualifications should be concentrated at one specific central unit, and that every application should only get as far as it needed to in order to reduce the workload for academics and streamline the admissions process. Taking advantage of the general system reform in the framework of the Bologna process, the faculty-based admissions committees defined criteria and elaborated guidelines, delegating much more to the central level.[79] Only postgraduate applications, problematic or unclear cases, and (formal) rejections, and applications for recognition of credits have to be assessed and signed by a member of the faculty-based admissions committees or by the dean of studies. To document and streamline the process, the central admissions office elaborates a cover sheet with the most important information for every application (background information, completeness of the dossier, requirements, etc.) or even a short statement for unclear cases.

6.1.2 A typology of units handling admissions

The type of unit in charge of foreign student admissions is mainly a consequence of the institutional or even national context and relates to the rationale for foreign student admissions. At the visited French public universities, the central admissions office, the *scolarité générale*, was established by law in 1984, and in charge of administering the *demandes d'admission préalable* for foreign undergraduate applicants.[80] The *scolarités* existed before the introduction of international offices: the latter were established to deal with student mobility, exchanges, and international agreements, and this remains their role (and hence the work division between the two units) to date. In Australia, exchange and mobility had much less importance than in Europe, and the introduction (and weight) of tuition fees for international students has resulted in a customer-oriented approach. Hence, international marketing, recruitment, and foreign student admissions and support are usually seen as an integrated process and handled by an international office (or company).

Two principal questions determine the type of unit in charge of foreign admissions:

- Are national and international applicants dealt with at the same place?
- Is the unit in charge part of the university structure or a corporate unit owned by the university?

In response to the first question, some institutions deliberately refuse to treat foreign applicants as a separate category and argue that all students should be admitted on the same premises and hence at the same place. Others

79 The central admissions unit is part of the rector's office, and all offers and rejections have to be signed by the rector himself. This is deemed important both in legal terms and for an institutional approach to admissions.
80 Cf. chapter 3.2 and chapter 6.1.1

emphasise the importance of a specialised entity to oversee the whole process related to foreign student intake. It is mostly the admissions office that deals with the admission of foreign students, and in the second case it is the international office. Many institutions have both, and in most cases, it is a matter of deciding on the work division between the existing admissions and the international office, rather than establishing a specific unit for foreign admissions. Sometimes, however, especially in devolved institutions with smaller operational units, there may be a specific "office of international admissions".

The second question only becomes relevant if international applicants are handled as a different category: institutions that operate in a competitive environment and aim at recruiting fee-paying students may consider university structures as too slow and inapt for the provision of a satisfying "customer service" or to ensure a good market position. Therefore, admissions, marketing and support structures for foreign students are "outsourced" to a company owned by the higher education institution.

Whereas companies usually only exist at central level, international and admissions offices (or officers) may be situated at the faculties. This can be instead of the central structures in decentralised systems, or in addition to central structures. Other parallel structures at faculty level can be committees of academics, or simply individuals like international delegates, administrative or academic selection officers. As they are closely linked to the selection process, they will be discussed in the following chapter. Finally, an institution may have different offices dealing with undergraduate and postgraduate admissions.

An integrated admissions office

Admissions offices are often in charge of foreign student admissions at institutions that emphasise the importance of equal treatment of all applicants regardless of the origin of their qualification. The office is responsible for the admission of all applicants to a given higher education institution.[81] A parallel international office is usually in charge of international exchanges and agreements. Hence, the work division between the two units does not depend on nationality (of the qualification). It is more exactly based on a categorisation into degree students and exchange students, and on the belief that handling admissions and handling mobility are two completely different areas of specialisation. The main advantage of one general admissions office for all applicants is comparability: as all applications are assessed at the same place, it is easier to ensure that the same standards and criteria are applied for assessment. This helps to identify the best students from the entire pool of applicants, and promotes the equal and fair treatment of all applications.

81 It has to be distinguished from a student administration or enrolment office, where students have to register once they have been admitted.

Based on the comparison of international and national degrees, expertise can be built up in the specific field of admission.

Higher education institutions that work with an admissions office can be institutions that do not deliberately recruit foreign students, either because this does not correspond to their mission, because they come to them anyway or because the overall profile as an international institution makes separate offices obsolete. Hence, no specific structures for international students are put in place. Within an office, however, specialised international admissions staff may be in charge of the foreign applicants. Institutions that aim to recruit the best students from a global pool often work with a general admissions office for reasons of comparability. Finally, some institutions have separate admissions offices by level of studies.

At the University of Lausanne, the organisational structure reflects the university's policy to offer no special treatment to (or not to discriminate) foreign degree students. Although there is an office for international relations dealing with exchange students and partnerships (political priority), it is not concerned with international degree students. Foreign students who want to obtain a degree at Lausanne are admitted at the central admissions office, at the same place, and by the same staff dealing with Swiss admissions. However, it has to be stressed that at least at undergraduate level many Swiss candidates can simply enrol, if they have the *Matura*, without passing by the admissions office. Therefore, the admission of foreign students is an essential part of the admissions office's work. Both the head of the international office and the head of the admissions office approve this division of labour.[82]

The ETH Zürich and the Wageningen University use separate offices for the different levels of study. This is in line with the research focus of both institutions, as procedures and collaboration with faculties varies substantially between undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Wageningen University works with one admissions officer for Bachelor's admissions, one for Master's, and a committee for admissions into the PhD. The officers and the process are overseen by the central student administration. The deliberate closure of the institution's international office and the reintegration of international admissions into the university's core business (cf. chapter 4.3) are in line with the institutional profile of a quality international research university. Whereas the establishment of specific structures for international students was a first step towards internationalisation, the second move towards a truly international institution made these redundant.

82 This is similar in Basel, where a central admissions office is part of the student affairs department, which in turn belongs to the rector's office. One person within the office is in charge of international admissions, although many tasks, e.g. enquiry management, are shared responsibility. Different staff members are in charge of admissions into the different levels of study. Until the 1990s, international admissions had been handled by a separate office. This system was deliberately changed, mainly to streamline the process and facilitate communication between the different units.

Examples of institutions that aim at selecting the best students from a global pool and therefore have the same admissions office dealing with all applicants are found at several American universities. At New York University, a central office handles all undergraduate admissions and the different Graduate Schools – for example, the Graduate School of Arts and Science – handle graduate admissions. The schools, in turn, cooperate with the faculties and departments that are in charge of the final selection and make the admissions decisions. Different structures are in place for exchange students and student support: one office deals with admissions to study abroad programmes offered by New York University, another with other exchange programmes and a third supplies support and services for international students at the university.

A separate category:
the international office or international admissions office

The international office is usually in charge of admitting foreign degree students at institutions that deliberately recruit foreign students. In this case, admissions are only one part of the unit's tasks: it also has responsibilities for exchange students and agreements, marketing, recruitment and student support, thus handling the entire process related to international student intake. All (degree and exchange) foreign students are treated as a completely different category from national students, who are admitted through different admissions structures. A subtype is the international admissions office, a specialised unit that only deals with the admission of foreign applicants. This is a combination of, or rather an intersection between, the admissions and the international office. This type can be found at more devolved institutions where smaller and more specialised units are the norm.

An advantage of having the international office dealing with foreign student admissions is that the admissions procedure is considered part of the whole process of foreign student intake. This can facilitate a better understanding of the specific needs (e.g. in terms of organisational matters and timing) on the institutional side, and make the process more transparent for the foreign student, who can turn to the same contact point from the first enquiry to arrival, and also seek support at a later stage. It is also believed that specialised international admissions staff may be more apt to gather and document the knowledge of foreign systems necessary for credential evaluation and to respond to the specific needs and inquiries of foreign applicants. This is also an advantage of having an international admissions office.

Higher education institutions may assign foreign admissions to their international offices in different contexts. In general, institutions that deliberately recruit foreign students may opt for this more integrated approach of marketing, recruitment, admissions and student support. This may apply to the undergraduate and/or postgraduate level. There are other, more specific rationales: if admissions procedures for national students focus on the national system, foreign student admissions may require specific procedures and separate management by an international office. In other cases, national students may be admitted through national structures, or they can simply enrol. Hence, at the institutional level, there is only a need for a specific unit for foreign admissions. Finally, if foreign students pay tuition fees (and nationals do not or pay considerably less), the financial procedures linked to their admission may require separate handling. A separate entity can be in a better position to ensure a good "customer service".

At Indiana University Purdue University at Indianapolis IUPUI, the Office of International Affairs deals with the admission of all international applicants. While at the undergraduate level, this office is also in charge of the admissions decision, postgraduate applications are checked for eligibility and forwarded to the departments. The people involved feel that this makes sense because international expertise is all in one place, and the same office deals with student services once the students arrive at the university. In addition, having one bigger office makes it easier to have a "voice" in the university environment, when issues related to internationalisation are discussed.

This view is shared by the staff at Purdue University. In this case, the admission of international undergraduate students is carried out at the international office, while other applications are assessed at the admissions office. A problem may arise when selection is done in two different offices – while there is intense cooperation and communication between the two, there is no systematic cross-checking or comparison of students selected by one or the other office. This means that international and national students compete in different categories, and therefore it is not necessarily the case that the best students overall are selected. At postgraduate level, the admissions office deals with both national and international students. Its role is limited to checking eligibility, after which departments carry out their selection.

An example for institutions that admit foreign students through special channels is INSA Lyon (cf. also chapter 4.3). Although a central admissions office administers undergraduate admissions, the actual selection process, as well as the programmes, is coordinated by the institution's international office.[83] For postgraduate admissions, applications are gathered directly at the international office, which coordinates the whole admissions and selection process.

All visited Australian institutions handle international students as a separate category, mostly due to their status as fee-paying students and the institutions' deliberate internationalisation policies. Institutions decide between assigning international admissions to an international office and a company owned by the university, rather than between an admissions or international

83 For admission into the undergraduate level, this office is common to all five INSA in France, but situated in Lyon.

office. La Trobe and Deakin University, two medium size institutions, work with an international office, because this model is deemed more suitable for their size and because international operations are considered too essential to the university to be separate. Whereas La Trobe University deliberately decided against the company model, Deakin University tried it but changed back to an integrated international office (see next section).

The University of Melbourne is an example for an international admissions office, which is part of the student access division of the university administration. National and international marketing and recruitment and national and international admissions are physically under one roof. While separate in organisational terms, the different offices work closely together to promote an equitable selection process, and to link recruitment and admissions. Although central actors voice their preference for an integrated international office, the system is reported to work well. It is mainly a result of the devolved structure of the institution and the strong role of the faculties, linked to the university's traditional quality approach.

Corporate structures: a company owned by the higher education institution

A company owned by the university can be in charge of foreign student admissions in a particularly competitive and market-driven environment. Among the visited institutions, only major institutions that recruit fee-paying international students have put in place a company or considered it as an option. These are Australian institutions, and Leiden University in the Netherlands. This is based on a decision to deal with international applicants as a different category. A company can replace an international office or exist in parallel. The institution's international office would then usually only deal with exchange students and international agreements.

Institutions may establish a company to meet the "specific needs of the international market". In a market-driven environment, traditional university structures might not be in the position to react quickly enough or to deliver a satisfactory "customer service". A university-owned company is believed to streamline the process and make it faster and more efficient, as it provides a certain degree of independence of the institutional decision structures. The staff are employed by the company and not by the university and have to act in a performance-oriented way. Finally, a financially separate entity makes it possible to get a clear picture of income and expenses, and to make investments.

The two visited Australian institutions that work with companies are both major, metropolitan universities with several campuses and large numbers of foreign students. The Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology RMIT has around 57,000 students, over 25 percent of whom are foreigners.[84] Monash

84 Cf. http://www2.rmit.edu.au/departments/planning/pocketstats.php

University has almost 52,000 students, of which almost 29 percent are foreign.[85]

RMIT has outsourced all admissions to RMIT International, a not-for-profit company owned by the institution. This company is dealing with all activities directed towards foreign students, i.e. marketing, recruitment, and admissions. A separate central international office deals with student support and international policy, but is not involved in admissions. The faculties are “customers” of RMIT International, and faculty contact persons liaise with the admissions and marketing staff at the company. The company was set up as a consequence of the introduction of tuition fees for overseas students in the late 1980s and has “historically” grown and evolved through practice since then. The “internal outsourcing” was reported to be efficient and working well, though institutional actors say that an international office could work equally well, as long as the process is focused and coordinated.

At Monash University, international student admissions are handled by Monash International, a not-for-profit company wholly owned by the institution, and governed by a board composed of business and university people. In this case, there is no separate international office: Monash International is responsible for marketing, recruitment, administration, and support for full fee-paying international students, scholarship students and exchange students. Apart from the “operational” division, Monash includes also other divisions related to internationalisation. These include pathway programmes[86], language courses, and international consultancy services. In this case, too, the company was established with the introduction of tuition fees. It was put in place to make decisions quickly instead of relying on the university’s bureaucratic structures: before, scholarship students had been dealt with directly at the faculties. The link between Monash University and Monash International is ensured by a university-unit responsible for the implementation of the institution’s far-reaching international policy, including numerous offshore campuses in Asia, Africa and Europe.

Leiden University established Leiden University Worldwide Programmes (LUWP) in 1999. With approximately 17,000 students and just below 900 foreign degree students, Leiden University is not as big as its Australian counterparts.[87] The establishment of the company was linked to the introduction of costly English-language-taught programmes at Master’s level.[88] This has led to a dual structure: whereas the central international office is in charge of admission for programmes taught in Dutch and for PhD programmes, international cooperation and exchanges, and student support, LUWP’s tasks

85 Cf. http://www.monash.edu.au/about/stats.html

86 Pathway programmes are bridging courses for students who do not directly qualify for admissions into higher education. They may be offered by vocational colleges or by universities. Cf. chapter 7.3.2

87 Cf. http://www.figures.leiden.edu

88 According to university senior staff, programmes are offered at full cost on the international market, but a substantial number of students receive at least partial grants.

include postgraduate programmes taught in English, study-abroad programmes in Leiden (non-exchange, and hence subject to fees), and international marketing.[89] The company was established in response to the special needs of an international and competitive market, to be able to act quickly and independently from university structures in a performance- and project-oriented way. However, this structure will now be changed: LUWP will at least partly be integrated into an international office placed directly under the university board, and hence with some degree of autonomy. A committee that evaluated the company's functioning in 2003 also advocated the creation of a single office dealing with all international students.[90] The committee attributed much of the criticism to a lack of communication between the company and the faculties, which do not consider LUWP part of the university and demand more transparency of the company's duties and finances. The dual structure also reduces external transparency: responsibilities of the two units have not always been clear, and applications frequently have to be sent back and forth.

Similar problems and disadvantages occur at other institutions working with a company, or they are pointed out by those institutions that had either discarded the option or experienced difficulties and changed to another system. In particular, tensions between academic staff at the faculties and the company staff are recurrent. These are mainly due to the different status of company staff, as well as to their more commercially oriented mission, often considered incompatible with academic matters by the teaching and research staff. The international office at Deakin University, Deakin International, for example, previously reported to Deakin Australia, the former corporate arm of the institution.[91] Deakin International was reincorporated as a department of the university because its company status was considered inappropriate for the above-mentioned reasons. La Trobe University, too, has deliberately opted against the establishment of a company. As well as the institution's moderate size, institutional policy staff mention the following reasons. First, an original reason for the establishment of a company to manage international operations became obsolete, namely that it had been unclear if a university could legally offer (and charge fees for) pathway programmes. Second, whereas a company cannot operate when it is insolvent, a university can still run its operations, an issue that became relevant during the Asian financial crisis, when student numbers from Asian countries dropped dramatically. Third, it is considered that an international office can also develop a cor-

89 Interestingly, the international office is also in charge of admitting those Dutch students who cannot directly enrol. This concerns for instance the Master's level, and all those students who have not achieved their Bachelor's degree from Leiden University. This arrangement is the result of a merger between the former general admissions office and the international office, which was merely in charge of exchanges.

90 Cf. *Leiden University Worldwide Programmes Evaluated*, Leiden, August 2003, http://www.mondiaal.leidenuniv.nl/content_docs/rapport_luwp.pdf

91 The company still exists as "Deakinprime", but now only provides executive programmes tailor-made for the corporate sector.

porate spirit, retain the surplus of its operations, and reinvest it into international operations and programmes, with fewer tensions between the office and academic staff and students. Generally, the view is that international admissions (and other operations) can well be run internally and with the same advantages, as long as managerial structures are in place.

6.1.3 The division of work within units

The processing of applications can be divided differently within each operating unit, be it at a central admissions office, international office, or company or at faculty level. In many universities, however, staffing levels do not allow for a considerable division of labour. At smaller institutions or offices, work divisions are frequently arbitrary, i.e. the staff take turns in processing applications as they arrive. In most units, however, a separate staff member handles applications to the doctoral level. When there is some division, it can be classified in two major categories:

- work division by countries;
- work division by faculty or discipline.

Whereas in the first case one person or a team of staff members processes all applications from a certain group of countries or world region, in the second case applications are divided by the discipline or faculty to which a candidate is applying.

Work division by countries

Work division by country teams or specialists benefits from existing in-depth knowledge of specific countries, or makes it possible to build up such specific knowledge of the secondary and higher education systems of a given set of countries. Rather than trying to have a superficial knowledge of all countries the staff can specialise on some. This division makes it easier to link marketing and admissions into focused recruitment actions, which may differ from one country to another.

At central level, Deakin University has developed a model of “country teams”.[92] Due to the increase in numbers of applications and admissions, Deakin International has been restructured. The office comprises international student support, exchange programmes, marketing and admissions, and hence is in charge of managing the entire process of foreign student intake. Within the office, there are five regional teams, each composed of a country team leader, an admissions support assistant and a marketing manager. There is a sixth part-time country team leader dedicated to research applications. Marketing and admissions have been integrated deliberately with a view to recruitment activities at fairs and exhibitions, as well as possible

92 La Trobe University was planning to introduce the same system in the course of 2004.

interdependences. Marketing managers are in charge of strategic work, whereas country team leaders assess applications, deal with admissions, and attend recruitment fairs. However, they should be able to do each other's work where necessary. All admissions support assistants report to one senior country team leader, who oversees the day-to-day admissions and tries to ensure that the country team leaders and the respective marketing managers are not on leave at the same time. A quality and standards manager, the former head of admissions, oversees the process. The regional split is preferred because 60 percent of applications are for the same field, namely Business and Commerce. A field-specific split would therefore not divide the workload, whereas the composition of the country teams is based on workload and number of incoming applications. It also makes the office structure more transparent to the outside: agents, for example, now have one clear contact person according to the country where they are operating.

A work division by country is also possible at the departmental level. At the Department of Economics at New York University, postgraduate applications from different countries are split between the academics involved in the selection. The division is based on the country of origin of the staff member or on previous personal or academic experience: many staff members have experiences abroad or have specialised in certain countries or world regions in their research. Other examples include the Faculty of Earth Sciences and Environment at the University of Lausanne and the Faculty of Languages at the University Jean Moulin Lyon 3, where the division is based on the language taught by the staff member.

Work division by faculty or discipline

A work division by faculty or discipline allows central admissions staff to gain expertise in the particular requirements of the programmes offered by a given faculty. Internal communication channels are clearly defined, as each faculty has its specific contact person(s) at the central office. At New York University, the office for undergraduate admissions applies a similar system. As students apply to be admitted to one of the NYU colleges, the division of application forms within the admissions office is by college, rather than country of origin of the student.

Where admissions are handled by a company, a work division by faculty teams can help to reinforce the links between the company and the faculties. At the Australian University RMIT, admissions staff specialise in programmes, not countries. There is at least one contact person for each faculty, but for larger faculties there may be more. A team of five deals with the Business Faculty, which takes in the biggest share of international students. Similar structures are in place at Monash University, with one team for the Faculty of Business and Economics and one for the Faculty of Information Technology, which receive the majority of applications, and for which Monash

International has the highest level of delegation. The remaining applications are handled by a multi-faculty team. With this type of work division, admissions staff need to have knowledge of all sending countries. Frequently, like at Monash, the country-specific knowledge is documented in a database, accessible for both recruitment and admissions staff.

6.2 Economies of scale: networks and national-level cooperation

International student admissions processes tend to have common features at different higher education institutions. The applicant's prior qualifications need to be checked for authenticity and equivalence to the national entry qualification and language skills usually need to be assessed. In a selective system, applicants may have to be ranked according to numerical criteria and interviews, and tests may have to be organised. Many higher education institutions, especially those working in a competitive environment, consider these activities part of their student recruitment and attach high importance to the fact that they are carried out at the institutional level.

Others see the potential for economies of scale that can be attained through networking. Even in Australia, where higher education institutions are heavily competing, admissions staff at some institutions deplore the double-handling between Australian universities, and support the idea of a regional or even national admissions centre for international students. This would enable knowledge-sharing and streamlined procedures. In Australia this seems unlikely, as institutions think competitively and are reluctant to share information.[93] Finally, the will to cooperate and the readiness to share information are key aspects of networking at all levels.

Networks or common procedures for foreign student admissions have been identified:

- within a discipline;
- at national level.

In the visited countries and institutions, a third logical form, regional-level cooperation has only been found as a sub-type of the engineering network ParisTech and for general student support and information (cf. chapter 5.3), but not specifically for admissions.

6.2.1 Networks for foreign student recruitment

Higher education institutions and faculties that operate within the same subject area usually have similar profiles, and their cooperation may go further than general national-level procedures. Whereas at national level, cooperation is usually limited to clearing activities, numerical selection or automated

93 Still, administrative information may be shared on an informal basis, for example in regular meetings of international or admissions officers.

tests, networks in one specific discipline may cooperate in more individualised joint actions like targeted recruitment or interviews. Within a discipline, requirements and procedures can be streamlined more easily. Applicants (or target groups) share similar profiles and previous qualifications. Good secondary schools or higher education institutions are well known or can be more easily identified and this knowledge can be used for targeted recruitment or the assessment of qualifications.

The following examples of cooperation within a discipline are found in France: two in the field of engineering and a network of management schools.

Networks of engineering schools: n+i and ParisTech

In the field of engineering, two networks have been set up for the purpose of foreign student recruitment: n+i, a nationwide network, and ParisTech, a regional network of Paris-based engineering schools. Both networks are partly financed through membership fees.

n+i is a network of more than 50 engineering schools and university-based engineering programmes with a coordinating unit based at EduFrance. The network was created prior to the agency on initiative of the French Ministry of Education.[94] Foreign student admissions are part of the network's activities, which comprise marketing, recruitment, orientation, financial aid, and internships. n+i recruits students who have completed at least a four-year Bachelor's degree for two-year Master's programmes.[95] The concept, which includes a jointly organised cultural and linguistic adaptation period, aims to offer an international experience to both French and foreign engineering students, and to provide quality graduates with the "adaptability and communication" skills requested by labour market.[96]

Application and admissions procedures are almost entirely web-based: the network runs a website in French, English, and Spanish, with a reduced version in Japanese. Students apply online until several selection dates (see chapter 8), and send in the original documents for verification to the n+i secretariat. The secretariat carries out the eligibility check for all applicants, based on commonly agreed criteria. Actual admissions decisions are taken by individual higher education institutions. The institutions can access the list of pre-selected candidates online and make their offers to the candidates. This also facilitates cooperation with the corporate sector: a range of busi-

94 In addition to the described examples, there are projects for other networks for foreign recruitment: the French Ministry of Education is promoting ideas to create n+i-type networks for law and business.

95 These Master's programmes frequently correspond to the final two years of a full five-year engineering programme. In addition, n+i offers a one-year non-degree programme.

96 For more information on the general concept see www.nplusi.com. Admitted students are offered a jointly organised intensive language course and undergo a specifically created and jointly organised "transition semester". During this time, they study engineering but receive special tutoring, first with their international fellows in courses organised jointly by several n+i schools, then at the school where they are going to study their Master's programme.

ness partners can review the pre-selected candidates in the database and offer scholarships for internships, final projects, or "traineeships".[97] According to the network's coordinator, the success of the online system is founded on the clearly defined field and format of n+i.

The other engineering network, **ParisTech**, is a regional network of eleven Paris-based engineering schools. As the participating institutions cover different fields of engineering and are of a small size, they cooperate rather than compete. ParisTech is a non-profit organisation managed by a permanent chief executive officer and by a board whose members are the directors of the member institutes. The network also runs joint marketing and recruitment activities, but works in a completely different way from n+i. The (current) focus of the network is China, and recruitment is facilitated through partnerships with selected Chinese higher education institutions, which undertake a preselection. A mixed committee of academics from the eleven French institutions, each representing a different field, then selects the candidates in China on the basis of a test and an interview. From a list of approximately 300 applicants, about 75 are preselected, and their application dossiers are sent to the institutions, which make the final offer. Unlike n+i, there is no online application for ParisTech, but a strong focus on personal contact and recruitment.[98]

Among the visited higher education institutions, the engineering school ENSAM takes part in both n+i and ParisTech, and reports to recruit the majority of its foreign students via these networks. For ENSAM, both networks have their own value: whereas the strong sides of n+i are seen in the transition and cultural adaptation period and in the cooperation with the corporate sector, ParisTech is appreciated because of its personalised recruitment and selection strategies. As hardly any foreign students are admitted outside the networks, institutional staff focus on the final selection, which is carried out by teaching and research staff (see chapter 7.2).[99] The networks are regarded as beneficial: the traditional admissions model of the *grandes écoles*, based on the competitive *classes préparatoires* and *concours*, makes direct admission of foreign students difficult. The networks facilitate separate channels and individual assessments for admission into higher levels of study. A combination of both systems would be ideal, i.e. an n+i system with additional interviews, for instance via videoconference. In general, participation in either type of network is deemed useful especially in the initial phase of internationalisation.

97 N+i defines a traineeship as a "partnership between a student and the host company". The student completes his or her internships and final project at the company, and agrees to work for the company for a given period after graduation. Companies can also recommend their own applicants for n+i programmes and support them if admitted, or they can ask n+i to preselect candidates with a given background. Cf. www.nplusi.com

98 For more information, see http://www.paristech.org.

99 In addition, ENSAM focuses on the establishment of double-degree programmes.

This explains why the other visited engineering school, the earlier mentioned INSA Lyon (cf. chapter 4.3) does not take part in n+i. The INSA or *Institut National des Sciences Appliquées* also form a network of five autonomous engineering schools at different French sites. They have streamlined some admissions and recruitment procedures, for instance they work with a joint central admissions office, and run joint targeted recruitment activities. Some of them would still participate for example in n+i, but INSA Lyon argues that it has its own longstanding international experience: it has built up its own network of collaborators and partner institutions abroad, relies on targeted recruitment at the partner institutions and runs its own channel programmes. Moreover, networks like n+i focus on recruitment into the Master's level, whereas INSA Lyon traditionally concentrates on recruitment after secondary school. Interviewees believe that there would be no added value from participating in additional networks.

Rise and fall of a network in the field of management studies

The CIAM, the French Graduate Management Admissions Board, was created in 1981 as a consortium of five major French management schools.[100] The centre's original mission was to improve the international profile of these schools, among them EM Lyon, which was visited for this study. For over twenty years, the CIAM coordinating unit in Paris was organising the recruitment and admission of foreign students for its member institutions. Yet, the CIAM will be closed in 2004, and each institution will handle foreign student admissions for the year 2005 individually. What led to the closure of CIAM and was the centre working effectively?

All interviewees at EM Lyon respond that, in operational terms, the CIAM had streamlined and facilitated foreign student admissions. Students were recruited for the Master's level, and needed to have at least completed a three-year Bachelor's degree. An application through the CIAM was valid for all five schools. Applicants were asked to submit their application and to take either the GMAT or the TAGE-MAGE, the French equivalent of the GMAT (cf. chapter 7.3.4). The TAGE-MAGE could be taken at one of the CIAM testing centres: there were over 40 centres worldwide, most of them situated at the cultural services of French embassies. Dossiers and test results were reviewed by an evaluation committee, which selected the candidates to be called for interview (in French or in English) at a local CIAM centre. The concept of the CIAM was based on a network of alumni who helped with assessment and carried out interviews. Protocols for assessment had been developed jointly, and the results were recognised at all the participating institutions.

The main reason for the closure of the centre was the growing competition between its members. Like n+i or ParisTech, the CIAM had originally also

100 These institutions are the HEC Paris, ESCP-EAP, ESSEC, EM Lyon and CERAM. For full names and websites of the institutions see http://www.ciam.ccip.fr.

been in charge of marketing activities, in line with its mission to improve the international standing of its members. Initially, student numbers were too low and the joint marketing activities were even reinforced, until they became “too successful”, and institutions started competing against each other for the best students. Marketing was taken off the joint action in 1999. Administrative procedures remained streamlined, but dossiers were evaluated at every school. Finally, even this cooperation was perceived as problematic: as the participating institutions grew stronger in the international sphere, they became reluctant to cooperate with each other, share information, or recruit from a common pool of students.[101]

According to the interviewees at EM Lyon, the closure of the CIAM will allow the institution to follow an independent and more targeted recruitment strategy. The contact list and accumulated knowledge of the CIAM will be shared among the member institutions, and hence the institution can continue to work with cultural delegates, alumni and partner institutions abroad, who can help with the organisation of tests or interviews. This will still require considerable organisational efforts, and the institution’s admissions office will need to be expanded. The applicants’ reaction to the closure of the CIAM still remains to be seen: for them, it will principally mean a multiplication of tests and interviews.

The problems that have led to CIAM’s closure show that a network can only function as long as the spirit of cooperation is maintained and not eclipsed by competition. Participating institutions need to be ready to accept some constraints: common criteria and sometimes even common pedagogical practice need to be agreed. In addition, institutions need to be aware that they are recruiting from the same pool of (good) students.

6.2.2 The national level

The role of the national level in the admission of international students depends on the respective national contexts, which have partly been explained in the country overviews in chapter 3. In this section, a selection of national level procedures will be presented in more detail, exploring their usefulness as a model in the context of foreign student admissions.[102]

There are different types of national-level action in the admissions process: an admissions procedure can be run either partly or entirely at the national level, and can affect either all applicants or only those with a foreign qualification. Joint or unified actions at national level may only comprise the ad-

101 A telling detail: admissions into the MBA programmes were never run commonly, as these had always been considered as too competitive and important for institutional profiling.

102 National-level admission procedures that mainly affect domestic students will not be explained in detail. These are for instance the earlier mentioned Australian Tertiary Admission Centres for applicants with an Australian upper secondary qualification or the Dutch IB-Groep (Information Management Group) for programmes with a limited capacity.

ministrative and organisational part of the admissions procedure, or include a selection procedure. Beyond the undergraduate level, the role of national organs is usually limited to different kinds of support structures, like service points abroad or guidelines for the evaluation of qualifications. Advantages of national level procedures and support structures depend on each case, and they cannot be generalised: a national level procedure can streamline the admissions process and take at least part of the workload off the individual institutions, or it can be an additional burden for higher education institutions.

UK: the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS)

In the UK, the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service processes applications for undergraduate programmes from both domestic and foreign applicants. UCAS aims to "provide a service to applicants, schools and colleges and higher education institutions which enables learners to make informed choices to achieve their full potential through higher education, and for higher education institutions to admit committed learners on an equal and fair basis".[103] The service works as a charity and company limited by guarantee, and derives its income from application fees, subscriptions from higher education institutions, and commercial activities.

UCAS is only in charge of the administrative part of the admissions procedure: it does not set requirements or make admissions decisions. The service provides information to prospective students on programmes, institutions, and entry requirements. Candidates can submit only one UCAS application form in each year's application cycle, which can include up to six programmes. The application form requires a reference, for instance from the applicant's head teacher, who assesses his or her suitability for higher education. The reference also informs on the grades the applicant is likely to achieve, as applicants have normally not yet obtained their final qualifications. Based on the information provided, institutions decide whether to make an offer to the candidate. The offer may be conditional, as applicants can be asked to achieve certain examination results. Once examination results are published, the institution confirms the place if the applicant meets the conditions of the offer. If the applicant holds no offers, or if offers are not confirmed, he or she is eligible for "clearing", a UCAS service that helps people without places find suitable programmes with vacancies.[104]

With a view to foreign student admissions, UCAS is generally considered as an effective and efficient system that avoids a "jungle situation" and enhances transparency, in particular as students can apply with the same application form for any university in the country. Moreover, it is viewed as positive to have the same system for domestic and foreign students, as it follows the general philosophy of setting the same standards and require-

103 Cf. http://www.ucas.com/higher/about/mission.html.
104 For more information see www.ucas.org or www.eurydice.org.

ments for everybody. However, UCAS may not always be helpful for international students: the system and application forms were not designed for foreign applicants and they are frequently not well understood abroad. Interviewees feel that a different system would force universities to be more customer-oriented, for instance to deliver good feedback in cases of refusal or to process and decide more rapidly on foreign applications. Frequently, no information is provided until a few weeks before the start of the programme (see also chapter 8.3). Finally, some institutions may prefer to have a closer relationship with the applicants, as the international market gets more competitive.[105]

Sweden: the National Admissions Office for Higher Education

The Swedish VHS or National Admissions Office for Higher Education is an example for a national-level body that runs the entire undergraduate admissions and selection procedure for Swedish higher education institutions for both domestic and foreign undergraduate applicants.[106] Unlike the UCAS-model, higher education institutions do not see applications or applicants before enrolment, and admissions decisions are made at national level.

In general, each university communicates the number of places available for each of their undergraduate programmes. Applicants can indicate 12 preferred programmes (out of the 1,600 available) in their application form, and have to submit it with transcripts, and a certificate of knowledge of the English and Swedish language. Admissions criteria are the same for all students (national and international), all universities, and all programmes. Some programmes have specific requirements, for instance upper secondary Mathematics, but this, too, usually applies to all universities offering similar programmes. If there are more eligible applicants for the same programme than there are places, the best ones are taken. The selection carried out by VHS is entirely numerical and hence based on marks. Motivation letters, previous work, personal statements, and the like are not taken into account.

To facilitate a precise numerical comparison with domestic applications, foreign qualifications and marks are “translated” as accurately as possible into the Swedish system. VHS evaluates and accredits foreign upper secondary qualifications at no cost for the student, and students can ask for an evaluation throughout the year, whether or not they have submitted an application. The fee for the service is paid by the universities, in proportion to the number of undergraduate programmes and students they have. The policy of precise “translation” of qualifications and numerical selection is frequently considered a problem, as it does not allow for the flexibility deemed both necessary and

105 The assessment of UCAS is based on interviews with representatives from UMIST, the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology and from the University of Nottingham.

106 Among Swedish universities, only Stockholm University has not delegated its undergraduate programme application procedure to VHS.

useful by the universities. In particular, the numerical selection is not regarded as an adequate tool to select and rank international students coming from a wide variety of education systems and institutions.

Overall, foreign admissions through VHS are secondary for higher education institutions, as the majority of foreign students are admitted directly at the institutions into English-language-taught Master's programmes. Also the foreign undergraduate applicants for the (only five) undergraduate programmes completely taught in English are admitted directly by the higher education institutions. For all other undergraduate programmes, Swedish language knowledge is a requirement. Therefore, most international undergraduate students that are admitted through VHS come from the Nordic countries, i.e. Norway, Finland, Denmark, and Iceland: of the 115,000 applications processed by VHS in 2004, 7,000 were foreign and 1,000 from Finland and Norway.

France: the role of the embassies

The French preliminary admissions procedure or *procedure d'admission préalable* is an example of a national-level procedure that only applies to foreign undergraduate applicants. Foreign students from non-EU-countries wishing to enrol for the first time on an undergraduate course at a French public university need to apply through the French embassy in their home country almost one year prior to enrolment. In his or her application, the candidate names two universities. The embassy forwards the application to the applicant's first choice university. If the institution refuses a place, the dossier is passed to the second one. If refused by the second institution, the applicant may request the Ministry of Education to direct him or her to another institution. Participation in the procedure is subject to a specified French language level, which is assessed through a test organised by the embassies. Certain candidates are exempt from this test, for example, if French is the official language of the country from which the candidate originates. Applicants from EU countries, who formerly also had to undergo this procedure, can now apply directly to the universities.[107]

The Ministry of Interior imposes the procedure – not particularly to help institutions but to avoid fraud and the abuse of student visas. Applicants who are deemed unlikely to "misuse" a student visa are exempted from the procedure.[108]

At the visited institutions, for instance the Paris 12 Val de Marne University, the procedure is considered helpful by some hands-on admissions staff, but

107 At the University Val de Marne Paris 12, for instance, EU applicants now have to submit a *demande d'admission* directly to the central *scolarité générale*. The application is then assessed by an academic committee for equivalence of the entry qualification.

108 For example, holders of qualifications like a French, International or European Baccalauréat are exempted from the procedure, and students who hold a French scholarship or who come to France as part of an organised exchange programme, as well as refugees, stateless persons, and the children of French diplomats.

generally perceived as a burden. For instance, embassies do not always verify if a student and the submitted documents are trustworthy. In addition, information on the procedure is not passed on in all countries, and foreign students frequently apply directly to the universities after the early deadline of preliminary admissions. As the system obliges institutions to decide much earlier on the admission of foreign than of domestic students, teaching and research staff often decline offers in order to keep places for national applicants, or at least answer only at a very late stage. This procedure is also viewed critically by a representative of the French Ministry of Education: it is considered inadequate to avoid fraud and validate qualifications; it is time-consuming, heavy, and incompatible with the present volume of foreign applications.

Additional support structures: national service points abroad

The majority of countries included in the study are represented by national agencies with offices abroad, as for example EduFrance, IDP or the British Council, which can support higher education institutions in foreign student recruitment and admissions. However, some of these agencies have set up special service points to help with foreign student recruitment and admission. The service points are usually in charge of credential evaluation and run language tests, above all to make sure that applications are not fraudulent and that the applicants fulfil visa requirements. This is seen as particularly important in China, because of the volume of applications and the increasing number of fraud cases. Two examples of such service points are the French CELA, the *Centre d'Evaluation Linguistique et Académique* and the Dutch NESOs or Netherlands Education Support Offices.

The French service point CELA was opened in 2003 and is operated by EduFrance and situated at the French embassy in China. Every Chinese student wishing to pursue studies in France has to have his or her qualifications and language skills evaluated by the CELA. Students whose qualifications are approved and who pass the test receive a certificate that they need to present when applying for a student visa.[109] The visited public universities consider the service provided by CELA as helpful. It is also regarded as useful by the visited *grandes écoles*, although all three of them have their own representative or even an office in China. Problems may, however, arise in cases where the centre imposes criteria that are higher than those required by an institution: INSA Lyon, for instance, attaches more importance to excellent qualifications than to language skills, which can be acquired once in France in the framework of language and bridging courses provided by the institution.

The Dutch NESOs, operated by Nuffic, the Netherlands Organization for International Cooperation in Higher Education, are a second example of these types of service points. Netherlands Education Support Offices exist in

109 Cf. http://www.cela-cn.org

China, Taiwan, Indonesia and South Africa. These local offices are in charge of the promotion of Dutch higher education as a whole and provide services similar to those described for the CELA. Institutions become members of one or more NESOs and pay a membership fee. The Chinese centre, for example, was founded in 2001, and works in cooperation with the Chinese Service Centre for Scholarly Exchange (CSCSE).[110] Among the visited institutions, the service provided by the NESOs is generally considered very helpful. Especially the institute of higher professional education, the Hanzehogeschool, makes extensive use of its services. Possible problems mentioned by interviewees at the University of Groningen are cases where institutions and service points differ in their opinion on criteria or assessment of qualifications, as well as a certain lack of transparency.

Although less problematic than other cooperation activities, this kind of service is not welcome in all countries. The Australian Vice Chancellors' Committee AVCC had proposed to set up a visa-vetting centre in China to carry out similar tasks to streamline the process, and operate it with a small financial contribution from each university. The offer was firmly refused by Australian higher education institutions, which are reluctant to cooperate and share information, as this is seen as a possible competitive disadvantage.

Guidelines and assistance for credential evaluation

In most countries, national bodies, such as the agencies in charge of international cooperation in higher education, ministries of education or the rectors' conference, assist their higher education institutions in the evaluation of foreign qualifications. Usually, these bodies host the national ENIC-NARIC office (European Network of Information Centres on academic recognition and mobility / National Academic Recognition Information Centres).[111] In the visited countries, higher education institutions are largely autonomous in their decisions on foreign student admissions and on the recognition of education undertaken abroad.[112] National offices are more orientated towards

110 Cf. http://www.nuffic.net

111 The ENIC Network of European National Information Centres was jointly established by the Council of Europe and UNESCO to implement the Lisbon Convention and to develop policy and practice for the recognition of qualifications. The National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARICs) provide advice and information on the academic recognition of diplomas and periods of study undertaken abroad. The NARIC network is an initiative of the European Commission. The networks cooperate closely, and individual ENIC-NARIC centres, often located at national agencies or ministries of education, are frequently identical. For more information see http://www.enic-naric.net.

112 However, there may be some constraints: First, higher education institutions may have to respect minimum legal requirements, e.g. as regards the duration of a Bachelor's degree programme for admission into the Master's level. Second, higher education institutions may have to respect bilateral or international agreements. Dutch institutions, for example, have to apply international law such as the European Convention on the Equivalence of Diplomas leading to Admission to Universities of 1953. Holders of an upper secondary qualification issued by one of the signatory states have to be admitted by Dutch universities. This treaty will soon be replaced by the Lisbon Convention (signed but not ratified in the Netherlands), which leaves more freedom to universities. Furthermore, bilateral agreements, for example with Germany, need to be followed.

providing information and advice on the foreign education systems and qualifications than decision-making. Assistance is provided either in form of periodically updated guidelines, information and training sessions, or through direct assistance on demand of the higher education institution (see also chapter 7.3.2).

Guidelines may give general recommendations for assessment, like the ones that are provided by the Swiss Rector's Conference CRUS, or background information on countries and higher education systems, like the Australian National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition NOOSR. In Switzerland, higher education institutions use the CRUS guidelines as a basis for the definition of their own specific criteria for the assessment of foreign qualifications, which are then in turn communicated through the website of the CRUS for all Swiss universities. The twelve Swiss universities also try to unify their criteria for assessment, timetables etc. in the national committee for admissions and equivalences, a bottom-up initiative, which is supported by the CRUS (cf. chapter 3).[113]

The Australian counterpart of the CRUS, the Australian Vice Chancellors' Committee AVCC, also issues a code of practice with general guidelines for admissions practices. In addition, the Australian NOOSR provides country guidelines, which are used as a basis for assessment and for the elaboration of requirements by all the visited Australian institutions. The country guidelines provide information about the higher education system, existing qualifications, the grading system, as well as a list of recognised higher education institutions and references to national rankings. NOOSR also organises training sessions all over the country, where the NOOSR staff explain how to assess international qualifications and give updates on the guidelines. NOOSR can also evaluate individual qualifications on request.[114]

This practice approximates the services provided by organisations in other countries.[115] In the Netherlands, higher education institutions can turn to Nuffic for advice if they doubt the value or authenticity of a given qualification. Nuffic also organises training seminars for admissions staff and offers evaluation services to individuals on request, in cooperation with two other national bodies.[116] In Sweden, the Högskoleverket HSV, the National Agency for Higher Education, evaluates qualifications awarded on completion of higher education programmes outside Sweden on request of individuals and

113 For more information see http://www.crus.ch

114 NOOSR guidelines were published in 1996. Due to staff restrictions, they have so far only been updated for a limited range of countries. Institutions are supposed to (and do) use them as a basis for their own further research on foreign degrees. For more information, see http://aei.dest.gov.au/AEI/Qualifications-Recognition/default.htm.

115 Only in France, the ENIC-NARIC office, which is part of the French Ministry of Education, is hardly used by the visited institutions. EduFrance can evaluate credentials on request of the higher education institutions.

116 For more information see http://www.nuffic.net. The Information Centre for Credential Evaluation does credential evaluation for individuals, cf. http://www.idw.nl.

provides universities with guidelines and information for their own credential evaluation. In the UK, UCAS produced a guidebook for the recognition of foreign secondary education diplomas and the UK NARIC has similar guidelines and gives advice to institutions on the comparability of undergraduate degrees for admission into postgraduate programmes.[117] Also in the United States, different organisations provide material and help for individual institutions on international admissions. The American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers AACRAO provides recommendations on recognition of degrees, gives information on international admissions, and organises courses on credential evaluation. The College Board also provides information and organises courses, and, in addition, it is in charge of the SAT examination and assists admissions officers in reading and using the test results correctly (see chapter 7.3.4). Finally, a company, World Education Services (WES) offers workshops for admissions professionals and credential evaluation for individuals on request, and hence a possibility for higher education institutions to outsource credential evaluation.[118]

In general, the visited institutions make wide use above all of guidelines, either as a direct reference in the assessment procedure or as a basis for the establishment of their own database with information on foreign qualifications (see chapter 7.3.2). Although they mostly follow the guidelines or the advice given by the national NARIC, higher education institutions appreciate that they are autonomous in their decisions on the admission of foreign students. They make use of their freedom and adapt criteria based on the performance of admitted student cohorts. Independently, most admissions officers would appreciate it if national-level centres could provide more information on individual higher education institutions abroad, institutional rankings, and models of standard diplomas.

117 For more information see International Qualifications for entry to Higher Education, http://www.ucas.com/candq/inter/inter03.pdf, and http://www.naric.org.uk.

118 For more information see http://www.wes.org, http://www.aacrao.org/ and http:// www.collegeboard.com.

7 Assessment and selection procedures

In practice, assessment and selection procedures are difficult to separate from the organisational structure of the admissions process. This is also the reason why they have already been mentioned, as for example when explaining the centralisation or decentralisation of the admissions process (cf. chapter 6.1.1), and in cases where admissions procedures are streamlined at sub-national or national level (cf. chapter 6.2). Still, the focus of the present chapter is different: it explores in detail **how and on which basis final admissions decisions are made**.

The following issues are relevant:

- ♦ rationale and context of the assessment system;
- ♦ how an academic and objective judgement is ensured;
- ♦ how and by means of which "tools" information on the applicant and his or her academic capacities is gathered.

The organisational structure described in chapter 6 provides the framework for decision-making in foreign student admissions. It is also important to take into account the underlying rationale of decisions: is academic excellence the aim, and should the best be selected from the pool of applicants? Should a positive admissions decision be based on the potential of a student to succeed, or on the equivalence of his or her qualification to the national entry qualification (cf. chapter 4.2)? In addition, assessment procedures can vary depending on the context of marketing and recruitment activities directed towards foreign students.

At undergraduate level, admissions decisions are frequently made by admissions staff. At postgraduate level, decisions on admissions are mostly taken by academics. Academic judgement is seen as both necessary and decisive in the actual admissions process for postgraduates. Admissions decisions can be delegated to admissions tutors or international delegates in the case of foreign students, made by the programme directors or by committees composed of several teaching and research staff. The exact role and organisation of academics in this process sheds light on the different ways of decision-making.

In all cases, the most common assessment procedure is a case-by-case assessment of application dossiers. The content of these dossiers – usually the applicant's entry qualifications, transcripts of courses, a language certificate, motivation and reference letters – can vary between institutions, as can the importance attached to each of the "ingredients". Additional tools, like standardised tests, subject-specific entrance examinations, or interviews, can be used to assess a student's eligibility, to gather additional information as a basis for assessment or as a decisive "second stage" after an eligibility check has been successfully passed.

7.1 Assessment and decision-making systems

Assessment and decision-making systems depend in the first place on the institutional, faculty and programme context and rationale. Assessments can be carried out at the host institution or linked to marketing and recruitment activities. In the latter case, assessments can take place partly or entirely in the applicants' countries of origin, at education fairs or through targeted recruitment at secondary and higher education institutions.

Assessment of applications in selective and open systems

It may be helpful to recall the initial classification of admissions systems into open and selective ones. In an open system, all eligible candidates are admitted. Decision-making processes focuses on the eligibility of a student. In a selective system with limited capacity, eligibility denotes the right to compete for admission, but only the best from a pool of applicants are admitted (cf. chapter 2.2).

In practice, foreign student admissions procedures are more nuanced, adding to the complexity of the picture:

- ♦ In a selective system with limited capacity, the best students can be selected from a pool of candidates after one or several deadlines. In an assessment system, this means applications are compared and ranked. They are often classified into different categories according to their quality and potential to be accepted. The selection may take place within the entire pool of applicants after one deadline or within reduced pools after each of several deadlines with a possible clearing at the end. International and national candidates may be ranked in the same or in different categories.
- ♦ Alternatively, applications can be assessed as they come in (rolling admissions, cf. chapter 8.2). If there is a capacity limit, the process closes when capacity is met. In this case, applications are compared with preset standards, which are usually not only numerical, rather than with other applications. Admissions decisions are made on a case-by-case basis. The (reduced number of) applications that arrive in the same period may still allow for some comparison, for example in cases where academic committees meet once a month to review the dossiers and decide on admissions.
- ♦ Even in a generally open system without a capacity limit, the eligibility of a foreign applicant can be subject to high standards in order to ensure equivalence with the national (or institutional) entry qualifications, and hence an implicit selection can take place. Decisions are made case by case in a rolling admissions system, i.e. as applications come in. The standards usually refer to duration and content of the previous qualification. In addition, there can be numerical minimum requirements, which are cut-off in nature. Standards may be documented and normalised, or left to academic judgement and experience.

In all cases, assessment procedures may be divided into different stages. A pre-assessment can be carried out by administrative admissions staff or by academics, who decide or recommend if an applicant is admitted into a second phase of assessment or selection. A system can be open at undergraduate and selective at postgraduate level. Usually, procedures are more sophisticated at the postgraduate level. The following examples illustrate different assessment systems. More examples will be presented in the following sections, for their close link to academic organisation and admissions tools and instruments.

New York University is an example of **selection from a pool** for admission into the undergraduate level: admissions staff only start reading the applications after the deadline, once they have all arrived. All applications are read twice by professional administrative staff and divided into 1) clearly admissible, 2) clearly non-admissible, and 3) pending, which is the biggest of the three categories. All applications in this last group are read by senior admissions staff, who make the decision. Domestic and international candidates are assessed and classified together.

Another example for selection from a pool are the French *grandes écoles*: at EM Lyon, for example, the decision on the admission of domestic and international candidates into the Master of Science is made by the same jury of academics, but they are ranked in separate categories. For the International MBA, candidates are first preselected from a (reduced) pool of applications after each of six deadlines. If admitted into the second selection stage, they are invited to one of the six selection dates succeeding each of the deadlines, or have to pass a standardised test in their home country and are invited to a telephone interview. The latter is more frequent for international applicants.[119]

Assessment against preset standards, or “rolling selection”, as admissions officers refer to this practice, is used for the MBA programme at Deakin Business School. This means that a student can apply at any time of the year and his or her application is evaluated when it arrives. The application is evaluated against a set of standards and requirements. These are not necessarily numerical: scores are used as indicators, and other criteria like work experience or reference letters are emphasised.[120] In “rolling selection” systems, standards can get higher as places become scarce: this happens for undergraduate admissions at Purdue University in the US. It is therefore possible that a good candidate is turned down in May, while in January he or she could have been awarded a place.

119 A later, so-called express registration process may still be possible, independently of the selection dates. Hence, deadlines are no real cut-off dates, and the school applies a parallel rolling admissions system.

120 The department considered it a problem that applications could not be compared among each other, and had discussed the option of a deadline and ranking-based admission. However, the idea was abandoned precisely because of the volume of applications and the importance of a quick assessment.

Foreign undergraduate admissions at all visited Swiss universities are examples of admissions based on **high standards within an open admissions system.** There are clearly defined and documented cut-off criteria per country of origin. Upper secondary qualifications from a given country may only be accepted with a given grade point average, and the applicant may in addition be asked to sit the central Swiss or institutional (for the Federal Technical Institutes) entrance examination (chapter 7.3.4). Decisions are made by admissions staff based on these criteria, and applications can hence be assessed as they come in. If necessary, criteria are revised by the admissions office. Postgraduate admissions are in most cases forwarded to the faculties and decided on by academics: at the ETH Zürich, for example, applicants for a Master's programme in Information Technology are selected by the programme directors.

Implicit selection in an open system takes place at French public universities, as there is no such clear definition of "equivalence". Equivalence of foreign qualifications is assessed by academics on a case-by-case basis and approved by an academic board. At the University Jean Moulin Lyon 3, applications for admission into the faculty of languages are only checked for completeness at central level, then assessed by the programme directors according to their language discipline. Difficult cases are discussed in a committee, which meets two to three times per year. All decisions need to be signed by the dean, who presides over the committee.[121] The lack of documented standards and criteria for equivalence is regarded as problematic. First, there is a risk of taking subjective decisions. Second, reviewing applications case by case without a previous eligibility check is labour-intensive: even qualifications from the same country are often very heterogeneous, and need to be carefully reviewed. Nevertheless, the "academic eye" on all applications is regarded as essential.

Assessment of applications in the context of student recruitment in the countries of origin

Assessment procedures, academic involvement and admissions tools can vary according to the place where admissions decisions are made. The "normal" case is that applicants apply to the host institution, where admissions or academic staff assess the application. However, institutions that actively recruit foreign students and engage in marketing activities abroad often link admissions procedures to these activities. In this case, applicants may be preselected or even made an offer in their country of origin, either:

121 For the undergraduate level, most of the individually assessed applications are foreign. French students can enrol directly, and only need to apply for admission into an advanced level of study, e.g. if they wish to transfer from another institution. In this case, these applications are assessed by the same staff as foreign applications. Although French students can enrol directly, they have to pass an obligatory orientation interview with one or two teaching and research staff at Lyon 3. The recommendation of this jury is not binding, but intended to avoid that students enrol in a programme that does not match their capacities and study projects.

- at higher education fairs;
- or in the framework of targeted recruitment at secondary schools and higher education institutions.

The main motivation behind an institution's attendance of higher education fairs is to increase foreign student numbers and to gain or underpin its position on the "international education market". Higher education institutions usually attend education fairs in their main source countries, i.e. in the main countries of origin of their foreign student cohorts, or in countries where they wish to recruit more students, for example to enhance the diversity of their student population. The institution's representatives, usually marketing staff, international office staff or academics, assess applications and interview students at the fair. If they have delegated authority for the programme in question, and consider that the student meets the requirements, they can make an admissions offer.

Many institutions, however, doubt the usefulness of education fairs for student recruitment. These are mainly institutions that aim to recruit foreign students with a specific profile and/or emphasise academic excellence. If at all, they only take part in education fairs for general marketing and information purposes. Instead, foreign student recruitment is done as targeted recruitment at foreign secondary schools or higher education institutions. To this extent, the host institutions identify adequate source institutions in terms of orientation and quality, and make agreements with them. Staff from the host institution frequently travel to the source countries to interview candidates and supervise tests. Sometimes the source institutions carry out a preselection.

All visited Australian institutions are present at international education fairs. With the exception of the University of Melbourne and Monash University, they would all make admissions offers "on the spot". This is the practice of the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology RMIT. Marketing staff of the university-owned company RMIT International, which is in charge of foreign student recruitment and admissions, can make offers on the spot for programmes where they have delegated authority. They are usually accompanied by academics in charge of foreign student recruitment. The internationalisation coordinator of the Business Faculty, for instance, normally interviews students at fairs and makes an offer directly if the student is admissible. Interviewees believe that the quick decision-making gives them a competitive advantage, and report that, especially in Asia, students and their parents often expect an immediate admission decision.

Monash University and the University of Melbourne are part of the "Group of Eight", a coalition of "Australia's leading universities"[122], and emphasise aca-

122 The members of the group are the vice-chancellors (presidents) of the University of Melbourne, Monash University, the University of Sydney, the University of Queensland, the Australian National University, the University of Western Australia, the University of New South Wales, and the University of Adelaide. For further information, see www.go8.edu.au.

demic excellence as an aim of recruitment. The University of Melbourne focuses on targeted recruitment at foreign schools and higher education institutions rather than on the attendance of “mass fairs”. The international coordinator of the Faculty of Business and Economics at Monash University attends education fairs alongside the staff of Monash International, but does not make offers on the spot, which are considered to “cheapen the university’s image”. Instead, candidates are invited for interview the following day. In the meantime, application documents can be verified. If documents are missing or a second look is necessary, the candidate can be made a conditional offer.

Most of the visited engineering schools aim at recruiting foreign students with a specific profile, and therefore prefer targeted recruitment to attending general education fairs. The French engineering school INSA Lyon undertakes targeted recruitment of foreign students into the undergraduate level, namely into three regionally focused channel programmes. Recruitment activities for the “ASINSA programme”, which is focused on Asia, take place two years before admission mainly at Asian secondary schools. The partner schools carry out a preselection, and, if possible, INSA staff interview candidates in the context of a site visit to the school. Whereas the institution does not (any longer) attend general education fairs, the importance of targeted recruitment, personal contact and follow-up is emphasised.

The other visited French engineering school, ENSAM, takes part in targeted recruitment activities for postgraduate admissions via the two networks n+i and ParisTech (cf. chapter 6.2.1). The n+i coordinator sometimes attends education fairs for general information purposes, but considers these of limited value for the recruitment of engineering students. Therefore, at the centre of the network’s recruitment activities are visits to foreign higher education institutions with recognised engineering schools or departments, to achieve cooperation agreements. In the case of ParisTech, the network of source institutions is limited to selected Chinese higher education institutions, which make a preselection. After that, interviews and a test are carried out by a committee of academics from the French institutions who travel to China for this purpose. In both cases, the assessment in the applicants’ country of origin results in a preselection, but the final decision is made at the host institution in France.

This is different for Purdue University. For a Master’s programme in Engineering, the department also actively recruits students at foreign higher education institutions. The students are selected at a partner university in China, and immediately asked for a firm acceptance of a place. Local staff at the partner university make a preselection, out of which Purdue staff select 300. The Chinese university reduces numbers to 100 after which six to seven members of academic staff of Purdue University travel to China to select 50 students, who are made an admissions offer.

Some Swedish institutions, for instance KTH or Uppsala University, have also expressed their doubts on the usefulness of international student recruitment fairs. Interviewees believe that fairs would only increase the number of applications from average or poor students, not high calibre applicants. To have some guarantee of the quality of foreign students, KTH staff prefer to visit universities abroad for recruitment purposes. In contrast, the attendance of fairs would result only in increased numbers of applications, and thus work, without making the "pool" from which to select any better.

7.2 Academic involvement in the admissions process

Much has already been said about the role of administrative units (cf. chapter 6.1), but little about the concrete involvement of academics. At many higher education institutions, the participation of teaching and research staff in (foreign) admissions is a matter of discussion. Should academics have any role in foreign student admissions? Are admissions an academic matter or an administrative duty that should not keep academics from their teaching and research tasks? The two opinions can be (and are widely) sustained, usually depending on the national and institutional context. A third answer is that both administrative and academic staff should have a role in the process. Interestingly, arguments for and against academic participation in admissions are put forward by both "parties", international or admissions staff as well as academic staff.

The importance of academic judgement, especially at postgraduate level, is the most frequent **argument for the involvement of academics** in the admissions process. Teaching and research staff have to work with the students afterwards; they should decide which students to admit. Administrative staff are often not regarded as qualified to judge a student's academic potential. In addition, the involvement of academic staff enhances responsibility for the academic progress of the admitted students. In foreign student admissions this is even more important, as the decision to study a degree programme abroad is often linked to a major investment on the student's side. With their participation in foreign admissions, academics also contribute to the enhancement of the institution's international profile.

On the other hand, there are plenty of **arguments against academic participation** in admissions. A common view is that admissions are mainly an administrative task, which can be partly or entirely delegated to specialised staff. Especially if admissions are a side task for academics, the assessment process can be very time-consuming, keep academics from their main tasks and lengthen the decision-making process. The view is that academic judgement can also be ensured via clearly set and periodically revised criteria. Furthermore, academics frequently do not have the specialist knowledge on foreign qualifications that admissions or international staff have. These arguments become more relevant when confronted with an increasing volume of applications.

The form and extent of academic involvement in foreign admissions usually **varies with the level of study**. In general, the importance of academic judgement and participation in the admissions process is emphasised more at postgraduate level, where the academic potential of the student, as well as the academic content of the previous qualification and its appropriateness for the study project need to be assessed. At undergraduate level, it is often easier to streamline criteria and delegate the admissions decision to specialist staff. It is often deemed inappropriate to take time off the academics' teaching and research activities. However, this may vary depending on the recruitment strategy of a higher education institution: if the focus is on recruitment into undergraduate programmes and quality, admissions procedures for the undergraduate level may involve academics and be more sophisticated than for postgraduate level.

Where teaching and research staff are involved in the admissions process:

- what are their exact roles and tasks?
- how are they organised, who, and how many are involved?

The **role of academics** can be to make the final decision on admission. They can make a selection after the eligibility of the candidates has been checked by admissions staff, or they can be involved from the start of the admissions process to provide flexibility and academic judgement. Academics may also be involved in special selection procedures, like interviews, tests, etc. At the other extreme, the participation of academics can be kept to a minimum. They may not have any involvement in the decision-making process, but just set criteria and see borderline cases. Academics can also only be involved when new programmes or procedures are introduced. In this case, they revise all applications for a limited time, and in setting and revising criteria, jointly establish procedures, define roles and tasks, and achieve a maximum delegation to admissions specialists.

The organisation and type of academic staff involved are closely related to their role. "Academics" are usually understood as teaching and research staff from the academic discipline in question. If active in admissions (of foreign students), these staff members may have substantially reduced teaching and research activities to work as academic coordinators, or in promotion and recruitment.[123] For each programme, faculty or institution, there may be only one or a limited number of persons involved in foreign admissions. These can be either "international delegates" with a role in foreign recruitment and admissions, or general "admissions and recruitment delegates" for under- or postgraduate admissions (of all students). Alternatively, programme directors can assess "their" applications. They can make a decision by them-

123 In addition, limits between academic and administrative staff are sometimes blurred: most admissions, selection, or international officers also have an academic background (i.e. hold a tertiary degree), though often not in the relevant field.

selves, or, in addition, get together in committees and discuss difficult cases. The final decision often needs to be signed by the dean or by the president of the admissions committee. Finally, an admissions committee or board can make an admissions decision based on the recommendations of specialised admissions staff.

The subsequent examples will clarify different models for academic participation in the admissions process, as well as present several decision-making (or, where applicable, ranking) models employed by the involved academics.

INSA Lyon is an example of **important involvement of academics in undergraduate admissions**, and of a selection from a pool based on a specific ranking system and a comprehensive selection procedure. The admission of foreign undergraduate students via elaborate procedures and the involvement of academics at the undergraduate level correspond to the school's policy focus on undergraduate recruitment (cf. chapter 4.3). Academic staff carry out interviews in the countries of origin in the context of targeted recruitment. They are part of the admissions jury and assess the content of the applications. In the selection process, a merit-based ranking into three categories (A for a positive decision, B for candidates who may be admitted if places are left, and C for refused applications) takes place. The persons in charge of the assessment are mainly the programme coordinators of the three regionally focused channel programmes. However, other motivated teaching staff are encouraged to review and comment on the applications. The jury confirms the final decisions and discusses borderline cases. The involvement of academics is regarded as essential not only for their pedagogical judgement, but because the academic staff are expected to "invest" in the school and contribute to its profile.

The above example is, however, exceptional, as at most of the visited institutions **the participation of academics in undergraduate admissions is kept to a minimum**. For example, no teaching or research staff are involved in the decision-making process at any of the visited universities in the US – i.e. in the actual selection of undergraduate students, in terms of reading through the application forms, carrying out interviews, or supervising tests. Their involvement, if any, is prior to the arrival of the applications, through setting the desired criteria. At New York University and Purdue University, academic staff, usually the deans, set the criteria for undergraduate admissions. But in practice, these academics only give their formal agreement on the criteria proposed by the admissions office. At Indiana University Bloomington, academics can comment on the class quality during and at the end of the academic year. Their assessment of the class quality will influence the selection procedure the year after. For undergraduate level, the situation is similar at most of the visited institutions in Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Australia, as previously explained in the sections on the degree of centralisation of the admissions process, cf. chapter 6.1.1.

At the majority of the visited Australian institutions, it is believed that **academics should set clear criteria, see borderline cases and decide on the recognition of prior learning** (advanced standing). This applies to foreign student admissions into undergraduate programmes and most taught Master's programmes. Although this opinion is more widely defended by admissions and international staff, who are interested in rapid and streamlined procedures, many academics make similar statements.[124] This is mainly due to the huge increase in the volume of foreign applications. At the Faculty of Science, Technology and Engineering at La Trobe University, for example, the associate dean international formerly assessed all foreign applications and made the admissions decisions. It was possible due to the limited number of applications, and considered a necessary first step to build up experience. However, the unit has gradually been working towards less involvement of academics, through the development of clear criteria, based on earlier experience and performance recorded of admitted student cohorts. "Straightforward" cases are now handled centrally at the international office, which only forwards unclear cases to the faculty. The associate dean international has trained several academic coordinators, one for the undergraduate level, one for the postgraduate level and one for research programmes, who have now accumulated some expertise on the applicants' main countries of origin. There are also **admissions committees** at faculty or institutional levels at most Australian institutions. These committees mostly do not assess applications for admission, but make generic decisions on the institutional admissions policy, recognition of qualifications from a given country or foreign institution and on general institution-wide and programme-specific requirements.

At the postgraduate level, academic involvement after a central eligibility check is the rule at most of the visited institutions. At Uppsala University, for example, it is deemed very important that academics decide on postgraduate admissions, as only they will be able to assess the suitability of the candidate to their programme. On the other hand, the academics highly appreciate the fact that somebody else does the eligibility check for them. Uppsala is a good example of **assessment by teaching staff, who then discuss the applications in a committee and for a selection from a pool based on a specific ranking system**. Academic staff are generally involved in the selection of students for their English-language-taught Master's programmes. "Academic staff' could mean one or two people if a programme is very small, or even all the teaching staff. For the Master of Development studies, for example, where around 250 applicants compete for 20 available places, four members of the teaching staff select the students. After eligibility

124 The level of "delegation" to administrative staff varies from one institution to another. At research-focused universities with strong faculties, like Monash University or the University of Melbourne, academics usually decide on admissions into most postgraduate programmes, and for some programmes are even involved in undergraduate admissions. If the admission decision is delegated, it is usually rather made by a faculty-based admissions office(r) than by the international office.

has been checked at the admissions office, all eligible applications are read by the teaching staff, who first rank the applications in three categories (category one for a clear positive admission decision, category two for a "maybe", category three for a clear "no") and then rank students within each category. The same system is used for the Swedish applications when they come in at a later deadline, and then the two lists are merged. This means that national and international students compete in the same category. Two staff members read the international applications, two the Swedish applications, then all read those ranked as category one. If there are enough students in this category, selection is done among them. If not, cases of category two are discussed.[125]

At all Dutch universities, the **decision on admissions into the Master's level has to be made by an academic committee**. The department for Agrotechnology and Food Science of Wageningen University is a good example for this practice. Unlike at Uppsala, **applications are assessed case by case**, in a rolling admissions system, until a final deadline (cf. chapter 8.1). The admissions committee is composed of the coordinators of the different programmes. The decision is guided by the comparability of the applicant's degree to a Bachelor's in the same field earned at Wageningen.[126] Committee meetings take place once a month, and even more frequently when the final deadline is approaching. Prior to each meeting, the programme coordinators prepare their candidates, after a general eligibility check and preadvice by the university's admissions officer.[127] If a candidate is clearly admissible, the president of the committee often only crosschecks the case. All doubtful cases are discussed in the committee to make a joint decision and learn from each other. The importance of interaction and dialogue within the committee is strongly emphasised. In addition, the presidents of the admissions committees of the university's four institutes meet two or three times a year to exchange experience and elaborate general admissions guidelines for the university. Generally, this way of involving academics is regarded as effective: they are exempt from bureaucratic tasks, but make the final decision on admissions. This is seen as important because they are the ones who then have to work with the admitted students. The low

125 A similar case is the Indiana University Bloomington, but academics apply a different assessment and ranking system: for a Master's programme in Politics, four members of the teaching staff assess applications after a central eligibility check has been made. In this case, applications are not split up into domestic and international: all applications are read by the four members of the academic staff. Each of them gives one to five points to each application. If there are big differences between the grading of the academics, the case is discussed. Then, an average between the four rankings is calculated for each application, and all applications are ranked. The best applicants of the list are admitted.

126 Holders of a Bachelor's degree earned at Wageningen can be directly admitted into a Master's programme in the same discipline. Hence, for this reduced group the admissions system is an open one. All other, and hence the foreign applicants are admitted "sur dossier".

127 The admissions officer checks for completeness, English language knowledge, and equivalence of the qualifications, and calculates a GPA equivalent based on institutional or Nuffic guidelines. If the qualification is unknown, it is send to Nuffic for evaluation. Only then, it is forwarded to the committee, together with a "preadvice form" providing background information and a recommendation for acceptance or refusal.

failure rate among foreign students is seen as a proof of the system's success.

For admissions into the Master's programmes in International Business and Economics at the University of Groningen, a similar system is in place. The **admissions staff participate in an academic admissions committee** or board. In this case, applications are assessed as they come in and there is limited comparison of applicants. The evaluation or admissions board consists of the director of education and two or three members of the teaching staff. The academic coordinator of the programme and the (faculty-based) admissions officer take part in an advisory role. Although the admissions officer formally only takes part as an advisor, the preparatory work determines most of the admissions decisions: the admissions officer preassesses the applications and gathers background information. Only the applications that fulfil the formal criteria are assessed and decided on by the evaluation board. The final decision of the board takes into account the assessment of the admissions officer, the results of any entrance examinations taken in subjects where the applicant's qualification is deficient and the assessment of so-called "in-country-evaluators" (academics who are consulted as advisors in the admissions process, for their expertise in a particular country or region, cf. chapter 7.3.2).

Interviewees at the same faculty also regard it as **essential to have an eye on admissions in the early stage of a programme**, and develop criteria as well as a delegation structure based on this experience. For the mentioned Master's programmes in International Economics and Business, the programme coordinator reviewed all incoming application dossiers when the programme was established. This was possible due to the initially low number of applications, and necessary because no written documentation on criteria and admissions procedures existed. Now the programme is well established and the number of applications has multiplied. It is therefore regarded as very helpful and more reasonable to be able to delegate the major part of the work to the programme's admissions officer (in this case an administrative staff member with a non-field-specific academic background, who is regarded as the most competent "specialist" in the field).

At the University of Lausanne, **programme directors at the different faculties decide on admissions** into their postgraduate programmes. In general, this is regarded as feasible as long as the number of applicants is manageable. Still, the assessment of qualifications by individual academics has led to different problems. At the Faculty of Earth Sciences and Environment, academics are often the first contact of foreign applicants and previously had often admitted students on the basis of their qualifications, curriculum and proposal, without the (obligatory) eligibility check at central level. Afterwards, it often turned out that the students' degree was not equivalent to the Swiss entry qualification, and that the applicant could not be admitted to the institution. It is now obligatory, wherever an application arrives, that one copy be sent to the central admissions office, one to the programme director and one to the dean's office. Once eligibility has been checked centrally, the decision is made by the programme director, who often consults other teaching staff. The dean verifies with the programme director if the student is admissible.

At the Ecole des Hautes Etudes Commerciales, the HEC Lausanne, a frequent problem is that (foreign) candidates apply to several Master's programmes of the school at the same time. As applications are assessed by the individual programme coordinators, one applicant may also receive several offers, and planning is difficult. One way of solving this kind of problem may be to create a graduate school: then, an admissions board formed by all the teaching and research staff would decide on general admission to the graduate school and only afterwards make the right "match" between candidates and programmes.

Frequently, academic staff specialised in international affairs are involved in admissions, rather than teaching staff or the programme directors. This is considered appropriate for two reasons: first, it ensures that the person in charge has the relevant knowledge, and second, it reduces the burden on other teaching and research staff.

The **involvement only of academic staff specialised in internationalisation** is the practice at RMIT. Academic staff, usually the "international programme director", or "internationalisation coordinator", liaise with the admissions and marketing staff at the university-owned company. They go to education fairs with RMIT International, work on admissions requirements, and assess applications in borderline cases. At the Business Faculty, for example, one internationalisation coordinator oversees foreign student recruitment and admissions. Although part of the teaching staff, most of this person's time is devoted to the tasks that go hand-in-hand with foreign student intake and the faculty's internationalisation strategy. Both an academic background and an almost fulltime dedication to foreign student recruitment are seen as crucial, and the belief is that academics involved in foreign admissions should be trained for this purpose, visit the foreign institutions that feed into RMIT and acquire a good understanding of standardised language tests (IELTS and TOEFL, cf. chapter 7.3.3)

At ENSAM, **"international delegates" decide on foreign admissions**. Most of the foreign degree students at ENSAM are admitted through the field-level networks (cf. chapter 6.2.1).[128] This has made it possible to delegate the selection and decision-making process internally to the network

128 ENSAM is a multi-site institution run at several regional centres. At each centre, one "delegate" is responsible for a given geographic region, in which the centre should develop excellence, engage in projects, foster cooperation and exchange. However, in terms of the admission of foreign degree students, this mainly affects students who study in the framework of double-degree programmes.

coordinator, instead of an assessment made by the actual programme directors. The coordinator and a second academic assess and rank all applications. They then compare lists and make a final decision. This is an exception in the French context, where the programme coordinators usually are involved in the selection process. The system is perceived as positive: it reduces the workload for the research and teaching staff, but they feel well represented by the (motivated) coordinators. Academics who want to participate in the admission of foreign students can take part in recruitment activities or become active in the selection committee in the framework of ParisTech (cf. chapter 6.2.1). The same board that admits nationals confirms the final decisions on foreign admissions (although these are selected in separate procedures). The confirmation by the board is often a pure formality and frequently even happens when the offer has already been made.[129]

EM Lyon is another example of the **delegation of foreign admissions to a limited number of academic staff** members, but also has **academic representatives participating in interviews or tests**. First, there are five coordinators in charge of five different world regions, so-called “international relations managers”. (cf. chapter 5.2). The same persons are in charge of five different domains (e.g. promotion of the MBA, academic international relations, etc.), thus ensuring an overlap between different domains and regions. The international relations managers collaborate in recruitment and admission activities, and help with the assessment of applications. In principle, the responsables pédagogiques or programme coordinators, which are current or former teaching and research staff, set criteria, decide on capacity limits and assess applications. For admissions into the International MBA, for example, applications are usually first read by the person in charge of the promotion of the MBA and by the programme coordinator (sometimes also by another international relations manager). They make a pre-assessment and decide if an applicant can participate in the subsequent selection process. If this is the case, the candidate is invited to an interview (in person or by telephone), and to sit a standardised test. A jury composed of the programme coordinators, and sometimes, especially for the MBA, business representatives, make the final decisions on admissions. Even with telephone interviews, at least two representatives of the school need to be present.

At the visited institutions, it is rare that **academics are involved from beginning to end** (information, application, selection, follow-up, etc.) in admissions procedures for Bachelor’s or Master’s degrees. It is, however, usual for the PhD level, where flexibility and academic judgement are most emphasised. This does not necessarily mean that one academic tutor decides by himself on the admission of a PhD student, and on the value of his or her research project. At the Department of Economics of New York University, for

129 This is mainly due to several and early decision deadlines, for instance in case of n+i (cf. chapters 6.2.1 and 8.1).

example, the selection committee for the doctoral degree involves the ten to twelve professors of the department, who form a committee. Out of about 1,000 applications received every year, 300 are cut out directly on the GRE score, which leaves about 700. These are divided by country expertise, so that each professor gets around 50 to 60 applications. A meeting is organised where each professor presents his or her five to ten preferences, and some crosschecking is done at this point. Three professors then read the selected 70 to 80 applications, make the final selection, and submit offers. Also prior to the formal application, the first contact of the student with the university is through the academic staff, who often discuss with the student the thesis proposal, and how it fits into the departmental expertise. Students still need to send their formal application to the Graduate School, but academic staff also evaluate the full application, e.g. previous study, previous research experience, previous academic work. At this level of study, it is important that the academics give a personalised evaluation of the suitability of the student for the research environment of the department: while grades need to be very good to be admitted, the selection is not based principally on a numerical evaluation.

7.3 The basis of assessment: admissions criteria and instruments

In the previous sections, different ways of exchanging views on and ranking of applications in the assessment process have been described. The judgements of those in charge of assessment and admissions decisions are based on a series of admissions criteria and instruments (like reference letters, tests, interviews, etc.). The information provided about the qualification and academic potential of the applicant is reflected against preset standards, or used to rank different applications. How and by means of which “tools” this information is gathered and weighed may depend on institutional or national traditions and assessment procedures, or on the personal experience and preferences of a programme director. Hence, completely different aspects can guide assessments: for example, while marks are still an important criterion for most institutions, others use them only as an indication and base their decision on motivation letters or interviews. Usually, admissions procedures and instruments are more sophisticated for the postgraduate level, although this can vary depending on the policy focus of each institution. In foreign student admissions, the equivalence of qualifications and, mostly, proof of a sufficient knowledge of the teaching language are obvious issues for the eligibility of applicants.

The following points will be discussed in this section:

- common entry requirements and their relative importance;
- the eligibility check: common tools to asses foreign qualifications;
- language requirements and terting systems;
- additional tools: interviews, tests, and entrance examinations.

7.3.1 Common entry requirements and their relative importance

The most common basis of the admissions decision is a case-by-case assessment of application files. The content of these files are the documents submitted by the applicant to prove that he or she meets the entry requirements. Entry requirements and their relative importance vary depending on the institutional and national context and on the specific admissions rationale of an institution or programme. In general, institutions request the type and number of documents that are deemed necessary to obtain a complete picture of the applicant's previous education and academic potential, and to make a qualified decision on admission. Usually, there are general admissions requirements at a given institution, different for undergraduate and postgraduate levels, and additional requirements for particular programmes.

The following admissions requirements have been identified at the visited higher education institutions:

- the applicant's upper secondary qualification or Bachelor's diploma;
- transcripts of courses;[130]
- proof of knowledge of the teaching language;
- a motivation statement or a personal essay;
- letters of recommendation;
- proof of work experience;
- curriculum vitae;
- results of standardised tests;
- proof of the right to access higher education in the applicant's home country;
- proof of previous academic work;
- literature lists of completed courses.

The above list is a potpourri of all requirements quoted by the visited higher education institutions. Universities can request all or some of the listed items as part of the application file and use them to assess the dossier. Often, some items are given more weight than others, and some are totally ignored (even when requested).

Generally, diplomas, transcripts of courses, proof of sufficient knowledge of the teaching language, and sometimes proof of access to higher education in the applicant's home country are basic requirements. They are requested by most institutions for admission into all levels of study and usually determine an applicant's eligibility. The remaining elements of the list are additional requirements used in more personalised assessment procedures (e.g. motivation statement, letters of recommendation, curriculum vitae etc.) or

130 Transcripts are official academic records, which detail place and time of study, courses completed, and grades achieved.

common requirements in a certain national or discipline-specific context (e.g. standardised tests).[131]

Diplomas and transcripts of courses document the applicant's previous academic qualifications. Frequently, higher education institutions require official translations of these documents into the national language (or English). For many postgraduate programmes, transcripts are especially important, because they indicate success in a particular course previously taken by the students and help show their previous knowledge in the most important subject areas. Transcripts are also requested as proof for specific subject prerequisites, for example if a candidate needs to have knowledge of mathematics for admission into a specific programme. Diplomas and transcripts are used together to assess the equivalence of an applicant's entry qualification, an issue that will be discussed in more detail in chapter 7.3.2.

The **proof of the right to access higher education in the applicant's home country** is also linked to the assessment of equivalence of an entry qualification, mostly for admission into the undergraduate level. It can be asked from applicants whose final upper secondary qualifications do not automatically open access to higher education in their home country, but needs to be completed by a separate entrance examination. Thus, for undergraduate admissions, candidates from these countries must prove that they have participated and succeeded in the respective national procedure and that they are entitled to university access in their country of origin.[132] Some institutions even ask for proof that applicants have actually been granted a place in the chosen subject at a university in their home country. This is common practice at all visited Swiss institutions:[133] Foreign applicants should have the same opportunities as their Swiss colleagues and the same opportunities they would have in their home countries. The admissions officer at ETH Zürich, for example, found the proof of admission in the applicant's home country much more reliable and telling than upper secondary qualifications, especially for lesser-known countries.

Standardised tests are a common admissions tool in the United States, and are explained in detail below (cf. chapter 7.3.4). The Graduate Management

131 Some requirements have not been taken into account in the present study: for research-oriented postgraduate courses, a thesis abstract is usually requested. In addition, numerous institutions require proof of finance (either a scholarship or proof of sufficient financial means) to be part of the application file. For example, in the US, most universities include a form called a Declaration and Certification of Finances or Affidavit of Financial Support in their application packets. The parents, or whoever is meeting the college expenses, must sign the Declaration and a bank or lawyer must certify it (also for the student visa). Many American universities operate a "needs-blind" admissions policy: financial position is not a consideration in the decision on whether to grant admission, but is necessary for issuing the certificate of eligibility. Cf. http://educationusa.state.gov/undergrad/admissions.htm

132 An example is the Spanish *Selectividad or Prueba de Aptitud para el Acceso a la Universidad* (PAAU), a centrally designed examination which has to be passed by all students seeking access to higher education.

133 This requirement is part of the recommendations for the equivalence of foreign qualifications published by the Swiss rectors' conference CRUS, cf. http://www.crus.ch/deutsch/enic/Zulass/richt.html.

Admission Test GMAT, a specific post-graduate test used for business schools or programmes, is also commonly used for postgraduate admissions at institutions outside the United States. The tests are the same for all, national and international applicants, hence the results help assess all applicants against the same standards.

Literature lists of completed courses and examples of previous academic work both help to assess applicants' academic suitability. As transcripts often only consist of the course titles, credits and duration, they may not be very telling. Therefore, higher education institutions request further and more tangible information on applicants' academic preparations. The University of Groningen, for example, considers literature lists very helpful for the assessment of an applicant's previous education. At Uppsala University, the importance of transcripts, a sample of previous academic work and a motivation statement is emphasised for postgraduate admissions. In addition, a proof of work experience and a CV can be requested for some programmes, and is regarded as helpful in the assessment process.

At most visited institutions, applicants are requested or at least encouraged to submit **motivation statements, letters of recommendation and a CV**. The importance attached to each of these requirements varies widely from one institution or even programme to another. A motivation or recommendation letter may be considered an asset and inform the admissions decision or be used as a reference in interviews, or they may be completely ignored even when requested. Motivation statements can be used to check if applicants have properly understood the orientation of a specific programme. Recommendation letters are regarded as particularly useful if the author of the reference letter is known. This can be the case in the context of targeted recruitment, or at (research-oriented) postgraduate level.

Proof of work experience is requested especially for Master's programmes with a professional orientation, e.g. for MBA programmes. Usually, between two and five years of relevant work experience is requested. Proof of work or any other practical experience can also be requested to gain additional information about an applicant's soft skills, e.g. teamwork or communication skills. For admissions into a Master's programme in Biodiversity and Natural Products offered at Leiden University, diplomas and transcripts, and hence grades and the subjects previously studied are taken into account. However, the department considers that standards vary too widely to rely purely on marks. Therefore, practical experience is emphasised, whether acquired at a university, at a research institute or in the industry.

Finally, **knowledge of the teaching language** is an obvious issue in foreign student admissions, and hence, a proof of adequate language knowledge is requested at most visited institutions. At some institutions, it may be the most important criterion in foreign admissions. At others, it may only have a relative importance as applicants can be trained in additional language courses after arrival. Although some institutions use their own language examinations or accept proof of language through other means, e.g. previous education, most of them make use of standardised language tests. Language requirements and in particular the most common standardised tests are discussed below (cf. chapter 7.3.3).

The following examples clarify the use and relative importance of different combinations of entry requirements.

Diplomas, transcripts, and **standardised tests** are emphasised at institutions and for admission into programmes where grades play an important role in the assessment of applications. This is more frequently the case at undergraduate level. For postgraduate admissions, grades are usually at least complemented by other criteria. Grades can be used in different ways in the assessment procedure:

- Grades of foreign applicants may be "translated" as precisely as possible into the national grading system for comparison with national students.
- Alternatively, institutions calculate an applicant's grade point average (GPA)[134] or use another common grading system, to compare foreign applications between themselves or for indicative purposes in a case-by-case assessment.
- Grades may be used as a cut-off criterion that determines if an application is considered. For instance, some institutions require a minimum score in a standardised test like SAT or GRE. While many universities fix 'ideal' limits, e.g. GRE minimums, they are not always used as cut-off criteria, as the deficiencies can be compensated by other aspects.
- Finally, institutions may only accept a qualification as equivalent to the national qualification if the applicant has reached a given score (cf. chapter 7.3.2).

Swedish **undergraduate admissions** are an example of a selection based on grades, which requires a precise "translation" of foreign qualifications into the Swedish grading system (cf. chapter 6.2.2). Assessment is based on a numerical classification of students based on their upper secondary qualification (and/or results of the SweSAT national aptitude test, cf. chapter 7.3.4). No other documents like motivation letters, or recommendations, or other non-numerical criteria are considered in the selection procedure. Also at Purdue University, admission into undergraduate programmes is based on a straightforward numerical selection based on grades. All foreign certificates need to be "translated" into the US system, and diploma transcripts for the last four years of study are required, and in future possibly also results of the

134 A GPA is an internationally recognised measure of a student's performance, which represents the average number of grade points a student earns for each graded course. The most common GPA scale is the four-point grade scale. For more information on this grading system see for instance http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/hsts/howgpa.asp.

national aptitude test SAT. No letters of recommendation or motivation are requested for undergraduate admissions.

Undergraduate admissions at the University of Melbourne are a third interesting example for grades-based admissions. Faculties set minimum entry standards, under which applications are not considered (cut-off criteria). In addition, there are so-called “guaranteed” entry standards for Australian and international upper secondary qualifications (for instance the International Baccalaureate). Candidates who meet these scores are automatically admitted. Applicants with secondary qualifications from other countries can assess their chances to be admitted on the basis of published “indicative scores”, and are assessed case by case based on their grades. Next to their diplomas and transcripts, they need to submit an official explanation of their national grading system.

At the **postgraduate** level, some of the visited institutions base their first assessment on grades: for example EM Lyon or the HEC Lausanne both base their admissions decision mainly on the applicants’ GMAT score and on an interview. While at EM Lyon the test score is very important, it is not a cut-off criterion, and can be compensated by other qualifications. For postgraduate admissions at Wageningen University, like at many other institutions, the university’s central admissions officer calculates a grade point average of each application before he forwards it to the department. The GPA is used as an indication, and assessment is based on all documents provided in the application file.

Motivation statements, letters of recommendation, CVs, proof of previous academic work, and **work experience** are emphasised at institutions and for admission into programmes where the admissions decision is based on a case-by-case assessment of applications, and where diplomas are regarded as a *conditio sine qua non*, but not as a sufficient indication for the applicant’s academic (and human) potential. This is more frequently, although not only, the case for postgraduate admissions. The applicant’s personality, practical experience and the content of his or her previous academic work are taken into account. Grades may still be important, but some institutions only use them as indicators.

Some of the visited institutions require motivation or recommendation letters for admission into the **undergraduate level**. At New York University, for example, applicants for undergraduate programmes have to submit a personal essay, three letters of recommendation, transcripts, and a CV or list of activities with their application form. High SAT scores are a basic requirement, but also extra-curricular activities and the breadth of knowledge are seen as very important.

The applicants’ motivation statements are the main assessment tools for the academic coordinator of a Bachelor’s programme in International Communication at Hanzehogeschool. Incoming applications are assessed case by case, and motivation is regarded as more important than academic results. An unconvincing motivation statement is a reason for rejecting an applicant.

The admission of foreign students into the undergraduate level at INSA Lyon is an example for the use of recommendation letters in the framework of targeted recruitment. Recommendations are requested from the applicants' schoolteachers. They are regarded as very helpful and reliable, as schools are "punished" for standard or dishonest recommendation letters: if the performance of the students systematically does not correspond to the recommendations, no pupils from this school will be taken in future.

At the **postgraduate level**, most institutions require complete application dossiers with most or all of the mentioned documents. However, some "tools" are regarded as more effective than others, depending on the admissions rationale and experience of the institution. At ETH Zürich, for example, applicants for the Master's pilot programme need to submit a CV and a statement of motivation together with their degree. Next to an excellent diploma, the students' motivation is considered decisive. Applicants should describe the Master's programme in adequate terms. In addition, they are considered favourably if they intend to do a PhD after graduation: the department sees the Master's programme as a means to recruit good potential PhD students. After candidates have been preselected in a first assessment round, they apply formally and additionally submit transcripts and reference letters, or other documents to provide further information on their academic potential and qualifications.

The Department for Agrotechnology and Food Science at Wageningen University always requires motivation letters for admission into the Master's level. These help to assess if students are qualified in the right discipline, and if their expectations and study project correspond to their application. Programme coordinators may reject students if their motivation letter does not describe the programme in question. In some cases, a CV or proof of work experience may be provided to demonstrate that an applicant has experience in the relevant field.

Many Master's programmes in Sweden, for example at the above-mentioned Uppsala University, ask also for recommendation letters but usually they are not deemed very helpful ("always the same"), and hence not very important. Some programmes have stopped asking for them altogether for this reason. At institutions in other national contexts, for example in the US, the opposite is the case: at Indiana University Bloomington, the results of the Graduate record examination GRE and recommendation letters are the most important elements for the admissions decision. In addition, CVs can be taken into account.

Additional issues, such as the previous university or school, sometimes influence assessment and admissions decisions. Especially within a given discipline, admissions staff or academics in charge of assessing applications frequently know the quality of a given institution, or, alternatively, they use university rankings or informally consult colleagues. The Economics Department at New York University, for example, acknowledges that the university the student comes from influences the decision. This is also true for all visited engineering schools and technically oriented institutions: the IT department at the Federal Technical Institute ETH Zürich, for instance, says to know the good quality schools from within the limited pool of potential (i.e. technically oriented) sending institutions, most of which have been visited, for example in the context of cooperation agreements.

In some cases, **completeness of the application dossier** is a cut-off criterion, and incomplete files are not even considered. This is the case at Wageningen University, or at KTH: if an application file is incomplete, it is put aside straight away. This may not seem very fair, but it reduces work at the admissions office significantly. Most other institutions get back to the applicant and ask for the missing documents, at least if the application is clearly a serious one and the candidate has the potential to be admitted.[135] The check for completeness of the application file is part of the general eligibility check.

7.3.2 The eligibility check: common tools to assess foreign qualifications

Determining the equivalence between an international applicant's qualifications and the national entry qualifications is one, if not the main issue, in foreign admissions at most of the visited higher education institutions. Together with the proof of sufficient knowledge of the teaching language, an equivalent entry qualification is usually the condition for a foreign applicant's eligibility for admission. In most cases, this is at least pre-assessed by administrative admissions staff, although, especially for postgraduate admissions, it can also be one of the academics' tasks.[136] Higher education institutions use different methods to determine the equivalence of a foreign qualification, and refer to a wide range of sources of information. The eligibility check also includes a verification of the authenticity of the submitted document.

Most of the visited institutions are autonomous in their decision on the equivalence of foreign qualifications. In some countries, however, there are **legal requirements** that influence equivalence, especially at the undergraduate level. These are usually based on the characteristics of the national upper secondary qualification: if it includes subjects in several disciplines, a foreign qualification also needs to meet this standard. If the national upper secondary qualification is subject-specific, and previous education in a given num-

135 Some higher education institutions still announce that only complete applications will be assessed: at the University of Lausanne, for example, this announcement has considerably reduced the number of incomplete and non-serious applications.

136 Cf. chapters 6.1.1 and 7.2

ber of subjects is required for admission into specific undergraduate programmes, also foreign students need to fulfil these requirements. The latter, for example, applies in the Netherlands and Sweden. In Sweden, the Higher Education Ordinance regulates the general requirements (i.e. an equivalent to the Swedish upper secondary qualification diploma and an adequate knowledge of Swedish and English for undergraduate admissions), and specific requirements, for example with regard to the subjects a candidate needs to have previously studied for admission into a given discipline. While at undergraduate level, these requirements are basically the same for all programmes with a similar orientation; institutions have more freedom at postgraduate level. The high level of regulation is sometimes considered problematic for foreign admissions, because regulations are based on the Swedish higher education system (cf. chapter 3.6) and hence do not take into account the different characteristics of foreign qualifications, issued by a wide range of institutions and educational systems.

Different ways of assessing equivalence

In general, higher education institutions work in two different ways:

- First, they establish and publish lists with the specific requirements for each country of origin (of the diploma).
- Second, they assess equivalence case by case, based on transcripts, literature lists and other information provided by the applicant.

The first method is more frequent for admission into the undergraduate level. Upper secondary qualifications are usually standardised and can therefore be more easily compared to the national upper secondary qualification. Higher education institutions may only recognise a foreign upper secondary qualification as equivalent under certain conditions: applicants may be required to have studied a given range of subjects in secondary school, or to have reached a given score in their upper secondary qualification. The requirements specified on the lists may be used as guidelines or as absolute minimum (cut-off) requirements. If a qualification is not considered equivalent, institutions usually request one or two years of higher education, a pathway programme, or a national or institutional examination to compensate for the deficiencies (cf. chapter 7.3.2).

For postgraduate admissions, there is usually more flexibility, and equivalence is frequently assessed on a case-by-case basis. This is partly due to the variety of Bachelor’s degrees issued by foreign higher education institutions, which makes the establishment of lists with all accepted qualifications and specific conditions difficult. In addition, a more flexible and in-depth assessment of an applicant’s academic potential is regarded as more important for admission into postgraduate programmes. Especially at institutions where a Bachelor’s degree earned at the institution opens access to a Master’s programme in the same discipline, “equivalence” is assessed by academics on the basis of the complete application dossier. At the visited European higher education institutions, the European credit transfer system ECTS is frequently used to determine the equivalence of foreign Bachelor's degrees.

Undergraduate admissions at Swiss universities are an example of the first method: at the University of Lausanne, for instance, there are clearly defined and documented cut-off criteria per country of origin. Upper secondary qualifications from a given country may only be accepted with a given score, and the applicant can be asked to sit the central Swiss entrance examination in addition (cf. chapter 7.3.4). Applicants from Latin American countries, for example, usually need to have achieved a specific score in their upper secondary qualification, and have to sit part of the entrance examination if the subject range included in their secondary school leaving examination is not comparable to the Swiss *Matura*. Upper secondary qualifications of some Asian countries are not considered equivalent: Chinese applicants need to have studied two years at a higher education institution, and applicants from the Philippines even need a Bachelor's for admission into undergraduate programmes. Criteria are revised by the admissions office based on the performance of admitted student cohorts and communicated on the university's website. According to some of the academic staff, criteria often put foreign applicants at a disadvantage, as they are completely based on the Swiss system and lack adaptation to foreign syllabuses.

Most of the visited Australian institutions also publish clear criteria for each source country (see the example of the University of Melbourne in the previous section). At most institutions, the importance of clearly specified and communicated criteria is emphasised, as these give the students the possibility to assess themselves prior to applying, which is believed to reduce the number of inadequate applications. The preset criteria, however, are usually not completely rigid: "borderline cases", i.e. applicants slightly below the requirements, may still be considered. In addition, applicants who clearly cannot present an equivalent qualification are frequently redirected to a pathway programme.[137]

An example for the second method is the Master's programme in International Economics and Business at the Dutch University of Groningen. Holders

137 If a student does not comply with the entrance requirements of a higher education institution, he or she can sometimes still access through what is called a pathway. Private vocational education colleges sometimes offer the same courses as some universities, and after one successful year at the vocational college, the student may pass directly to the second year at the university. Usually, these courses at private vocational colleges are designed for and attended by foreign students. They charge the same fees for domestic and international students. For domestic students, this is much more expensive than attending a university, whereas for international students there is not much of a difference. Major universities like Monash University often run their own pathway or access programmes: Monash College, which is operated by the university-owned company "Monash International", offers pathway programmes that coincide with year 12 of Australian secondary education and / or with the first year of university education in certain disciplines. Successful completion of the latter guarantees access to the second year of selected Monash programmes. Cf.: http://www.monash.edu/international/pathways/moncollege/

of a Bachelor's degree awarded by the university in the same discipline can be directly admitted. Hence, for this group the admissions system is open. All others, and hence all the foreign applicants, are admitted "sur dossier". The basis of assessment is the comparability of an applicant's qualifications to the Bachelor's degree awarded by the university in the same discipline. "Equivalence" is determined case by case, not only on the basis of the diploma, but taking into account transcripts, literature lists, a motivation statement, a CV, reference letters and, if available, university rankings. ECTS credits, too, play a major role in the evaluation. The admissions officer pre-assesses every application, and the final decision is taken by a committee of academics. Many students with foreign qualifications do not qualify directly for a Master's programme, but are admitted into the last year of the Bachelor's.

Sources of information on foreign qualifications

Be it to establish lists of equivalent qualifications or as a basis for case-by-case assessment, all higher education institutions use a number of **sources of information** to determine the equivalence and to check the authenticity of foreign qualifications. The visited institutions mentioned the following "tools":

- ♦ institutional databases;
- ♦ guidelines and other relevant publications;
- ♦ National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARIC)[138] and other external diploma evaluation centres;
- ♦ personal experience of admissions, international and academic staff (in charge of assessment);
- ♦ advice from contact persons in the source countries or from academics with hands-on experience in a given discipline and country;
- ♦ websites of foreign higher education institutions and secondary schools, contact or site visits;
- ♦ comparison and contact with other higher education institutions.

Most institutions use a combination of several tools (as many as available). The following examples will clarify the use of these different sources of information.

At least at the bigger (or better-staffed) institutions, international or admissions staff try to build up their **own databases** and reference libraries with background information on foreign qualifications, higher education institutions, and schools. The documentation of knowledge in folders and databases facilitates the work of admissions officers, and lessens the impact of their lost expertise if they change employment. Databases frequently start with the information provided by national guidelines, which is gradually complemented with information gathered by means of all available tools. The

138 For a definition of the NARIC network, see chapter 6.2.2 or http://www.enic-naric.net.

admissions officer at Leiden University, for example, has created an internal database with information on different national higher education systems, diplomas, and higher education institutions. The database is accessible for the staff at the front desk, and in the future for study advisors at the faculties.

Frequently, higher education institutions keep track of the performance of student cohorts from a given country, and feed the results into their databases and criteria for equivalence. At the University of Melbourne, for example, the student entry pathways committee tracks the performance of international undergraduate students against Australian students admitted through the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre. International admissions staff and faculty-based selection officers meet to assess and revise entry scores biannually. The results are fed into the internal qualifications database, which is used by central and faculty-based admissions staff.

Guidelines are usually provided by the organisation that hosts the ENIC-NARIC office, and hence either by a department of the ministry of education or by a national agency in charge of promoting international exchange and mobility in (higher) education (cf. chapter 6.2.2). They usually provide information about higher education systems, qualifications, the grading system, as well as a list of recognised higher education institutions. In some cases, they also refer to national rankings. Examples of national guidelines have been mentioned earlier, e.g. the guidelines of the Australian National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition, NOOSR, the guidelines of the UK NARIC, and the guidelines provided by the Dutch organisation Nuffic (cf. chapter 6.2.2). While most higher education institutions start with the guidelines provided by their national NARIC, they also work with recognised guidelines from other countries. The UK NARIC guidelines, for example, are widely used also by admissions staff outside the United Kingdom. Especially in countries where general rather than country-specific guidelines are provided, admissions officers frequently look abroad: the Swiss University of Lausanne, for example, uses the UK NARIC guidelines, and the guidelines provided by the German Information System on the Recognition of Foreign Educational Certificates.[139]

Some of the visited higher education institutions not only use specific guidelines when evaluating foreign applications, but also other **national and international publications** on foreign education systems and diplomas. Visited Swedish universities mention the World Higher Education Database published by UNESCO;[140] US institutions use publications from the Association of International Educators NAFSA, from the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, ACCRAO, and World Education Services, WES.[141]

139 For more information see http://www.naric.org.uk and www.anabin.de.

140 Cf. http://www.unesco.org/iau/whed.html

141 Cf. chapter 6.2.2. or http://www.nafsa.org, http://www.aacrao.org, http://www.wes.org

If the admissions officers are unsure about the equivalence and authenticity of a qualification, they can ask the national **NARIC or other external evaluation centres** for advice.[142] They can also submit the diploma for evaluation, or ask the applicant to do so. In addition, the NARICs organise training and information sessions for admissions staff on a regular basis. Examples of the NARICs' activities have been listed in chapter 6.2.2. An example for the regular use of an external evaluation centre is New York University. For admission into some schools, NYU requires their international undergraduate applicants to have the transcripts and upper secondary qualifications evaluated by an external company. The cost of this operation is on the student. Because applicants come from about 17,000 different secondary schools, the diversity of qualifications makes it impossible to evaluate them all at the admissions offices.

Usually, international admissions staff, delegates, or coordinators have **personal experience with foreign higher education systems**. This not only refers to the experience they have gained while dealing with foreign admissions: at many institutions, academic and international staff come from different countries or have lived abroad for some time. At ETH Zürich, 50 percent of the academic staff is foreign, and a similar situation can be found at the science faculties of the other visited Swiss universities. At the Australian La Trobe University, a considerable percentage of the academic staff is Asian, and can assist in evaluating qualifications from the region.

Some institutions have established **networks of contact persons**, who they can contact for advice. This can be institutional academic staff who are not directly dealing with admissions but have some expertise in a given country and discipline. Other institutions have established networks of contact persons in the source countries, who they can contact for advice on foreign qualifications. At the Faculty of Economics at the University of Groningen, the admissions office has established a system of consulting academics with relevant expertise for advice on non-EU qualifications. These "in-country-evaluators" are academic staff of the programme, faculty, or university with "hands-on knowledge" of the higher education system (qualifications, universities, etc.) of the country where the diploma has been issued. Written guidelines for the consultation of these staff members explain the exact tasks and most relevant questions to these experts. An example of a network of advisors in the source countries is INSA Lyon. The French engineering school maintains a network of over 200 foreign correspondents in the main countries of origin, who can be contacted for advice in the assessment procedure. The contact persons are academic staff at partner institutions, teachers from the secondary schools where INSA Lyon recruits students, or professionals

142 In some cases, institutions also rely on foreign authorities. At the University of Lausanne, for example, cases of fraud had proliferated for several African countries. Therefore, applicants for undergraduate programmes now have to present a certified letter from the ministry of education confirming their final school marks. The letter has to be sent directly from the ministry to the University of Lausanne.

from industry. Higher education institutions frequently also rely on alumni networks: the American Union College, for example, sometimes consults alumni for advice on foreign qualifications and institutions.

Even within a given country, there are usually a variety of upper secondary qualifications, and a wide variety of higher education diplomas, which may or may not be equivalent to a Bachelor's degree. In order to obtain detailed information on each qualification, most higher education institutions **study the websites of foreign higher education institutions and secondary schools**. Some may also **contact** the foreign institution and ask for a detailed syllabus, or, if possible, carry out **site visits**. At Monash University, for example, new qualifications are first assessed based on the NOOSR guidelines. A digital form is then sent to the institution that has issued the diploma to specify level criteria, learning outcomes and assessment levels. Sometimes, institutions would even approach Monash and provide their syllabuses on their own initiative. At RMIT, the internationalisation coordinator of the Business Faculty tries to take advantage of stays abroad, for example at international education fairs, and visit all foreign institutions that feed into RMIT.

Finally, most international and admissions staff know that they do not have to reinvent the wheel. A common practice at most visited institutions is to **study the websites and requirements of, or contact colleagues at, comparable higher education institutions**. This is not only information gathering, and sometimes sharing, but works to establish thresholds and entry standards. Admissions staff from different higher education institutions may also get together on a regular basis, to exchange experience. For example, the international admissions officers of the visited Australian universities, all situated in the State of Victoria, meet on a regular basis to exchange (administrative) information. AACRAO organises seminars, workshops and conferences on credential evaluation and admissions practices for admissions staff. Regular meetings of admissions staff can also help harmonise standards: the twelve Swiss universities discuss (and try to unify) their criteria for the equivalence of foreign qualifications in the national committee for admissions and equivalences, which is supported by the national ENIC-NARIC office at the CRUS. During its meetings, the committee discusses, for example, the value of different qualifications from a specific country, and the requirements that should apply in each case. Finally, the attendance of international education conferences is reported to be useful for staff dealing with international admissions, both for the information provided and for the possibility to exchange experience with colleagues from other institutions.

7.3.3 Language requirements and testing systems

Language command is an obvious issue in international admissions, and proof of language knowledge is usually part of the application package foreign students are asked to send when they apply. As a rule, this requirement refers to the teaching language of the programme, which is not necessarily identical to the national language. For example, English is a requirement for English-language-taught programmes in non-English-speaking countries. The language criterion may be an unconditional requirement, or only have relative importance in the admissions process. Hence, higher education institutions can measure adequate language knowledge before or only after the arrival of foreign students. Even if documented proof of language is part of the admissions requirements, students may have to sit a language test at their host institution after arrival. If their language command is good enough, they can directly begin their studies, or they may first, or in parallel, have to take additional language courses.

There are two main issues to be discussed in this context:

- different means to measure an adequate knowledge of the teaching language;
- the weight of the language requirement in the admissions process.

Means of ensuring an adequate language command

There are different ways of measuring adequate language knowledge. In most cases, proof of language knowledge has to be included in the application file. This proof can be in the form of a language certificate, a standardised language test like the Test of English as a Foreign Language, TOEFL, or the International English Language Testing System, IELTS, or through other means, such as a letter from a professor, or the years of study of the language in previous education. Alternatively, sufficient language command can be tested via an institutional examination carried out before admission by a representative of the institution in the applicants' home countries, or after the arrival of the students.

In all countries where the national language corresponds to the teaching language, there are officially recognised language certificates and diplomas, which are accepted as a proof of language knowledge, for instance, the French certificates DELF, DALF or the test TCF.[143] Frequently, students can (or have to) sit these examinations at national representations in their home countries, e.g. at the embassies or at national service points like the Dutch NESO or the French CELA (cf. chapter 6.2.2). Sometimes the certificates can be issued by official bodies of other countries: the University of Basel, for example, accepts the certificates issued by the German Goethe-Institut. Especially at Master's level, English has a growing importance in foreign admissions in non-English speaking countries: most of the visited institutions increasingly offer English-language-taught programmes and request a proof

143 For more information on the *Diplôme d'Études en Langue Française* (DELF), the *Diplôme Approfondi de Langue Française* (DALF) or the *Test de Connaissance du Français* (TCF) cf. for instance http://www.education.gouv.fr/int/francais.htm. For their particular relevance to international admissions, only the most common language testing systems for English will be explained more in depth in this publication.

of English command.[144] This section describes in detail the most common standardised English tests.

The most common **standardised tests** of English are TOEFL and IELTS. The Test of English as a Foreign Language, TOEFL, is an internationally used standardised English language test, run by the US-based private organisation, Educational Testing Service, the same organisation that runs the most important standardised tests in the US, including the SAT, the GRE and the GMAT (cf. chapter 7.3.4).[145] The TOEFL test consists of listening, reading, and writing components. It can be done on paper or as a computer-based test, and exams are organised several times a year in a wide range of countries. The TOEFL does not test proficiency in spoken English, which is often considered a problem.[146] Such a test of spoken English is included in the International English Language Testing System, IELTS, which works in a similar way to TOEFL. However, it specifies the different "band scores" for each language sub-skill (speaking, listening, reading and writing) in addition to an overall score. Another difference is that the IELTS is based on international English, whereas the TOEFL tests North American English. The IELTS has been jointly developed and is owned by the British Council, IDP Australia, and the University of Cambridge. It can be taken in 300 centres in over 120 countries worldwide. Although younger and still less established than the TOEFL, it is increasingly accepted by higher education institutions, professional and governmental organisations.

Among the visited countries, the TOEFL is still more common in the US, whereas Australian higher education institutions mostly prefer the IELTS. However, most institutions accept both tests. In the other visited countries, e.g. for English-speaking programmes at Dutch institutions, both tests are equally accepted. Usually, institutions set their own English language admissions standards and the minimum IELTS or TOEFL scores they require.[147] A frequently mentioned problem is that test scores do not reflect the applicants' real language command, as applicants can train for standardised tests. Practice tests can be purchased and numerous training courses are on offer. This is why some institutions voice a preference for the IELTS: the test's specific "band scores" for each subcategory and the inclusion of an oral test make a realistic assessment of the applicants' language skills more likely.

A different means to assess language skills are **examinations organised by the institutions**. This may be **after admission** (and arrival) of the students.

144 For more information on English-language-taught programmes in Europe see Friedhelm Maiworm, Bernd Wächter: *English-Language-Taught Degree Programmes in European Higher Education*, ACA Papers on International Cooperation in Education, Bonn 2002.

145 Cf. www.ets.org and www.toefl.org.

146 Although ETS offers a separate test, the Test of Spoken English (TSE), it is less common, and offered less often and by fewer testing centres.

147 Most institutions require a TOEFL score of between 213 and 250 (computer-based test; 550 and 600 on the paper-based test) or an IELTS score between 6 and 7, for undergraduate admissions sometimes as low as 5.5. Cf. for example www.ielts.org, or http://educationusa.state.gov/graduate/testing/english.htm.

For admission into Indiana University Bloomington, for example, students do not need to send a proof of English with their application, but all foreign applicants need to do a test on arrival. The scores of the test determine whether the student needs to follow intensive course of English prior to starting the actual course programme: they may be allowed to do nothing but English for up to one year. Most higher education institutions can admit foreign students on a conditional basis even if they have not provided a language proof in their application file. At the University of Basel, for example, such students have to sit a language test on arrival. If they fail, they can still be enrolled on a provisional basis, and are allowed to repeat the test within the first semester of studies. At many institutions, even students who have actually provided proof of language, e.g. an IELTS or TOEFL score, are asked to sit an institutional examination: at the University of Melbourne, most foreign students are invited to sit the institutional Diagnostic of English Language Assessment, DELA. Depending on their results, students may be given suitable language or communication support, e.g. in the form of workshops or short courses.

Some institutions organise their **own language examinations before the admission** and arrival of students. This may be done in the context of selection days at the higher education institution or in the students' country. Hanzehogeschool, for example, sends a representative to the most important source countries, including China and Taiwan. An English lecturer runs an institutional English test, the Hanze Service English test, and assesses language skills and the "cultural adaptability" and communication skills of the student. If applicants do not succeed, they may be advised to first enrol on a preparatory course.

Many institutions also accept a **proof of language by other means**. At Uppsala University, a test score is required, but can be replaced by proof of sufficient previous English language education. At institutions where applicants are interviewed in the selection procedure (cf. chapter 7.3.4), the interviewers obviously get an impression of the students' language skills, and can check the veracity of a provided test score.

Decisive or negligible? The weight of the language requirement in the admissions process

Almost all institutions request a proof of language, but the importance attached to the language requirement varies hugely. First, at some institutions, the language requirement is unconditional and a given score in a standardised test, or the presentation of a language certificate, is a cut-off requirement. Although this can be an academic requirement for programmes with a strong language orientation, there are also other, non-academic, reasons: many institutions that are "flooded" by foreign applications (and do not have adequate selection mechanisms) use the proof of language as a filter. Second, while the language requirement may be important for an institution, it may still admit foreign applicants on a conditional basis, which is usually subject to the completion of language courses. Third, the language requirement can only have relative importance: this is the case for programmes where linguistic perfection is not necessary, like engineering, or for institutions that provide extensive language training or bridging courses. Although proof of language is usually requested, it does not play a decisive role in the admissions decision. Finally, institutions that actively recruit foreign students often try to find “the golden mean” between the proof of sufficient language knowledge and not “putting off” their target groups. In these cases, language requirements and entry scores are usually negotiated between academic and international staff.

Although a higher test score is usually required for admission into the postgraduate level, the requirement is more often **unconditional** for the undergraduate level. Purdue University has an unconditional language requirement for undergraduate admissions. The TOEFL score is used as a cut-off criterion and applications with an insufficient score are put straight aside. No conditional offers are made, and students do not get a “second chance” to improve the language on arrival. Academic reasons are part of the university’s motivation, but the system also helps to reduce the number of incoming applications. Institutions may also require high language scores, but use them only as one admission criterion in the context of an overall assessment of the application dossier: at New York University, undergraduate applicants need to present high TOEFL scores, but there is no set minimum score. The language criterion is hence put in relation to the applicant’s other qualifications.

The French University Val de Marne Paris 12 attempts to **filter** the mass of foreign applications by means of a French test for admission.[148] An institutional language test, which at present is only systematically required by the Faculty of Languages, will in the future be a general requirement for all foreign applicants to the university. For interviewees at central level, this is a “disguised form of selection”. At present, the university still lacks a deliberate policy towards foreign degree students, and hence the necessary academic selection instruments and student support structures.

At most visited institutions (in the non-English-speaking countries), undergraduate programmes are still taught in the national language, and international undergraduate applicants need to be proficient in Dutch to study in the Netherlands, French to study in France and German to study at a university in the German-speaking part of Switzerland. Proof of adequate language command is an **important requirement for admission**. If applicants cannot provide sufficient proof of language with their application, they are usually asked to pass a language examination at the institution. As explained above,

148 This applies in particular to those applicants who do not have to sit a French test in the context of the *procédure d’admission préalable* at the embassy in their home country, cf. chapter 6.2.2.

this examination may be part of the admissions procedure. At ETH Zürich, for example, language is part of the subjects tested in an institutional entrance examination for applicants whose qualification is not recognised as equivalent (cf. chapter 7.3.4).[149] In this case, too, the language criterion is regarded as an important “filter”.

Although most institutions attach great importance to the language requirement, some can still **admit applicants on a conditional base** into the first semester of studies, after which they need to pass an examination or present another sufficient proof of language (see the example of the University of Basel in the previous section). In general, this is more frequently the case for the postgraduate level. While a higher language test score is normally requested, the requirement is more flexible in most cases, and the accent is on the applicants’ academic qualifications. At New York University, postgraduate students can be offered conditional admission if they do not have sufficient English knowledge. Final admission is based on the completion of a language course with required results. At many Australian institutions, this is the case for undergraduate and postgraduate admissions. Even if there is a big gap between the requirement and the applicant’s actual language command, language is mostly only a cut-off criterion for direct admission into a programme. Applicants are not usually “put aside”, but redirected to a language pathway programme at the same institution.

The language requirement has only **relative importance** at a number of visited engineering schools. At KTH, for example, English knowledge proof is required, but the score need not be very high, as language is considered of secondary importance for engineering. Language is also not a decisive requirement for admission via the network n+i into Master’s programmes at French engineering schools (cf. chapter 6.2.1). Before the foreign students begin their studies, they are offered an intensive language summer course, as well as special tutoring during a first transition semester. This is similar at INSA Lyon. In addition, this school recruits foreign students at the undergraduate level two years before graduation, so they have enough time to prepare for their stay and improve their language skills. Both models count on the ability of academically well-qualified students to learn the language once they are in the country, with the help of the language support provided.

The aim to find a **“golden mean”** between the proof of sufficient language knowledge and scores that are still attainable and will not hamper foreign student recruitment is mentioned at most of the visited Australian institutions. As these institutions “operate” in a competitive environment, entry scores are often a cause of disagreement between teaching and research staff, and international admissions and marketing staff. At the Royal Melbourne Institute, RMIT, for example, the discussion is not only to raise the required IELTS

149 The central examination at Fribourg cf. chapter 7.3.4 works in a similar way the Swiss cantonal universities.

scores, but to stop waivers and make the test obligatory for every applicant. The debate is a response to complaints by academics, who consider that the students' English language deficiencies affect the quality of their courses. Hence, while academics emphasise the importance of high language hurdles for quality reasons, international staff often argue that too high hurdles would keep students from coming. Another argument used by international staff is that apparent language deficiencies are often due to cultural differences: Asian students, especially, often have different communication habits and need time to adapt. Usually, a compromise score is negotiated between academics and international admissions and marketing staff.

This kind of debate is, however, not limited to the Australian context: many institutions that actively recruit foreign students attempt to strike a balance between quality and attainability in their language requirement. The Faculty of Economics at the University of Groningen, for example, had temporarily raised the required English test score for its English-language-taught programmes. As the new scores stopped students from coming, the minimum entry requirement was again lowered and fixed at a medium level. The faculty has still kept the higher score as a reference and has found an interesting way of ensuring a sufficient level of language command. Applicants who only meet the minimum entry score may be further tested by means of a telephone interview, or be requested to write an essay under supervision at the faculty, the university's language centre or by an agent. If their vocabulary or communication skills are considered deficient, applicants may only be admitted under the condition of taking additional English courses at the university's language centre.

7.3.4 Additional tools: interviews, tests, and entrance examinations

Many higher education institutions make their admissions decisions on the basis of the application dossier, and hence on the documents provided by the applicant. In the case of foreign students, however, this is not always an easy task, especially if the applicant's qualification, the issuing institution, and the value of grades and recommendations are "new" and hence unfamiliar to the assessors. Some higher education institutions therefore use additional selection or assessment tools: they invite applicants to an interview or ask them to sit a test or entrance examination. In selective systems, an examination or interview can be a decisive "second stage" after an eligibility check has been carried out. Tests or interviews can also be used to gather additional information about the candidate's academic potential, and applicants can be asked to sit an entrance examination to check for gaps in their education.

Interviews

Whether an interview is part of the admissions procedure is a matter of institutional (and national) tradition and rationale. Whereas many institutions select their students based on diplomas and marks, interviews are more common if the personality of the applicant plays a major role in the admissions decision.

To some extent, this is different for foreign admissions. Sometimes interviews may be regarded as **particularly important for the admission of foreign students:** the variety of foreign qualifications and the uncertainty about the authenticity of written material (like motivation or recommendation letters) can make it difficult to judge solely on the basis of an application dossier or on marks. As explained in the previous section, interviews can also be carried out to assess the applicants' language proficiency, which can be of particular relevance for some programmes. For these reasons, institutions that do not interview their national applicants may organise interviews with foreign candidates.

In other instances, **practical constraints**, like the geographical distance or the volume of foreign applications can complicate the organisation of interviews with international applicants. Hence, institutions that commonly interview national applicants may admit international candidates without having met or talked to them. In all cases, the practical constraints influence the form of the interviews, which can be:

- ♦ personal interviews at the host institution;
- ♦ interviews in the framework of targeted recruitment in the source countries;
- ♦ interviews in the context of education fairs;
- ♦ telephone interviews (webcam or videoconference).

Interviews may be a **decisive second stage** for the admission of foreign students, after a preselection on their application dossier. This is the case at the French Ecole de Management EM Lyon. For admission into the International MBA programme, for example, preselected candidates are normally invited to interview at a selection day at the institution. In the case of international applicants, this is mostly replaced by a telephone interview. Even if the interview is made by telephone, at least two representatives of the school need to be present, to ensure an objective assessment (cf. also chapter 7.1 and 8). For admission into the Master of Science programme, the interview has to be in person.[150] In this case, staff from the institution frequently go to the applicants' home countries.[151] Next to the GMAT, the interview is the most important element of the admissions decision. Motivation or recommendation letters, for example, are only used as a reference in the interview.

150 This is part of the *règlement pédagogique*, the regulatory framework agreed between the higher education institution and the Ministry of education. Although initially proposed by the higher education institution, a change of these rules is not easy and goes hand in hand with complicated bureaucratic procedures.

151 Up until now, these interviews have been streamlined via the network CIAM, which is currently being dissolved (cf. chapter 6.1.2).

At the American Union College, the interview is also considered one, if not **the most important element of the admissions procedure**. Union College is a small liberal arts college, where the selection is highly personalised, and all candidates – national and international – are interviewed. While the results of standardised tests like SAT or GRE need to be very good, the selection is based on "intuitive criteria": the students' personality or what they may contribute to the campus are crucial for the admissions decision. This is why all potential students are interviewed personally and not by telephone. All international applications are dealt with by one of the international admissions staff members, who frequently travel to selected source countries to recruit students. He or she can carry out on the spot interviews, and admit students to the university, if their grades are high enough and the person "can contribute to campus life".

Examples for institutions that interview foreign students in the **context of targeted recruitment** have been described earlier: the French engineering school Institut National des Sciences Appliquées INSA Lyon, for example, recruits candidates for undergraduate admissions at a network of foreign secondary schools and interviews potential students whenever possible during the site visits (cf. chapter 7.1). Another example is the Ecole Nationale des Arts et des Métiers ENSAM, which recruits foreign students for Master's programmes via the network of French engineering schools ParisTech (cf. chapter 6.2.1 and 7.1). Applicants are tested and interviewed at their home institutions by a committee of teaching and research staff from the network's member institutions. In both cases, the decision is based on the assessment of a complete application dossier, and the interview "completes the picture". National applicants are admitted via a marks-based *concours*, and interviews are part of an admissions procedure specifically designed for international students. According to interviewees, the personal contact and assessment in this model show excellent results, but recruitment can be very expensive. In addition, it is only possible if the number of source institutions is limited.[152]

Examples for interviewing applicants **at education fairs** have been described in chapter 7.1, and need not be repeated in detail. This is common practice for most of the visited Australian universities. In most cases interviews are not systematically part of the admissions procedure, but carried out whenever possible to get a complete picture of the candidate (and to somehow compensate for the quick assessment).

Some universities systematically interview foreign applicants, such as **for programmes where a good language command is essential**. For admissions into Law programmes at the University of Melbourne, all foreign appli-

152 For admission into the Master's level, for example, INSA Lyon will interview foreign applicants by phone, webcam, or video conference. In this case, applicants come from a wide range of institutions and countries, and it would therefore be difficult for INSA staff to travel to the applicants' home countries.

cants are interviewed by phone. Another example is the School of Applied Communication at RMIT, where the international programme director interviews foreign applicants in person whenever possible to ensure adequate language skills.

Finally, the majority of the visited institutions did not, or at least did not systematically, interview foreign students in the admissions process. In most cases, interviews were regarded as desirable, but difficult because of the volume of applications and practical constraints like distance, geographical spread of applicants, etc.

Tests and entrance examinations

Like interviews, the use of tests and entrance examinations in the admissions process is often subject to institutional and national traditions. Some tests are directed to all applicants, domestic and international. Others have been specifically developed for foreign candidates. Applicants may have to sit a test prior to sending in their application, or they can be required to do so once their eligibility has been checked. The following passages give examples of different tests and entrance exams that have been identified in this study and analyse their usefulness for the assessment of international applicants.[153]

There are different types of tests and examinations, and these may have different functions: tests can be organised by individual institutions, at the national level or by independent organisations. They can be entrance examinations or standardised tests, general or subject-specific.

Test results may be used in the assessment of the application dossier, which is usually the case for standardised tests. Applicants can also be asked to sit tests if their previous qualification is not considered equivalent to the national entry qualification, or they may have to pass a test to compensate for deficiencies in specific subjects, if these are a prerequisite for admission into a given programme. Finally, entrance exams can be used to select the best eligible applicants from a pool.

(1) Standardised tests: SAT, GRE, GMAT, TAGEMAGE, SweSAT

Standardised tests are usually multiple-choice and are used across a variety of schools and higher education institutions. General tests aim to give an indication of a student's potential to succeed in higher education, and assess verbal, quantitative, and analytical abilities. Subject-specific tests

153 Language tests are discussed in chapter 7.3.3. Numerous publications analyse the usefulness and reliability of tests and examinations. Standardised and aptitude tests, in particular, have been widely analysed and discussed (cf. for example McDonald et al.: *Aptitude testing for university entrance: A literature review*, The National Foundation for Educational Research, Slough 2001). The present study does not engage in this discussion, but gives an idea of the use of different tests and examinations.

evaluate skills and subject knowledge related to a specific discipline. Test scores are used to predict the students' success in higher education or in a specific programme, and to assess students against the same standard, regardless of the origin of their qualification. The most common tests can be taken at testing centres in numerous countries of the world and are usually subject to a fee. Applicants mostly have to sit the test prior to sending in their application, and test results are considered with the rest of the application dossier, as additional information on the applicants' suitability. Less frequently, institutions use standardised tests on a selection day instead of an entrance examination.

The main advantage of standardised tests for foreign admissions is that they facilitate assessment of national and international applicants against the same standard, whereas it is often difficult to assess and compare the value of foreign qualifications and grades. In addition, candidates can usually take the tests at testing centres in their home countries, and neither applicants nor representatives of the individual institutions have to travel abroad. On the other hand, interviewees at the visited institutions frequently doubt the meaningfulness of test results, as applicants can prepare for them via practice tests and training courses.[154] In general, tests are viewed positively as an additional source of information on the students' academic potential, but not as a sole criterion for the admissions decision (which they are not meant to be).

The following tests are used at the visited institutions:

- The Scholastic Aptitude Test, **SAT**, the Graduate Record Examination, **GRE** and the Graduate Management Admission test, **GMAT**, are all US-based standardised tests. SAT is the most common test intended to measure the skills necessary for undergraduate study. It is organised by the College Board, a national-level agency which also helps the admissions offices to evaluate the results. GRE and GMAT are tests for admission into the postgraduate level. Whereas SAT and GRE are general tests, the GMAT is the common test for postgraduate management and business studies. All three tests are "products" of the Educational Testing Service, ETS, which also runs the TOEFL test.[155] Higher education institutions outside the US rarely require the SAT; GRE and GMAT are common internationally. In most parts of the world the tests are computer-adaptive.[156]

154 This criticism has been voiced at the visited institutions, but is contested by several studies. See for instance Trost: *Die Schulabschlussnote sagt am meisten aus: Studierfähigkeitstests im internationalen Vergleich*, in: DAAD (ed.): *Betreuung, Zulassung, Ausländerrecht*, series Die internationale Hochschule, op.cit., p.68-74

155 Cf. www.ets.org

156 GRE and GMAT, for example, can be taken as computer-adaptive tests: depending on how the student performs on each question, the computer will determine whether the student should be asked a harder or an easier question next. Test-takers can view scores instantly when they finish the exam (with the exception of essay questions), and score reports are forwarded to university recipients within two to three weeks after the student has completed the test. The tests are offered several times a year in different parts of the world, as well as on-line.

- The Test d'Aptitude aux Etudes de Gestion **TAGE-MAGE** is the French equivalent of the GMAT. It is administered by the French Foundation for Management Education, FNEGE, and can be taken at testing centres in different countries. The TAGE-MAGE is the result of a merger of two tests, one of which was specifically developed by EM Lyon, for the selection of international candidates via the network of French business schools, CIAM (cf. chapter 6.2.1). EM Lyon accepts both the GMAT or TAGE-MAGE results from international applicants, with a slight preference for the French test, which is regarded as more reliable as it is less common and harder to "learn by heart" on the basis of practice tests.
- The Swedish Scholastic Assessment Test, **SweSAT**, is a general selection test used for admissions into Swedish higher education, and is administered by the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education HSV and offered twice a year at higher education institutions throughout Sweden. It is a selection test which aims at ranking applicants according to their expected academic success. The test is mainly taken by Swedish students (as it is taken in Swedish, apart from the English language test), but is open to all applicants. The test was originally developed to give a "second chance" to students who may not have succeeded in the upper secondary school leaving examination. Now, school leavers commonly take it, and one third of all places are awarded on the basis of the test results.[157]

Only in the US, standardised tests are commonly used for both domestic and foreign admissions into undergraduate and postgraduate levels by the visited institutions. Usually, the academic staff of each department within a university determine the test score requirements (at least for postgraduate programmes), as well as the weight given to the results. They can be used to establish a ranking, as a cut-off criterion, or as one of several sources of information on the applicant's academic potential. Various examples are mentioned earlier in this chapter (cf. 7.3.1). The GRE, and above all the GMAT, are also common at international level. The visited business schools and departments either require a GMAT score or at least consider it as an asset if submitted.

(2) Entrance examinations

Overall, the visited higher education institutions hardly use **entrance examinations** in the admission and selection of foreign students. If they do, their function is mostly to **compensate for deficiencies in the applicants' prior qualification**. In this case, only those whose prior qualifications are insufficient for admission into a given level and programme are required to sit an entrance exam.

157 Cf. www.hsv.se

In Switzerland, for example, undergraduate applicants whose upper secondary qualification is not considered equivalent to the national upper secondary qualification *Matura* are asked by the universities to sit an entrance examination, which is centrally organised at Swiss level. The federal institutes of technology organise their own institutional exams. The aim of these examinations is not to select from a pool of qualified students, but to compensate for a lack of qualification and to ensure that students are sufficiently prepared and likely to succeed. In both cases, the exam is based on the Swiss *Matura*.

The **central Swiss entrance examination** in Fribourg is a **general examination**, which like the *Matura* includes subjects from various disciplines. The Swiss cantonal universities, represented by the Swiss rector's conference CRUS, are responsible for the examination. Foreign students register for the examination via the admissions office of the university they want to study at, which decides if applicants are eligible. The candidates can take part in preparatory and language courses organised in Fribourg prior to the bi-annual examination. The courses are partly subsidised, partly subject to tuition fees.[158] Every year, between 400 and 500 students register for the examination, of which 150 take the preparatory courses. About 75 percent of the students prepared in the courses pass the examination, which can be repeated once.

The underlying rationale of the Fribourg examination is to bring the foreign applicants to a level as close as possible to the level of Swiss secondary school graduates, and to only admit students who are likely to succeed in higher education. Hence, the aim is to prepare students for higher education, not to select them. Interviewees want standards to remain high, and be comparable to the *Matura*. The visited universities appreciate the model, and the feedback on the performance of admitted students is positive. A problem voiced by the interviewees is that the examination may be overly based on the Swiss system: Swiss History for example, which is an obligatory part of the examination, is often difficult for foreign students (and its necessity for admission into scientific disciplines, for example, is doubtful).

At ETH Zürich, undergraduate applicants whose qualification is considered deficient are asked to sit the reduced or complete **institutional entrance exam**. This examination is organised separately for several reasons. First, the ETH is ruled by federal and not by cantonal law like the universities, and has the possibility to establish different procedures. Second, the Fribourg examination is not considered to be in line with ETH standards: as the ETH is specialised in technical and scientific disciplines, subject clusters and "clientele" are different, and the requirements in scientific subjects are higher.

158 According to the director of the preparatory courses, the cost of preparatory courses and examination per student and year corresponds to a third of what the student would cost if they had to repeat one year at university.

An examination committee determines the content of the entrance examination, based on the Swiss *Matura* and adapts to the special needs of the ETH (sciences). The entrance exam is held twice a year in the three official languages and once a year in English. Around 120 undergraduate applicants take the examination every year, out of 300 invited. Of the up to 450 applications, up to 150 can usually be admitted on the basis of their qualifications.

In most other institutions, applicants can be asked to sit **examinations in individual subjects**, if these are requested for admission into a specific programme. At the University of Groningen, for example, previous education in Mathematics is required for admissions into Bachelor's and Master's programmes at the Faculty of Economics. Applicants with suspected deficiencies can be requested to sit an entrance examination or attend an interview with a Maths lecturer. Usually, entrance exams are organised twice a year at the faculty. For non-EU candidates, entrance examinations can also be arranged at an approved agent in their home country.

Finally, institutions may require **all foreign applicants to sit entrance examinations**. This is either to ensure an adequate level of preparation, or to select the best students from a pool of eligible applicants.[159] An example of the former is the system used by the French network of engineering schools ParisTech (cf. chapter 6.2.1 and 7.1) for admissions into Master's degrees. A committee of academics from the network's member institutions travels to a limited number of Chinese partner institutions where they interview applicants and test them in various scientific disciplines. The examination includes different scientific disciplines and the results are considered in the assessment procedure as one of several criteria (next to transcripts, a motivation statement, etc.).

Wageningen University formerly admitted foreign applicants for Master's programmes via an entrance examination, which was held at the embassies in the applicants' home countries. Wageningen students come from all over the world, frequently from developing countries. The examination tested the applicants' knowledge and skills, as well as English proficiency. From an academic point of view, admissions via the examination showed very good results. However, with the growing number of applications, the system became increasingly expensive and difficult to administer. The examination was abolished and admissions decisions are now based on the individual assessment of application dossiers (cf. chapters 7.2 and 7.3.1). This reduced bureaucracy and made the system more efficient (though interviewees doubt if more effective).

159 None of the visited institutions carries out a selection from a pool of eligible applicants via an institutional entrance examination. This is, however, practiced at the Swiss University of St Gallen, where only a limited number of foreign students are admitted. For undergraduate admissions, for example, all eligible foreign students have to sit the institutional entrance examination. After the exam, the best are directly admitted. Candidates who are just above or just below the required score for admission are invited to an interview. The exam is basically an aptitude test, and includes text analysis, language systems, quantitative problems, etc. Its function is to identify the best students out of the pool of applicants. Cf. http://www.studies.unisg.ch.

8 The timing: closing dates or rolling admissions

Much of what has been said at this stage has to do with timing. Selection from a pool of applicants, for example, is only possible for programmes with a set deadline and hence directly linked to the timing of the admissions process. However, deadlines are more common in some systems than others, and their use is far from universal. There are two main possibilities for the timing of an admissions procedure:

- ♦ a set deadline;
- ♦ “rolling admissions”.

Institutions or programmes that work with **a set deadline** accept applications until a preset closing date. After that, applications are assessed together. This system may be put in place for several reasons: first, applications can be compared and the best candidates from a pool of applicants selected. Second, academic staff, above all programme directors who have to plan their classes, can be informed about the number of applicants and hence the likely number of future students. Especially in cases without a capacity limit, this can be important information for a smooth planning of academic activities. Third, for applicants from third countries the duration of visa procedures and other necessary preparations of a long stay abroad might make it necessary to set an early deadline. In these cases, deadlines for those foreign applicants who need a visa are fixed at an earlier date than those for nationals and foreigners who do not, e.g. students who go from one EU country to another.

“Rolling admissions” mean that applications are assessed as they come in rather than “stored” until a closing date. Interested candidates can apply at any time. If there is a capacity limit, students will be accepted until this limit is reached. It is usually stated in the documentation and on the website that the earlier they apply the higher their chances of getting a place. Rolling admissions are often used in systems where admission purely depends on an eligibility check, i.e. where equivalence to the national entry qualification is decisive. Yet, a rolling admissions system can still be highly selective: then, applications are not compared among each other but with preset standards and thresholds. There are two main reasons for the use of this system. First, as applications are assessed constantly, it substantially reduces the seasonal workload of admissions staff and teaching and research staff involved in admissions. Second, it is the basis for the achievement of quick “turnaround times”, i.e. the time between the receipt of an application and an offer or rejection letter. As applications can be processed and assessed as they come in, it is possible to give the students an answer as quickly as possible. This is convenient for the applicant, but is mainly a market rationale: the quicker you are, the higher the chances to get a good student. Obviously, turnaround times also depend on how the admissions process is organised, e.g. between the central and the faculty level.

The advantages of one system correspond to the **problems** of the other. A deadline-based system entails a huge seasonal workload for admissions and academic staff and requires discipline as well as some patience on the side of the applicant. As dossiers are only assessed after the closing date, good applicants might consider other, quicker offers, unless the prestige of the institution they are applying for makes up for long delays. A rolling admissions system, on the other hand, can be slightly unfair, as applications cannot be compared. Once a capacity limit is reached, students with better qualifications than some of those already admitted may have to be refused. Also, and in particular in cases without a capacity limit, the size or even the number of the classes is unknown until the very last moment and therefore planning of academic activities is difficult.

Some institutions have opted for a **combination of both procedures**. They work either with rolling admissions until a given deadline or with several different deadlines for one intake. In both cases, planning is facilitated and enough time can be left for a visa procedure if necessary. In the second case, a selection from a reduced pool of applicants is possible after each deadline. Also, the workload at a given point in time is reduced, decisions can be made and communicated quicker, and candidates have more flexibility to match an application with their own timetable.

The following examples clarify the above-described different models of "admission timing".

8.1 The use of deadlines in admissions procedures

Quality-oriented **institutions, departments or programmes** with complicated selection procedures often work with deadlines in order to be able to select from the pool of all applications. Numerous examples are mentioned in chapter 7.1. Deadlines for these selection procedures might be the same for all applicants, or differ according to the nationality of the entry qualification. In addition, there might be several closing dates for the same intake.

One deadline for all applicants is used at ETH Zürich, and at Purdue University. A Master's pilot programme in Information Technology at ETH Zürich works with a deadline in February for a programme start in October. Applications come in from November until February, then a first selection round takes place. At the end of April, candidates receive an informal recommendation on their chances to be admitted. Pre-selected candidates are asked for additional information for a second selection round and a "formalised" application[160] until May, after which a final decision is made in July. Having

160 An application is formalised or official once it has been received by the rector's office, i.e. the central admissions office, and an application fee has been paid. As soon as this is the case, a refused applicant can take legal action against a decision. Therefore, an "informal" first selection round is used for a first screening.

enough time for selection of good Master's students is especially emphasised in this programme, as this is seen as a preselection of good future doctoral students.

At the School of Engineering at Purdue University, applicants for postgraduate programmes may submit applications until the beginning of January for priority selection and financial support. There is a second, final deadline in May, after which applicants for the remaining places are selected. These deadlines are the same for national and international applicants, but the department has to send recommendations on the admission of international applicants to the central Graduate School before a deadline in June, so that enough time is left for visa procedures once offers are made.

The French *grande école* INSA Lyon is a good example for the use of **different deadlines for national and international applicants**. The bulk of international undergraduate students at the institution are admitted through the earlier mentioned regionally oriented international channel programmes ASINSA, AMERINSA, or EURINSA. For these programmes, the closing date for application is in early February, and the selection procedure takes place in March. For admission into other programmes at INSA Lyon, national undergraduate applicants and the few foreign candidates who apply via the traditional *concours* have to apply by April.[161] Thus, although strictly speaking the earlier deadline is not explicitly linked to nationality but to the programme, in practice it applies to most international undergraduate applicants. For applicants who already hold a Bachelor's, deadlines are clearly differentiated according to the nationality of the degree. To be admitted into a Master's programme at INSA Lyon (or an advanced level of the integrated engineering course), candidates have to apply by the end of February and have one more month to complete their application. The respective deadlines for their French counterparts are in mid-May and mid-June. The earlier deadlines for international applicants allow for a thorough individual assessment of the applications, and leave enough time for preparation and visa procedures. In addition, the programmes for both levels are preceded by a summer school for international candidates, who, as a result, take up their studies two months earlier than their French fellow-students do.

A common model at competitive US institutions is the use of an additional **"early decision deadline"**. The candidate applies early, usually in November, and can apply only to one institution or at least has to withdraw all other applications when made an offer. This option is used by applicants who are certain of their first choice higher education institution and have decided that they will attend if admitted. The demonstrated commitment and smaller pool of applications after the regular deadline may slightly increase admission

161 For admission into the undergraduate level, these deadlines are common to all five INSA in France, as admissions are administered jointly. To reduce complexity, INSA Lyon is being presented as an independent example.

chances. New York University uses an early decision deadline prior to the regular deadline in January. Candidates for undergraduate programmes can apply by November and receive a decision in December or January. They are also allowed to apply to other schools, but must withdraw any other applications if admitted and pay a tuition deposit within two weeks of notification. Although early decision deadlines are also open to international applicants, they are primarily used by national candidates and graduates from (foreign or US-based) international schools.

Finally, **several consecutive deadlines** are used by the French *grande école* EM Lyon (see chapter 7.1) and the network of engineering schools n+i (chapter 6.2.1). The network n+i works with four separate deadlines during a selection period lasting from August until April (for a programme start in September or July, for those students who need to take part in the language course). After each closing date, the best candidates of each pool are preselected and made an offer that they have to accept within a given delay. Non-selected candidates from an early session might be taken into account at a later stage, up until after the final deadline in April. This way, a selection can be made from a reduced pool of applicants after each closing date, and the workload is considerably reduced.

A similar system is used at EM Lyon, which has put in place six deadlines and subsequent selection dates for admissions into its International MBA programme. Deadlines are between January and June for a start in the autumn. One or two selection days take place about three weeks after each deadline. The organisation of the selection days, including interviews and tests, becomes more manageable with a reduced number of applicants per date. However, applications are screened as they come in, and the aim is to inform the candidate within 48 hours if he or she can take part in the next stage of the selection procedure. Hence, in parallel to the deadlines, the school applies a rolling admissions system.

8.2 Continuous decisions: rolling admissions

It is more difficult to define a “typology” of systems using rolling admissions. Yet, some variables help distinguish between the different schemes:

- Rolling admissions can be for international students or for all applicants.
- Some programmes have a capacity limit, others do not.
- Rolling admissions can work with or without a final deadline, but in most cases there is a recommended date by which candidates should have applied. A final deadline may only exist for foreign applicants due to the time required for visa procedures.
- As explained in chapter 7.1, institutions working with a rolling admissions system may practice an open admissions system and focus on equivalence between foreign and national entry qualifications, or be “selective”

by setting thresholds, but without making a selection from a pool of applications after a set deadline.

In the US, Purdue University admits **all applicants** at the undergraduate level with rolling admissions, and Indiana University Bloomington does it for both the under- and postgraduate levels. The application is evaluated against a set of high standards and requirements. For some programmes, standards may be raised as the capacity limit is approaching, and admissions close once capacity is met. The admissions office suggests deadlines, which gives students an indication of when the application has to be sent. Frequently, departments need to keep some places free for the national students after the international deadline, as some applications from national students could still arrive. As a result, the department risks taking less qualified national students than previously selected international students.

All visited Australian institutions use rolling admissions. For the undergraduate level, rolling admissions are **specific to international and other fee-paying students**. Candidates with an Australian upper secondary qualification who apply under the HECS funding scheme have to apply by the end of September if they want to begin studies in March. Interested international candidates can apply at any time, and applications are assessed as they arrive. At some institutions, offers are valid for more than just the following term, i.e. students can enrol one year later without having to reapply.

The rolling admissions model suits the competitive context Australian universities operate in. Institutions follow a market-driven rationale and need to react quickly to get more and better students. Turnaround times are an important issue for all visited Australian institutions. The aim at most institutions is a 24-hour turnaround for undergraduate and postgraduate coursework programmes. In practice, applications are being processed in a time comprised between several days and two to seven weeks, although it takes longer for research-based postgraduate programmes. Turnaround times, or at least targets, are usually shorter for institutions where a company, like at Monash University or RMIT, or a well-staffed central international department, like at Deakin University, handles international admissions. To achieve a good turnaround is often quoted as one of the main reasons for a maximum delegation of competence to the central unit.

Some programmes at Australian institutions have a **capacity limit** and admissions procedures close once the limit is reached. At the University of Melbourne, rolling admissions are applied **until a set deadline**: in December for a start in March for international undergraduate students and in October for international postgraduate applicants. For national applicants, the deadline is earlier at the undergraduate level (HECS students) but may be later at the postgraduate level, where it is at the discretion of each department. Most programmes are highly selective and applications are chosen based on pre-set thresholds (see chapter 7.3.1). Problems arise when programmes fill up too quickly, such as for medicine in autumn 2003, when all places were taken over two months before the final deadline. Although this was considered unfair towards other candidates, the system was maintained to keep up quick turnaround times.

Commonly at Australian institutions, however, **capacity can be extended** for many programmes according to the number of admitted international (full-fee-paying) students, i.e. additional staff can be employed, and new classes put up. This may even be the case for programmes with high entry thresholds, such as the IT Master's programme at La Trobe University. The department has reacted to the increasing volume of applications by raising entry requirements, but has not set a capacity limit. Candidates are admitted almost until the beginning of the semester. This allows for considerable flexibility and rapidity, and most applications are assessed within three to five days. However, planning is difficult, as the actual number of students is only known right before the beginning of the semester. Even if new staff can be employed, there may be high pressure on existing staff until this actually happens. In this case, deadlines are indicative: applications should be submitted by mid-January for a start in March. Applicants who need to apply for a visa are advised to apply by mid-November, and allow at least four to six weeks for visa procedures.

Rolling admissions until a definite deadline are practised at most Dutch and Swiss institutions, at least for undergraduate admissions. As the admissions decision is based on the equivalence of entry qualifications, there is no need to "accumulate" a pool of applications to choose from, and applications are assessed as they come in. Yet, there is still a final deadline: in the Netherlands, for example at the universities of Wageningen or Groningen, this is as early as in April for a start in October. The early deadline is to allow time for visa procedures. Even though all visited universities apply the earlier described fast track procedure (see chapter 3.5), it takes at least four to six weeks, with the final visa deadline in July. Assessment of qualifications, offers to applicants and receipt of responses, etc., take approximately eight weeks. Both universities stated that the deadline could be in June were there not the visa constraints.[162]

The University of Lausanne also works with rolling admissions until a deadline in June. This delay applies to all applicants. Should the entrance qualification not be available at this stage, candidates still have to apply within the delay and indicate the date when the missing documents will be delivered. Swiss admissions officers are currently trying to unify admissions delays in the national committee for admissions and equivalences and are discussing an anticipation (and unification) of the deadline. This is an attempt to allow

162 Visa-related aspects may condition admissions procedures, but are not the focus of the present publication. For further reading on this topic, see the following study on five European countries: *The Time & the Trouble*, The Hague: Nuffic 2000, www.nuffic.nl/immigration/pdf/timetrouble.pdf

more time for the assessment of applications, especially for Master's programmes. One delay for all Swiss universities may make the system more transparent for applicants.

8.3 Admission timing at national level

Deadlines or delays for admissions procedures may be in place for national level procedures as the ones described in chapter 6.2.2, as well as for institutions, departments, or individual programmes. These may be procedures that apply to all applicants, like the national admissions office VHS in Sweden. Other procedures may have been put in place specifically for foreign students like the French *procédure d'admission préalable*.

The Swedish National Admissions Office for Higher Education, VHS, for instance, does the general admissions and selection of **all undergraduate students**, i.e. national and (the few) international. Although international students might need more time beforehand to have their qualification evaluated and their marks "translated", the official **deadline is the same for all applicants**. After the closing date, a selection is made based on a marks-based ranking for programmes with a capacity limit. The deadline for applications for autumn entry is in April. However, applicants can complete their application until mid-June with new results, or additional material. Offers are then sent in two rounds: a first round in June and a second, as places can become available when people turn down offers, in August. Those students selected in the first round need to answer to the offer by mid-July.

In the case of the UCAS clearinghouse system, **different final deadlines** apply to home (UK and EU) and non-EU applicants. UK and EU undergraduate applicants have to apply between September and January for a start in October.[163] Applications received between February and June are still forwarded to the universities but treated as late: the chosen institutions may consider an application but are not obliged to do so. Non-EU, hence fee-paying, applicants formally have to apply by June. Yet, they are also recommended to respect the January deadline or at least apply as early as possible, as programmes with capacity limits might fill up quickly. All applications, national, EU or non-EU, received after the June deadline will still be part of a clearinghouse process. Applicants receive information on programmes with unfilled places and have to contact the institutions directly. Although in theory, the deadlines for home students and non-EU students differ, the recommended dates are the same. The earlier deadline for national and EU students is due to the different fee system: they pay domestic-level tuition fees. In general, higher education institutions reply by May for the January deadline and by July for the June deadline. However, institutions do not have to respect these delays and can make their decisions on a continuous basis, like in a rolling admissions system.

163 Deadlines are even earlier for Oxford and Cambridge, as well as for Medical studies and programmes in Art and Design.

In France, the earlier explained *procédure d'admission préalable*, and the linked **deadlines only apply to foreign undergraduate applicants** from non-EU countries. Visa procedures and considerations linked to immigration are the motivation for admissions deadlines. Procedures and timetable are imposed by the French Ministry of Interior and are obligatory for all French universities. For a start in October, candidates can place their demand at the French embassy in their home country until January of the preceding academic year and have to return the completed forms between December and the end of January. A French test takes place at the embassy in February. The embassy forwards the application to the requested universities in March and the candidate can expect a reply after mid-April. No deadline applies to French undergraduate students, who simply enrol. Hence, decisions on the admission of foreign applicants have to be made much earlier than for their French counterparts.

9 Managing the volume of applications: additional tools and filters

Managing the volume of applications has become one of the most common problems in foreign student admissions. At many of the visited higher education institutions, understaffed admissions or international offices are snowed under with enquiries and piles of applications that need to be processed, i.e. entered into a database, assessed, or forwarded to faculty-based administrative or academic staff, whose desks almost collapse under piles of application dossiers.

Enquiries and even applications often reach four- or five-digit figures per year. New York University, for example, receives around 33,000 domestic and international undergraduate applications for 3,900 available places. At the postgraduate level (e.g. for Master's and PhD programmes), the university's Graduate School for Arts and Sciences gets about 10,000 applications, of which one-third are international. In 2003, the Australian Monash University received 17,575 applications from international students. Both institutions are big metropolitan universities, with more than 48,000 enrolments in total. Smaller universities too are often flooded with applications: the Dutch University of Wageningen, for example, has 5,000 students in total, and receives between 3,000 and 4,000 international applications for Master's programmes every year.

This situation has forced most institutions to re-think the management of foreign applications. Different tools to streamline enquiry management are discussed in chapter 5; the various ways to organise admissions procedures, divide work within an office or institution, and streamline the process via networks or national structures are presented in chapter 6. The visited higher education institutions have also introduced some additional measures to handle the volume of applications and reduce the number of non-serious and poor applications. The following measures are most frequently quoted:

- make criteria and brochures as clear as possible to allow self-assessment;
- properly resource the units in charge of international admissions;
- collaborate with agents in the applicants' countries of origin;
- charge an application fee;
- introduce an online application or registration system.

The importance of **clearly set and communicated criteria** is emphasised at numerous institutions. The visited Australian universities, in particular, which all apply rolling admissions and assess applications against preset criteria, mention this measure as an important tool to reduce the number of weak applications. Students can assess their chances of being accepted prior to applying using the criteria published on the institutions' websites and in brochures. Issues linked to information, and to the role of preset and communicated criteria are discussed in chapters 5 and 7.3.2.

A **sufficient staffing level** of the units in charge of foreign admissions is regarded as important by all interviewees in charge of processing admissions.[164] Workload is the biggest problem for many admissions officers, and frequently, one or two staff members need to handle a few thousand enquiries, and process and follow up on several hundred applications every year. At the visited institutions, staffing levels vary widely. They depend on the importance of international student recruitment to the overall policy of each higher education institution, as well as on the institution's financial situation. In general, the number of staff necessary to process international applications depends not only on the volume of applications, but also on the organisational structure of the process, if the staff deal with all or only international admissions, and whether they have side tasks (Cf. chapter 6.1). Bureaucratic structures and lengthy decision procedures often make it difficult to increase staffing levels in proportion to increasing workloads and volumes of applications. At Indiana University Bloomington, for example, it takes up to five years to change staffing levels. Admissions staff are often forced to find other ways to streamline the admissions process and reduce workloads, for example by introducing online applications or automated e-mails.

Numerous higher education institutions collaborate with **agents in the applicants' countries of origin**. These can be commercial agents, or offices of the respective national agency, e.g. Nuffic or IDP, as discussed in chapters 5.3 and 6.2.2. The main purpose of working with commercial agents is to increase foreign student numbers. As higher education institutions pay a provision for every recruited student, working with agents may increase the quantity more than the quality of applications. Therefore, interviewees emphasise the importance of training sessions and clear protocols. The trained agents are intended to work as **filters** through education counselling. Examples for this practice are the visited Australian universities, which actively recruit students mainly from a range of Asian countries. Commercial agents and IDP offices work as filters through counselling, that is, they try to match the student's capacity and profile with an adequate institution, programme, and level. If students do not fulfil the requirements of the programme they are interested in or are unlikely to be accepted by a prestigious institution, the agent can offer alternatives.[165] If higher education institutions

164 An Australian benchmarking study on international office operations has found there is on average one "applications processing staff" for just over 200 enrolments per year. The study surveyed 29 Australian universities, which accounted for over 80 percent of commencing international students in 2002. The study was initiated by the Australian Universities International Directors Forum, which was established in 2002 and chaired by Stephen Connelly, director of the international office of the visited La Trobe University. For more information, see: Olsen: *Benchmarking University International Office Operation*, Paper for the 17th Australian International Education Conference, Melbourne, October 2003, http://www.idp.com/17aiecpapers/program/wednesday/manínted3/OlsenWed1530_p.pdf

165 The effectiveness of this filter is questionable: most institutions collaborate with a wide range of agents, who compete between themselves. It is difficult to make sure that all apply the same protocols, and applicants may try their luck with different agents until their applications are forwarded to their chosen higher education institutions.

work with online applications, the role of agents can be to confirm the authenticity of the documents submitted by the student.

An **application fee** can be introduced to cover administration costs, but often it is principally intended to reduce the number of non-serious applications. Online application systems are not only introduced to provide a better customer service to prospective students: **online applications or internal online registration systems** are often introduced to reduce the workload for admissions staff and make data accessible for all staff involved in the admissions process. The advantages and disadvantages of both items are frequently contested. The following paragraphs describe the use of these tools in more detail.

Application fees: an extra workload or an efficient filter?

Application fees are more common in some countries than others: in the US, Australia, and Switzerland, for example, almost all visited higher education institutions charge applications fees, whereas none of the visited Swedish or French public universities do. The fees can be the same for all applicants, or they can be higher for international than national applicants, or only apply to international candidates. The visited institutions with an application fee ask between 30 and 130 €. In most cases, the application fee needs to be paid when the application is submitted, and a proof, e.g. of a bank transfer, has to be included in the application.[166] Application fees can significantly reduce the number of non-serious applications, and contribute to covering the administration costs of the admissions process. However, collecting application fees also creates extra work, costs time, and may be particularly difficult in the case of international students (if these apply from their home countries).

Most of the visited institutions that charge an application fee confirm its effectiveness in **decreasing the number of non-serious applications** and reducing (pointless) workloads. At the University of Lausanne, international applicants are charged an application fee of CHF 200 (around € 130), whereas national applicants can register for free. Previously, a registration form was part of the university’s brochure, and students had to send this form to the university to request an application package. Hence, all serious and non-serious requests had to be processed. The introduction of an application fee, together with a complete, transparent brochure and online information, has considerably reduced workloads, and almost all applications received are serious. Some of the visited Australian universities have raised their application fees to stop non-serious applications: at Monash and Melbourne University, for example, application fees have gone up from AUS $ 50 to 100 (€ 30 to 60), and the higher fee is considered an

166 Some institutions, however, only charge a fee if an official (i.e. legally binding) letter of acceptance or rejection is issued, and hence after a first screening of applications. This is, for example, the practice of the Swiss University of Basel.

"excellent filter".[167] At some institutions, the application fee is reimbursed at enrolment.

A second motivation of application fees is to help **cover the administration costs linked to the processing of applications**. The French private Ecole de Management, EM Lyon, for example, requires an application fee from all applicants. This is in line with its philosophy as a private institution: work has to be done by somebody, and needs to be paid for. Some US institutions have a higher application fee for international students, to cover part of the extra cost they create through work-intensive credential evaluation. They usually charge between US $ 50 and 80 (€ 40 to 65).

Many of the visited institutions, however, claim that the income through application fees is far too low to cover the cost of processing applications. Some of the visited institutions argue that application fees entail **additional administrative work and cost time**. Collecting the fee from international applicants can be difficult and the fee can represent a significant hurdle for applicants from developing countries. Wageningen University has deliberately opted against the introduction of an application fee for the above reasons.

Depending on their policy, higher education institutions may **exempt some applicants from application fees:** the Union College in the US, for example, tries to encourage online applications. To provide an incentive, online applications are exempt from the application fee.

Finally, institutions that **deliberately want to increase the pool of applicants** may decide against an application fee. The Australian University of Ballarat used to charge an application fee, but it was abolished to encourage more applications. Ballarat is a regional university with low numbers of international students on its main campus and wants to attract a bigger pool of applicants.

Online or paper-based?

Many of the visited institutions already run or at least consider a system of online applications. In general, students can apply online and scan their documents, but still have to send the originals by mail. If accepted, the applicants receive a conditional offer, which is only confirmed once the higher education institution has received certified copies of the originals. Online applications can be linked to a database, which is accessible by all staff members involved in admissions and assessment. Frequently, prospective students can put up personal folders, progressively complete their applications files, and check their status once the application has been submitted. Alternatively, candidates can be invited to download an application form and

167 The fees also cause problems at both institutions. At Monash University, the fee was formerly collected by bank draft, which was difficult for applicants from a number of source countries. Now the fee is collected by credit card, and one of the financial staff of Monash International oversees the procedure. At the University of Melbourne, additional work and cost is generated by the fact that the fee is refundable, and needs to be held for two years if applicants do not enrol.

send it back by email. The application is pre-assessed and, if eligible, the candidate is asked to submit the originals. Online applications are partly intended to speed up turnaround times and make the application process easier and more accessible for prospective students. It is usually their choice if they want to apply online, submit their application on paper, or by email. However, online applications are also a tool to manage increasing volumes of applications, to reduce paper piles and the workloads of admissions staff.

Online applications help reduce data-entry work and paper piles during and after processing applications. All application files often need to be kept for a number of years, and storage space is a problem at several of the visited institutions. Online applications save time, as applications can be processed before or while certified copies of the documents are sent. Another advantage is a greater transparency for the students, who can check their status online, reducing follow-up questions.

The principal disadvantage of online applications is the greater risk of fraudulent cases and non-serious applications, especially as the first assessment of the student is not based on certified copies. Some of the visited institutions, for example the University of Lausanne, use online applications for national applicants, but not for the international ones.

In the United States and in Australia, for example, several universities voice the preference for **online application as an important tool to reduce data-input work**. There is, of course, still the problem of matching parts of the application sent on paper (e.g. recommendations) with online applications, but overall time is saved. Students are still allowed to send in paper applications too. At La Trobe University, a system of online applications is regarded as a solution to several problems: paper piles, an enormous workload that leaves hardly any time for the limited number of admissions staff to pre-assess applications, and long turnaround times. La Trobe aims for a complete online system, where students can check their status, and to use agents to verify the authenticity of the students' qualifications. Like many other Australian institutions, the online system is part of a student management system, which is developed and supported by a specialised company.[168]

At Wageningen University, an online system is being developed by the University's IT department, in regular consultation with admissions staff. Also in this case volume of applications is the main reason for the introduction of a complete online system. The 3,000 to 4,000 yearly applications need to be processed, registered, preassessed, and sent to the departments. Applications need to be kept for an additional two years before they can be cleared. The new system streamlines the process internally: admissions staff as well as academics can access the database with a password, and assess and comment online on the applications. The final aim is an online applications system, which will allow students to apply and check their status via the Internet.

168 Cf. http://www2.callista.com.au/

Some institutions, however, are **reluctant to introduce a system of online applications**, and underline the importance of certified copies of all documents, even at the initial assessment stage. They may still opt for an internal streamlining of the admissions procedure and introduce an internal system of **online registrations**, to enable central and faculty-based, front desk, admissions and academic staff to access the information on the applicants or introduce comments. This way, application dossiers would not need to go back and forth, and would not "be lost" or remain too long in one place. Such a system will be introduced at the Faculty of Economics at the University of Groningen. The online registration system links the registration of incoming applications and the faculty's database on foreign qualifications. It is expected to avoid paper piles and to save time and allow for a more personal follow-up of applications.

At Uppsala University, some English Master's programmes do not put their application form online. This allows the programme director to do some screening at an early stage, as the form is sent via e-mail only to those candidates who contact them and sound right for the programme. This works as a filter and reduces application numbers, but possibly works only when application numbers are fairly small.

Online systems may be used by **national agencies or networks**. In Australia, IDP, in its function as an agent for student recruitment, has developed an online application system for all programmes and universities. Students do not have to apply for a specific programme: they register and afterwards, in a counselling process, around four programmes that match their preparation and interest are attached to their name. The student still needs to send original application documents to the nearest IDP office. After a pre-assessment by IDP, the application is forwarded to the university. This service has only just been developed, so there has not been any feedback on its quality and usefulness.

In Sweden, candidates can apply only for undergraduate programmes via the National Office for Higher Education, VHS. Their online system, however, only accepts Swedish grades. Foreign upper secondary qualifications need first to be sent on paper to VHS, which evaluates and assigns points. Student can apply online once they know their Swedish equivalence points.

Finally, the network of French engineering schools n+i recruits and admits students via an entirely web-based system. Students apply online and send in the original documents for verification to the n+i secretariat. The individual higher education institutions can access the list of pre-selected candidates online and make their offers to the candidates, who can check their status online. A range of business partners can also access the database and offer traineeships to suitable students (cf. chapter 6.2.1). According to the network's coordinator, the success of the online system is founded on the clearly defined field and format of n+i, but is not advised as a general tool for all kinds of subjects and institutions.

10 Twelve conclusions and recommendations

The study that led to the following conclusions and recommendations explores the admission of international students into higher education in Australia, France, Sweden, Switzerland, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States. While the recommendations are derived from the findings in these countries, they refer to general tendencies, which may be specific but are not limited to one particular national context.

As the study explores the admission of foreign applicants, the recommendations below focus exclusively on this group of students. Other elements of foreign student intake, e.g. marketing or student support, are mentioned as far as they are related to admissions and selection.

To avoid misunderstandings, the authors would like to underline several points: first, the recommendations below are based on a range of tendencies that seem common to most of the visited countries and institutions. This does not mean there are not other valid ways of admitting foreign candidates. Second, the authors stress they are not advocating that adequate admissions policies and instruments are the only solution to the problems related to foreign student intake. Other issues, for example visa and immigration policies, adequate funding, scholarship schemes, and housing are critical matters of concern and require urgent action.[169]

National authorities and higher education institutions need to recognise the importance of adequate admissions and selection procedures

Overall, the importance of adequate admissions and selection procedures for international degree students is frequently not sufficiently understood by national authorities and higher education institutions. Marketing the attractiveness of an institution or an entire country as a study destination, or the guiding principle to attract international excellence are only coherent if there are admissions and selection procedures which facilitate the actual intake of the “right” students: those who are at least likely to succeed in a given programme. Even where marketing activities are limited, student demand and the volume of foreign applications demonstrate the urgent need for adequate policies for foreign student selection and admissions. From the national perspective, this implies that the legislative framework (for education and immigration) should be screened for possible inconsistencies with the respective educational internationalisation policy, and that support should be provided to higher education institutions.

- ♦ From the institutional perspective, this means that foreign admissions should be accorded a place in the institutional strategy and budget, and

169 The present study could explore these issues only to a marginal extent. For further information on immigration policies and related problems, see for example the publication The time and the trouble, op. cit.

that adequate admissions and selection structures should be developed on this basis.

- From the applicant's perspective, higher education institutions should be responsible for the success of "their" students, and only admit them if there are adequate support structures and if the students are at least likely to succeed.

National or state legislation should not be a straightjacket nor infringe on institutional autonomy in foreign admissions

In the countries covered in the study, institutions have a high degree of autonomy in deciding on the admission of foreign students. Where this is not the case, and national regulations determine minimum requirements or procedures, this is frequently perceived as a problem.

- National or state legislation on admissions requirements into the undergraduate or postgraduate level are often based on the national educational system, and do not take into account the specific characteristics and diversity of foreign educational systems and qualifications. This can complicate foreign student admissions in an inappropriate way.
- Although it is possible and even advisable to fix clear criteria for foreign student admissions according to the origin of their qualification, this is better decided at the micro-level, according to the specific profile of an institution, the programmes it offers, and the national skills profile of its main applicant cohorts.

Institutions should be autonomous in their decisions on the admission of international students, and this autonomy should not be unnecessarily limited by national or state legislation. National and state authorities should revise legislation that constrains international admissions.

National or state-based quality control of foreign admissions is advisable where institutions compete over fee-paying students. Here there is a greater risk that some institutions may simply take "anyone who pays" and close both eyes when assessing an application. This violates the principle of "duty of care" towards international students and can have negative repercussions on how foreign students perceive, and pass on through word of mouth judgements on, education provided by an institution or in a given country.

National bodies should provide comprehensive guidelines with information on foreign qualifications

National bodies should provide higher education institutions with assistance and tools for the evaluation of foreign credentials. Where this is not already the case, national bodies should provide guidelines for the evaluation of foreign qualifications.

- Credential evaluation and gathering information on foreign qualifications is frequently done in parallel by higher education institutions. This includes costly and time-consuming operations like site visits to foreign higher education institutions and secondary schools, requests of syllabuses, and contacts with Ministries of Education. These procedures will always be necessary but can be substantially reduced or facilitated through national guidelines.
- Guidelines and recommendations should not be binding, but supply higher education institutions with a basic and comprehensive source of information for the evaluation of foreign credentials.
- Guidelines should be as complete as possible, and provide information on foreign education systems, institutions (higher education institutions and, wherever possible, secondary schools), degrees and grading systems, rankings and models of diplomas.
- Guidelines should be regularly updated.

Finally, a further development of international information sources, like for example the World Higher Education Database of the UNESCO, would be desirable.

In a competitive environment, there are limits to national-level or discipline-specific cooperation in foreign admissions

National clearing systems and discipline-specific networks can be tools to streamline the administrative part of the admissions procedures and avoid double-handling of applications by the different institutions. Information, for example on the equivalence of foreign credentials, could be shared. A clearing system facilitates planning and helps to monitor parallel applications to several institutions by the same candidate. The final admissions decision should always remain with the higher education institutions. Several aspects need to be taken into account:

- If a clearing system is not specifically designed for foreign admissions, application forms and procedures may be difficult to match with foreign higher education systems and certificates. In such cases, special measures for foreign applicants should be developed.
- If a clearing system exists for non-academic reasons, e.g. if it is linked to immigration policy, it can easily burden higher education institutions. This necessitates competent and motivated staff to handle applications at the clearing units. Requirements such as language level should not be too rigid and leave a margin for a different approach (see below.)
- Clearing systems can only be regarded as a true success if the freed capacities at higher education institutions are used for the development of appropriate assessment procedures and for better student services and information.

- Discipline-specific networks for foreign student recruitment seem to be more successful, especially as far as efficient pre-assessment and even common selection procedures are concerned: they offer specific “products” and target a common and clearly defined student profile.

A crucial finding is also that clearing systems and networks for joint foreign student recruitment only work if higher education institutions do not compete among themselves. Networks and clearing systems should be established on a non-competitive basis, but structures that work “too well” may become obsolete, as the sharing of information for one pool of applicants is regarded as a competitive disadvantage. Informal cooperation and clearing systems that are “invisible” to the applicants and facilitate, for example, the management of enquiries, may be the only form of cooperation accepted by higher education institutions.

Institutions need a strategic approach to the admission of international degree students

Higher education institutions should think through their internationalisation policy and clarify their rationale for foreign student admissions. Admissions strategies and instruments should be developed on this basis.

- The focus of a number of higher education institutions’ internationalisation policy still lies on the enhancement of mobility and student exchange. Their institutional budgets do not foresee extra funds for the admission and support of international degree students, whose growing importance is simply ignored.
- Institutions should clarify if, how, and for what reasons they want to internationalise. Frequently, ad-hoc structures are established driven by student demand or institutions imitate “good practice” without sufficient investigation of policies suitable for their situation and purposes.
- The rationale of foreign admissions should take into account the situation, size, type, and profile of the institution, as well as the traditions and structures in place. Geographic scope also matters: i.e. does an institution want to operate predominantly in a local, national, regional, or global context? On this basis, institutions should decide on the type, number, and level of students they want to admit, and / or actively recruit.

Once a rational and strategic approach is established, it may be helpful to investigate good practice models. This publication offers a first orientation, but further consideration will be necessary to adapt practices to the specific situation and requirements of a particular institution.

Institutions should take responsibility for their foreign degree students

The decision on the admission of foreign students should be accompanied by the commitment to ensure they have the potential to succeed in their studies. Higher education institutions and staff should feel responsible for the success of the students admitted.

- ♦ Marketing the higher education of a given institution or country needs to go hand-in-hand with the principle of "duty of care". The different rationales of foreign student recruitment, whether linked to foreign policy, skilled migration or attracting international excellence, can all only be maintained if the students have a real chance to succeed. This applies regardless of whether international students pay for their education or are subsidised by the host country.
- ♦ The families of foreign students, especially if they are from developing countries, have often made a major financial investment to pay for a degree programme abroad, and hence the students are under high pressure to succeed.
- ♦ Although foreign degree students apply for the same "product" as national applicants, they have different needs and backgrounds. International degree students often do not benefit from the same student support structures as exchange students, and there is less awareness of their problems and constraints (for example in terms of student visas, timing, etc.).

There are various means to help create a feeling of responsibility:

- ♦ Teaching and research staff should be involved in foreign student admissions at some stage. This helps create a consensus on admissions procedures and responsibility for the admitted students within the department, and helps ensure admissions decisions are based on academic criteria.
- ♦ The performance of admitted student cohorts should be tracked, and where necessary, admissions criteria and student support revised or adapted.
- ♦ Sufficient and competent staffing in the units in charge of admissions and a clear definition of job roles promotes responsibility towards foreign students.
- ♦ Foreign students should have access to both academic and international office support structures.

Institutions should employ a sufficient number of competent staff and establish clear communication structures

Foreign admissions can only be handled properly by adequately staffed units. As long as clear communication structures, adequate staffing, and an institutional approach towards the outside are ensured, any model may bring good results. Bureaucratic decision structures, which for example set hurdles to the employment of additional staff, should be revised.

- To put in place satisfactory structures for foreign student admissions costs money and should be taken into account in the institutional budget and strategy. Application fees can contribute to this cost (and work as a filter), but this contribution can only remain marginal.
- Processing applications, evaluating credentials from all over the world and (pre-) assessing the potential of international students to succeed in a given programme is by no means a side task and should be carried out by well-prepared and motivated staff.
- Clear communication structures within an institution, and especially between central, faculty and departmental levels are essential for a successful and smooth running of foreign admissions, and to ensure an institutional approach. Good communication structures mean clearly defined contact persons at central and faculty level and clearly defined responsibilities and decision structures. This improves informal communication, as do regular meetings. Clear communication structures are all the more important if both a central unit and faculty-based units are involved in the admission of foreign students. Administrative double-handling should be avoided, and consensus reached over procedures and deadlines, competences and criteria.
- Purely administrative units, which simply check applications for completeness and forward them to other entities, are frustrating for the staff and should be avoided. A minimum task of administrative admissions staff should be to check the eligibility of a foreign applicant and elaborate a corresponding recommendation. If this is done at faculty-level, applications should be directed there.

To some extent, lower staffing levels can be compensated by electronic means, standardised replies, etc. However, as in any context, artificial intelligence can only partly replace people. As with external clearing systems, electronic means should be used to free capacity for personal follow-up and to research foreign qualifications.

Several organisational models may work, as long as potential problems of each structure are anticipated

The organisation of admissions largely depends on institutional traditions, size, and the rationale for foreign admissions. Several models may yield good results. In most cases, it is simply important to bear in mind the risks of each system, and foresee and compensate for potential problems. As a general rule, the admissions and selection procedure for international applicants should be as close and comparable to the procedures for domestic applicants as possible, but, at the same time, foreign student admissions should be embedded in an institution's general policy and activities directed to all foreign students.

- The higher the degree of centralisation, the more important are clearly set and communicated criteria, protocols and working communication channels between admissions and academic staff. They should track students performance and feed back into the criteria. A centralised system seems to be more appropriate and less controversial for small institutions.
- The higher the degree of decentralisation, the more important are good communication structures between central and faculty-based administrative units, clearly defined roles and an institutional approach. For bigger institutions, both models are common, though faculties may traditionally have a strong role and often request some level of decentralisation.
- If a separate international office deals with foreign applicants, good communication structures and common criteria have to be ensured to avoid quality gaps between the national and the international student cohort. If a company is dealing with foreign applicants, it is essential to ensure a close link between the company and the academic entities.
- If foreign students are handled at a general admissions office and hence at the same place as national applicants, the specific requirements of foreign admissions need to be taken into account. First, it is essential that there are enough capacities to generate the necessary country expertise for credential evaluation. Second, it is indispensable to ensure that the process is linked to the other activities directed towards foreign students, e.g. that foreign degree students are able to benefit from the information and support services provided for exchange students.

The admissions decision should be based on academic criteria, and these should be transparent and clearly communicated

Even if financial or other considerations play a role, the final decision on admissions should be based on academic criteria. Other requirements, for example language, are important but should not play a predominant role. Ideally, indicative academic admissions criteria should be specified for each country of origin, to ensure objectivity and allow the students to assess their chances of being admitted. Criteria can be set for each country by academic committees with international expertise, or be based on the committees' general requirements and on the advice of the international or admissions' office. In general, criteria should be defined through dialogue between the different levels and staff, to take maximum advantage of both academic and international expertise, and to ensure objectivity and consensus.

Furthermore, academic staff should be involved in foreign student admissions at some stage to ensure admissions decisions are based on academic criteria.

For undergraduate admissions, this involvement can be outside the actual admissions process, and the role of academics can be to:

- define requirements and criteria as clearly as possible;
- keep track of the students' performance and feed the results back into the criteria;
- give advice in unclear cases and assess requests for the recognition of prior learning.

For postgraduate admissions, good models seem to be:

- assessment by at least two specialised academic delegates, who can exchange views, and over time build up specific experience in foreign admissions;
- discussion of unclear cases in a departmental or faculty-based committee after an initial assessment by programme directors or specialised and competent admissions staff.[170]

Academic staff should monitor foreign student admissions if new programmes or procedures are introduced, develop criteria based on similar experiences and revise them according to the first student cohorts' performance.

As applications increase, further delegation (similar to the model described for undergraduate admissions) to admissions staff can be essential. The more competent and prepared the admissions staff, the more a delegation of authority is possible. But these structures can only be effective if a real assessment and dialogue takes place, instead of simply adding a signature to already approved cases.

Selection and assessment should take into account the variety of foreign educational systems, grading scales, and qualifications

Selection procedures should take into account the specific characteristics of foreign qualifications, no matter if international applicants are admitted in "rolling admissions", on the basis of preset standards or selected from a pool after one or several deadlines.

- If admissions procedures for domestic students are heavily focused on the national educational system, national or institutional qualifications should not be taken too strictly as a reference for the equivalence of foreign qualifications. Due to the diversity of the latter, as well as to the different pedagogical traditions, this may result in rigid, unfair, and often unreasonable requirements for foreign students. The national qualification should be taken as a reference in a wider sense: how does it ensure a student's capacity to succeed in the programme he or she wants to study? Does the foreign qualification also fulfil these specific requirements, and does it indicate that a student would have comparable

170 Depending on an institution's policy focus, these models may of course also work for the undergraduate level.

chances to succeed in the programme? Separate admissions procedures for foreign applicants can be one solution, but need to ensure that comparable standards are applied to the two student cohorts.

- If general admissions procedures for national applicants allow for a wider interpretation, joint assessment of national and international candidates is preferable. Still, criteria may need to be adapted, and an awareness of what is common or possible in different national contexts needs to be developed.
- Especially at the postgraduate level, foreign applications should preferably be assessed case by case, and not simply selected on the basis of a numerical ranking. Due to the diversity of educational systems and qualifications, grades may not be the most appropriate tool for selection. Wherever possible, grades should at least be complemented by other types of information, e.g. CVs, essays, work experience, recommendation or motivation letters, depending on the required student profile.
- Standardised tests can be an adequate tool to measure the skills of all applicants against the same standards, but should only be used as one of several sources of information on the applicants' academic potential.

Networks of foreign contact persons can help with credential evaluation, supervise tests or run interviews. These can be alumni or cultural attachés of national representations. Higher education institutions could also take further advantage of existing cooperation agreements with foreign institutions.

In general, targeted recruitment at foreign higher education institutions can open further possibilities for the selection of foreign applicants – for example, through tests and interviews – and increase the reliability of selection tools such as recommendation letters and grades.

Language is important but should not prevail over academic criteria

Some higher education institutions use language knowledge as a filter to reduce the mass of international applications. Surely, an adequate command of the teaching language is essential for a student to succeed in his or her studies. However, as an initial requirement it should not prevail over academic criteria.

- Especially in technical disciplines and the natural sciences, an initial proficiency of the language is not indispensable.
- There are different means to ensure a sufficient level, for example transition semesters, summer courses, additional tutoring or early targeted recruitment which gives the students time to prepare.

But students should not be directly admitted into a programme if they are clearly unable to follow the course. Unless an applicant proves that his or her capacities are close to those of native speakers, all students should be assessed on arrival and offered additional courses or tutoring if necessary. This is particularly important for two reasons:

- ♦ First, many institutions find that results of standardised language tests do not always reflect a students real language proficiency, be it because they have trained for the test or because of fraud.
- ♦ Second, spoken language skills may not be sufficiently reflected in language test results, but are highly important for class participation. This may be due to cultural differences as well as linguistic problems; but additional skills can be learned through supplementary courses and tutoring.

Timing should take into account specific needs and constraints of foreign applicants

- ♦ A frequent problem in foreign admissions is that decisions are taken too late and not enough time is left for visa procedures and preparations for the stay abroad (from the student's perspective). As time goes on, programme coordinators struggle to plan their courses, and enquiries multiply. These problems should be addressed through the timing of the admissions process and the definition of deadlines for applicants.
- ♦ However, deadlines should not be too rigid: academic calendars differ widely at the international level, and more flexibility may be needed for foreign student admissions. Rolling admissions until an indicative deadline, or several deadlines to allow for a selection, can be good solutions.
- ♦ Even more importantly, academic assessors and administrative staff need to be aware of the urgency of decisions on foreign admissions and of the time students need to prepare a stay. Deficient communication channels and over-regulated bureaucratic structures are often a problem and should be revised to speed up foreign student admissions.

Annex 1

Higher education institutions visited

Australia (State of Victoria)

Deakin University
La Trobe University
Monash University
Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology RMIT
University of Ballarat
University of Melbourne

France

Université Val de Marne Paris 12
Université Jean Moulin Lyon 3
Institut National des Sciences Appliquées INSA Lyon
Ecole Nationale des Arts et des Métiers ENSAM Paris
Ecole de Management EM Lyon

Sweden

Kungliga Tekniska Högskolan (Royal Institute of Technology) KTH, Stockholm
Högskolan (University College) Dalarna
Uppsala Universitet

Switzerland

Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule (Federal Institute of Technology) ETH Zürich
Université de Lausanne
Universität Basel

The Netherlands

Wageningen Universiteit
Universiteit Leiden
Rijksuniversiteit Groningen
Hanzehogeschool Groningen

United States

State of New York

Union College
New York University

State of Indiana

Purdue University, West Lafayette
Indiana University Bloomington
Indiana University Purdue University at Indianapolis (IUPUI)

Annex 2

Higher education authorities, internationalisation agencies and associations visited and / or interviewed by phone

Australia

Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AVCC)
IDP Education Australia (IDP)
Department of Education, Science and Training: Australian Education International / National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition (AEI-NOOSR)

France

Agence EduFrance (also host of the network n+i)
Ministère de la Jeunesse, de l'Éducation et de la Recherche (Chargé de la Mission aux Relations Internationales)

Switzerland

Conférence des Recteurs des Universités Suisses (CRUS, Rectors' Conference of the Swiss Universities)

Sweden

Högskoleverket (HSV, National Agency for Higher Education)
Verket för högskoleservice (VHS, National Admissions Office for Higher Education)
Svenska Institutet (SI, Swedish Institute)

The Netherlands

The Netherlands Organization for International Cooperation in Higher Education (Nuffic)

United Kingdom

British Council

United States

Department of Education: United State Network for Education and Information (USNEI)
American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO)
College Board
American Council on Education (ACE)

What is ACA?

Founded in 1993, the Academic Cooperation Association (ACA) is a not-for-profit pan-European network of major organisations responsible in their countries for the promotion of internationalisation in education and training. Current membership is comprised of 20 such organisations in 15 European countries, as well as associate members from North America and Australia. ACA's secretariat is located in Brussels, Belgium, in easy reach of the European institutions.

ACA is active in the following fields

- ♦ The promotion of innovation and internationalisation in (higher) education and training;
- ♦ The enhancement of contacts and cooperation between its members, and the provision, to its members, of fast and up-to-date information on important developments in the European institutions and international organisations;
- ♦ Research into and publications on internationalisation in education and training;
- ♦ The provision, to third parties, of know-how and expertise in the management of international cooperation projects and programmes;
- ♦ Contract work for third parties.

ACA projects cover a wide spectrum and are too numerous to be listed here. However, the recent policy focus of ACA's activities has been on themes related to the relative position of European higher education on a global scale. This orientation has also found expression in the latest publications in the present monograph series, the *ACA Papers on International Cooperation in Education*, as well as in ACA's many international seminars and conferences.

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ACA Papers on International Cooperation in Education

Programme

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Universities and other higher education institutions operate in an increasingly international environment. Many of them run international marketing campaigns and recruit students on a global scale. Even those which do not engage in such activities are sometimes flooded with student applications from all over the world. Therefore, policies and instruments for the admission of international students are rapidly gaining in importance. In this situation, institutions are looking for admission models which will both help them get the "right" students and rationalise their administrative procedures. But there is hardly any literature to guide them in this endeavour. The present study tries to change this. It examines admissions policies and tools in different countries, in order to identify a range of models and procedures for the effective and efficient handling of international student admissions and selection.

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