

2005

Book Review of Higher Education Management and Policy, Paris, OECD.

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Recommended Citation

Cohen, Philip (2005) "Book Review of Higher Education Management and Policy, Paris, OECD.," *Level 3*: Vol. 3: Iss. 1, Article 5.

doi:10.21427/D7QB1J

Available at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/level3/vol3/iss1/5>

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Book Review

Higher Education Management Policy

Paris, OECD, ISSN 1682-3451

The journal is sub-titled 'Journal of the Programme on Institutional Management in Higher Education' (IMHE). This Programme co-ordinates the work of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in the area of Third Level education.

The Programme itself has two main objectives:

- To promote - through research, training and information exchange – greater professionalism in the management of institutions of higher education.
- To facilitate a wider dissemination of practical management methods and approaches.

This review will consider how well the journal supports such objectives and, more generally, how accessible it is to those interested in the field of higher education and its management.

Now in its seventeenth volume, this well-established journal publishes three issues per year. Volume 16, published in 2004, comprised 23 papers in all. They ranged from 8 to 30 pages, with most of them having between 10 and 20 pages.

The institutional affiliations of authors included UNESCO, European Investment Bank, universities, university umbrella groups, international research institutes, a university hospital and a students' union. They were located in Australia, Austria, Canada (2), France (4), Great Britain (7), Ireland (2), Japan, Luxembourg, Nigeria, Turkey, USA (2).

Where it could be determined, the authors seemed to be fairly evenly divided between practising academics, researchers and managers. Both snail mail and email addresses were included in order to assist readers to contact authors and to follow up any issues if they wished to do so.

The papers covered an eclectic mix of topical higher education issues: incentives and accountability, student satisfaction, performance indicators, institutional autonomy versus government control, international co-operation, economic impacts of higher education, widening access, computer-based learning, research versus teaching, generalist versus specialist institutions, management of change.

Most papers were traditional reports of the authors' own research, either scholarly papers in their own right or conference papers rewritten to varying degrees. But some were review papers, some papers from conference keynote speakers, some rapporteurs' accounts of discussions at workshops. They all shared a practical real-life perspective.

Differences in referencing patterns reflect the different origins of the papers. References typically numbered between 15 and 25, citing other research papers published in reputable journals, many with an international coverage. One review paper included more than 70 references; keynote speeches had none at all.

Only four of the papers had illustrations but these were always appropriate and added significantly to the content.

All the papers included abstracts. Most are substantial, straightforward and add much of value to the paper. Others, however, are too brief or too dense and full of jargon to help an initial understanding by the reader.

The OECD is a reputable publisher with a global reach. The editor is an acknowledged expert with extensive experience in the field. There is an Editorial Advisory Group of 18 similarly distinguished individuals drawn from North America, Europe (east and west), Australia and Japan. All papers are submitted to independent referees for review before publication.

The print version of the journal is slightly larger than A5 format with each issue between 120 and 150 pages, making it easily portable and just as easy to handle. All the papers are well laid out. Many of them use bullet points or in-text boxes to good advantage in order to summarize and highlight significant facts or arguments.

The header to each page gives an abbreviated title of the paper and the footer gives the journal title, ISSN, publisher and year of publication. The first page of every paper is solely a title page with title of the paper, author's name and institutional affiliation, abstract and publication details (the same information as the footer plus the volume and issue numbers).

The paper is crisp white. Headings and sub-headings are bold and clearly legible. But the main font in all papers - especially the abstracts and the references - is slightly smaller and fainter than this reviewer would have liked.

And two small irritations concerning photocopying: the height of the paper means that the copies have to be slightly reduced to incorporate all the text and it is necessary to include the title page in any photocopies in order to have a full reference.

DIT has two current subscriptions to this journal, held in the libraries at Bolton Street and Mount Street. Holdings for both go back to Volume 14, 2002.

A major benefit to most readers is the fact that an electronic version of the journal is included in all subscriptions to the print journal. This means that it is freely available to users on their own desktops at all times [***see below**].

The electronic version is easy to access via the Library Catalogue. It presents the full text print version in PDF format – like a photocopy online. Furthermore, pages can be viewed and printed in A4 size (depending on the capabilities of individual PCs and printers).

Some electronic journals have the option of viewing papers in either PDF or HTML format. In HTML, live web links can be inserted in the main body of the text, thereby enabling readers to connect directly to referenced sources and other related web pages. This journal does not have that facility at present. It would greatly enhance its utility if it did, and it can only be a matter of time before such functionality is added.

I queried at the outset whether or not the journal satisfies the objectives of the IMHE Programme. Undoubtedly it does, through its contribution to the exchange of information and dissemination of practical management methods applied specifically to higher education. All done in such a way that it is easily accessible and highly readable. I recommend this journal unreservedly.

***DIT Library subscribes to a huge number of electronic journals (16,000 at the time of writing but constantly increasing). Most can be accessed directly via the Library Catalogue at <http://library.dit.ie/search/s> without the need for IDs and passwords from any networked PC on campus.**

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