

Chapter 11

Improving the evaluation of the education–employment relationship in France

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Introduction

In 2005–2006, all universities were entered in the Reform Act of April 2002 (reform of higher education degrees) and the first balance sheets became possible. In March 2006, a new Evaluation Agency for Research and Higher Education (AERES) was set up by the law entitled ‘Programme Planning Law of Research’. AERES is an independent administrative authority in charge of evaluating higher education and research institutions with regard to their missions and activities, research activities of research centres and higher education degrees.

Those events questioned the evaluation processes in France: which are the most important evaluations with regard to the higher education system? Usually, the evaluation of activities, the evaluation of resources and the evaluation of results, or, in other words, the evaluation of the efficiency and the effectiveness of the system, are distinguished. It is uncertain whether the new national agency will be able to evaluate the results of higher education degrees (see below). The access to the labour market becomes a field of evaluation. I will also look at national and local survey results, showing the increasing difficulties for new higher education graduates seeking a job, and at explanations of that (changes in the labour market and in the number of graduates and postgraduates).

In that context, how do we develop not only the evaluation of higher education activities and resources, but also, above all, the evaluation of higher education results? How can we be sure of the quality of higher education degrees, especially of Higher

Vocational Education (HVE) degrees? Particularly, how do we develop and improve the education–employment relationship? Are employers satisfied with higher education graduates’ skills? Are the new graduates satisfied with their first jobs? Do they find a job related to their skills? Our analyses show that external evaluations are not enough; they fail to measure and to prove the actual quality of HVE degrees (see below). Self-evaluations are needed and they can be used to build precise quality charts; when the majority of quality indicators are good, it becomes possible to look for an external accreditation by independent evaluation bodies, if possible at the European level (see below). However, external accreditations are not enough. The conclusion examines the problem of governance at the university level: why governing bodies are not able to abolish degrees that are not relevant for the labour market, i.e. those which give poor job opportunities to their graduates? The conclusion deals with that question.

New educational and economic contexts

Educational context — The Reform Act of April 2002: licence, master, doctorate (LMD)

In 2005–2006, all French universities were entered in the reform Act of April 2002, called 3, 5, 8, then LMD. The reform Act sets up a first cycle of 3 years (called ‘*licence*’), a second cycle of 2 years (called ‘*master*’) and a third cycle (‘*doctorate*’). However, all previous vocational degrees have not been suppressed. At the first level of higher education, the DUT (*Diplôme Universitaire de Technologie*, University Technological Degree), the BTS (*Brevet*

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de *Technicien Supérieur*, Upper Technician Degree) and the professional licence (*Licence Professionnelle*) are maintained as such. At the second level, the IUP (*Instituts Universitaires Professionnalisés*) have been integrated into masters degrees, but the engineering degrees (*Titre d'Ingénieur*), the titles delivered by the Commercial schools (*Écoles de commerce*) and the MSG (*Maîtrise de Sciences de Gestion*, Masters in Management Sciences) still exist. The panorama of HVE degrees has been made more complex by the 2002 reform. The complexity has been criticized severely by employers and managers, interviewed in previous research [1]. It is uncertain whether the National Repertory of Certifications set up by a law (law of 'Modernisation Sociale', January 2002) will make the panorama clearer: it has to include the list of all the vocational degrees (more than 15 000), but it is still in progress at the time of writing (June 2007).

First-level professional degrees

The BTS, set up in 1959, is a professional two-year HVE degree (about 230 000 students and 110 000 graduates a year) [2]. The DUT, set up in 1966, is a professional two-year HVE degree (about 100 000 students and 50 000 graduates a year). The *Licence Professionnelle* is a new degree (1999) and corresponds to a third year of HVE (about 25 000 students in 2005–2006 and 17 000 graduates in 2005); year after year, new *Licences Professionnelles* welcome a greater number of students (about 5000 a year). The three degrees have the same features (see Table 1), apart from one. The 23 industrial or service specialities of the DUT are regulated by law (July 1998): the law prescribes the teaching and learning subjects, the number of teaching hours and the modalities of the exams; and it is the same for the BTS. On the other hand, the subjects of the *Licence Professionnelle* are decided at the local level in the context of the university autonomy; however, the yearly number of hours and the length of stages are prescribed; moreover, every *Licence Professionnelle* has to be ranked in a list of 46 national denominations, broken down into nine professional sectors.

Second-level professional degrees

The Reform Act of 2002 has set up two possible orientations in the masters degree: professional and

research; the law says that selection is carried out at the beginning of the second year of the masters. Which are the changes? The curricula of the masters are proposed by the universities: there are no more national curricula (*maquettes nationales*). It is a big change and the result is that courses sharing the same name have developed with considerably different curricula, teaching and assessment methods and aims; so it is not easy for students to choose a masters and to compare the quality of the contents and of the degrees. If, for the second year of the masters, nothing has changed (the professional masters replaces the DESS, *Diplôme d'Études Supérieures Spécialisées*, and the research masters replaces the DEA, *Diplôme d'Études Approfondies*), an important change is located in the first year of the masters. Several solutions are possible with regard to the proposals of universities: common or separated curricula for the two orientations (professional and/or research); within each of the orientations, specialities are introduced from the first year or only in the second year; some universities have introduced the selection at the entrance of the first year of the master. Simultaneously, we have to remember that degrees in engineering, commerce and management are maintained. Universities have used the reform to create new professional degrees: an explosion in the number of curricula has been seen, as observed in Italy [3].

From the mid-1990s to the 2002 reform, the number of students in higher education was globally stable and the length of higher education studies was also stable. Nevertheless, among all higher education students, the number of HVE students and of HVE graduates or postgraduates was increasing every year (Table 1). And the full impact of the reform is not yet known: statistical data are only available for 2003 and before [2]. With the explosion in the number of curricula, the number of students and of graduates (particularly at the five-year level) will probably be increasing.

So, more and more young people will have a degree in higher education. In 2004 (before the full impact of the reform), the proportion of young people with such a degree was more than 43%: 16% of the pupils who entered secondary education in 1989 have got a first-cycle higher education degree, and 27% have a second-cycle higher education degree

Table 1. Evolution of the number of graduates and postgraduates

	Year...	1990	1995	2000	2001	2002	2003
<i>Baccalauréat+2</i>							
DUT		29 000	37 400	47 500	48 000	48 900	48 100
BTS		53 100	78 200	95 500	99 300	103 500	103 500
<i>Diplôme Universitaire d'Études Générales</i>							
Total <i>baccalauréat+2</i>		170 500	248 000	267 800	269 100	273 300	270 600
Compared with 1990 (%)		100	145	157	158	160	159
Compared with 1995 (%)		–	100	108	109	110	109
<i>Baccalauréat+3 Licence</i>							
Compared with 1990 (%)		71 300	127 200	135 400	132 800	138 200	146 400
Compared with 1995 (%)		100	178	189	186	194	205
Compared with 1995 (%)		100	106	104	108	115	115
<i>Baccalauréat+4 Maîtrise</i>							
Compared with 1990 (%)		51 200	80 400	93 300	95 800	96 000	97 200
Compared with 1995 (%)		100	157	182	187	188	190
Compared with 1995 (%)		–	100	116	119	119	121
<i>Baccalauréat+5</i>							
DEA		20 000	25 400	23 400	24 500	26 500	26 800
DESS		12 600	21 100	32 600	38 100	44 000	48 000
<i>Ingénieurs</i>							
Écoles de commerce		16 100	20 300	24 600	26 000	26 200	26 400
Total <i>baccalauréat+5</i>		12 200	15 300	18 300	20 700	21 400	24 400
Compared with 1990 (%)		60 900	82 100	98 900	109 300	118 100	125 600
Compared with 1990 (%)		100	135	162	179	194	206
Compared with 1995 (%)		–	100	120	133	143	152
<i>Doctorate</i>							
Compared with 1990 (%)		7 200	9 200	10 000	9 000	8 600	8 500
Compared with 1990 (%)		100	128	139	125	119	118
Compared with 1995 (%)		–	100	109	98	94	92

Data taken from *DEP, Repères et Références Statistiques sur l'Éducation et la Formation*, <http://www.education.gouv.fr/stateval>

[4]; evidently, the proportion is very different with regard to the social origin. Probably, as an impact of the 2002 reform, the rate of 25% of young people getting a five-year degree will be reached quickly. The problem is that the labour market does not need such a number of postgraduates!

Economic context: the degradation of conditions of access to the labour market

The second context is the economic one. From 2001, the economic situation in France has been rather bad: economic growth is weak, and the rate of unemployment is at a high level (about 10%). All national and local surveys about students' placements reveal a constant degradation from 2001 [5–24]. For instance, APEC (*Association Pour l'Emploi des Cadres*) surveys [5,6] reveal that, 6–9 months after graduation from a four- or five-year course of higher education, 49% of the graduates of 2003 and 2004 are unemployed and are looking for a job. From 2004 to 2005, the situation has deteriorated: only 49% of graduates have a stable job (60% of the 2003 graduates in 2004); 49% are managers (56% of the 2003 graduates); the average wages are about €1500 gross per month. In 2005, 18 months after graduation, 11% of 2003 graduates are still looking for a first job and the global level of unemployment for the cohort is 20%.

In the 1960s, in the context of economic planning, a link was made between education levels and levels of job position, setting up an objective and subjective link between the degree and the job position; that link is a specific French feature: a clear education–employment relationship. So, a postgraduate student waits for a stable job contract, a management position and high wages. That favourable situation is still known by the majority of postgraduates. However, if the deterioration observed in the last years goes on in the coming years, more than 50% of postgraduates would not have the awaited situation. Why the degradation?

Evolution of the labour market is structurally favourable to graduates and postgraduates. The number of upper job positions (*cadres* and *professions intellectuelles supérieures*) has increased more than 60% during the last 20 years; today it is more than 4.5 million [8]. The proportion of graduates and

postgraduates in upper job positions grows regularly: in 2002, 55% of *cadres* had a graduate or a postgraduate degree against 44% in 1990 (non-graduated managers have retired and have been replaced by young graduates or postgraduates). About 70% of managers less than 30 years old have a graduate or postgraduate degree (45% in 1990). Between 1982 and 2002, the growth in the number of *cadres* has been the highest for some jobs: teachers and recruiters (+341%), researchers and developers (+153%), data-processing experts (+147%), administrative, financial and accounting managers (+109%), communication and documentation professionals (+108%) and lawyers (+96%). The growth will go on between 2000 and 2010 [25,26]: it will be the highest for the same management positions; it will be relatively weak for teachers and civil servant managers.

How many graduates and postgraduates, with a higher education degree of three years or more, are recruited every year in France? On average, between 1998 and 2002, 112 500 beginners (i.e. young people present on the labour market for 5 years or less; most of them are less than 30 years old) have been hired in a managerial position (1 125 000=19% of managers' recruitments during a year) [8]. With regard to the proportion of graduates and postgraduates among the less than 30-year-old managers, the number of new higher education graduates or postgraduates who are recruited into a managerial job position can be estimated at about 80 000 per year. Is that number enough to face the number of graduates and postgraduates who yearly look for a job after their graduation? The answer is no.

As we see in Table 1, the number of graduates and postgraduates produced each year has increased since 1990. The most important increase of the period concerns the number of degrees awarded at a five-year level: +35% from 1990 to 1995, +20% from 1995 to 2000, +27% from 2000 to 2003; 125 600 five-year higher education degrees were awarded in 2003. Among the five-year degrees, the DESS (called professional masters since the Reform) attracts more and more students: 12 600 degrees awarded in 1990, 48 000 in 2003 (+380%).

The growth in the number of higher education degrees which are awarded yearly is not linked to a demographical effect. Since 1995, it has not been

linked to growth in the access rate to higher education. It is produced by the lengthening of higher education studies [27]. That lengthening is not only produced by the difficult situation of the labour market, but also by the higher education reform: the students with a two-year higher education degree go on to get a three-year degree (a *Licence Professionnelle* for instance); the students with a four-year degree (the old *maîtrise*) go on to get a five-year degree. With the implementation of the reform in all the universities in 2005–2006, it is clear that more and more students will get a licence or a masters [1].

Before the Reform Act of 2002 and especially with the implementation of the reform in all the universities, what happened and what will happen for the students with a graduate or a postgraduate degree? We have to remember the data: about 80 000 yearly recruitments of young *cadres* and, in 2003, more than 125 000 students with a five-year degree who were looking for a job. The imbalance between the demand for managerial jobs and the number of managerial jobs offered to beginners is clear and will increase in the coming years.

A bad education–employment relationship certainly explains the relative degradation observed on the labour market. The deterioration makes a vicious circle: deterioration of the labour market, downgrading at the entrance to the labour market for a significant proportion of graduates, lengthening of studies, increase in the number of students who get a degree at the highest level, reinforcing the degradation, and increasing the waiting list to have a job or a better job.

The imbalance between offers and job demands, the source of unemployment, is particularly high in some professions, even in professions which know an increasing number of managerial positions, in professions which recruit young beginners with a higher education degree. Labour markets are segmented: they are differentiated in terms of rates of higher education graduates' recruitments. Professional markets with regulated access and with student selection (*numerus clausus*) at the start of degrees (teachers and doctors, for instance) are open to beginners. Internal markets (internal promotions and beginners' selective exclusion) make compulsory a first entrance in non-managerial jobs. External

markets put young beginners in general competition against experienced employees. French markets are more and more dominated by internal markets, and so beginners with a higher education degree have difficulties in making a good entry into the labour market [28].

So, in spite of a high increase in the number of management jobs and a high rate of recruitment of young people, the unemployment rate is high for computer-science experts. Another profession (professionals in communication and documentation) which employs more and more young managers with a higher education degree, recruits about 5000 beginners a year, but about 25 000 young graduates and postgraduates were looking for a job in 2002. The explosion in the number of courses in computer sciences and in communication, and in the number of new graduates has caused a lot of damage. Moreover, there is a risk of a stronger deterioration if the economic situation does not improve and if the governmental policies to reduce the public deficits lead to a significant decrease in the number of civil servants, by not replacing departures caused by retirement.

Improving the evaluation processes: quality of the education–employment relationship

The conditions of access in the labour market are more and more difficult for the young higher education graduates and postgraduates. One of the main reasons is too many young people arriving yearly on the labour market with a higher education degree. It is partly because more and more vocational courses are available in universities. Why are there more and more degrees? It is linked to the 2002 reform and to the insufficiencies of the national evaluation system (see the next section). So, because it is difficult (or impossible) to change the national evaluation system, some universities and some courses develop self-evaluations and set up quality charts to prove the quality of their degrees, particularly the quality of job placements (see below).

Insufficiencies of the national evaluation system

The national evaluation system was set up in the mid-1980s. In the context of mass expansion of

higher education and the increased expenditure, HEIs (higher education institutions) needed to be held accountable for the quality of their provision. Reinforcing the evaluation is prescribed by the 2002 reform and is pushed by the building of the European Space of Higher Education (development of quality assurance). The new law reminds us that evaluation of the degrees by students has been compulsory since the 1997 regulation; it also reminds us that the results of the quadrennial contracts (launched at the end of the 1980s) between the State and each university have to be evaluated more seriously. Nevertheless, the evaluation system has several shortcomings. The defaults are due to the absence of an actual lead by the Ministry of Higher Education. We observe a loss of control by public powers, showed by the fragmentation, the heterogeneity and the absence of co-ordination of the *habilitation* (authorization) processes. In that context, of a relative *laxisme* (laxity) from the State, universities do not have a direct interest in regulating or limiting the number of their courses. The logic of corporate professions (academic staff) is to increase the number of degrees in order to increase the number of students; more students mean a chance to get more academic staff.

Which bodies regulate the number of degrees (*offre de formation*)? National commissions of experts give advice for the degrees proposed by universities. If the Ministry agrees the experts' positive advice, the degree is accredited (*habilité*) as a national degree and, because of that, it is financed by the State budget essentially with regard to the number of registered students. The first problem is the number of national committees: a committee for the DUT, one for the *Licences Professionnelles*, one for other licences and masters, not forgetting a committee for engineering degrees and another one for management degrees. More and more, the criteria which allowed professional and general degrees to be distinguished are less and less different [29]: for the professional degrees, we observe a lower control of the number of courses, a lower selection at the entrance, financing problems and risks of deterioration of the access to the labour market. The Programme Planning Law of March 2006 set up a new national Agency for Evaluation with a mission of evaluating higher

education degrees: its role in regard to the role of the existing committees is not yet clear; usually in France, new evaluation bodies do not suppress the existing ones.

The second weakness is the process of evaluation itself. Experts have to judge the quality of the new course before it exists. Committee members have to examine the content of proposals. When the proposal is to set up a new degree, their first job is to make a conformity control. Are the proposals in accordance with the Law? So, the committee members have to check the precise curricula, the distribution of the different disciplines, the numbers of training hours, the duration of internship, the career prospects, the selection procedures, the number of academic and professional staff, the state of economic partnerships, the resources brought by the institution, the advice given by the University Councils etc. Conformity control is not enough. Committee members also have to appreciate the coherency of the degree with the other degrees in the institution and to take into account the priorities elaborated by the HEI ('that degree is the most important for us'). They may check whether the economic partnership described in the proposal is real. In principle, they do not have to accept political or lobbying pressures. The process of *habilitation* is a long one: it takes more than 1 year. It is a process carried out from a distance and is generally seen as being time-consuming and bureaucratic.

In the process of assessment, the national experts judge the quality of the proposals and give their opinion (positive or negative advice) according to a written dossier, filled by the head of the project and certified by the HEI; the content of the dossier is prescribed. Labour market relevance is a crucial point and it is measured by several criteria: list of jobs possible for the graduates, precise definition of the awaited skills, stability of the economic partnerships, professional teachers' involvement, place of traineeship and apprenticeship in the degree and attention paid to continuous vocational training. The labour market relevance is assessed at the national level. Theoretically, it is above all taken into account by the economic world representatives, members of the national commissions. Theoretically, their advice is based upon their knowledge of the labour market opportunities. However, at the national level, do

those representatives have a precise knowledge of the regional labour market opportunities? Do they actually participate in the national commissions? It is not always the case [1].

In an evaluation *ex ante*, the general problem for the national experts deals with the reliability of the written information given by the head of the project. Experts are able to check the conformity of the dossier to the national regulations. But how can experts check the degree of involvement of the economic partners, the actuality of the career prospects? They can check the partnership by reading the letters of firms included in the dossier (but is a letter of support a guarantee of involvement?). More surely, experts can be confident if an official agreement between the HEI and an economic partner is included in the dossier, i.e. agreement about stages, apprenticeship, recruitment, financial support etc.

All the forms used in France for the *habilitation* of a new degree have a part devoted to the career prospects of the future graduates. The HEI has to ‘fill the cases’. Is it a reliable exercise or a formal one? Each HEI plays the game; it is theoretically compulsory to play the game, otherwise the national experts will formulate negative advice on the project. In fact, nobody is completely naïve: it is impossible to be sure of the actual career prospects for graduates who will reach the labour market in 1, 2 or 3 years. So, the remark could be: why is the information asked for? The best way to demonstrate that the preoccupations about the career prospects are actual ones would be promises (“we promise that we will hire the graduates in the future”), but such a promise is impossible: no firm is able to make such an engagement.

When the proposal is to renew an existing degree (process of *ré-habilitation*, of revalidation), the committee members have to check the actual activities, resources and results of the degree during the 4 previous years. Activities: how many applicants for the degree? How many registered students? Resources: how many academic and professional staff? How many financial resources? Results: how many students have been awarded the degree? How many have dropped out? Which are the actual career prospects? So, it would be wrong to assert that the process did not address the relevance and respon-

siveness of vocational courses to the labour market. Because vocational degree programmes had been designed as vocational degrees, relevant to the needs of employers, they were judged against this aim. Moreover, the national committees are helped in their judgements by surveys, analysis and visits in the field carried out by national committees of follow-up; so the experts are able to identify globally the strong and the weak points of the courses. But here is the third weakness of the national process of evaluation. Most often, the statistical data included in the proposal of renewal are written by the people in charge of the degree. More rarely, the data are certified by a local observer. It is clear that, in this second case, committee members may be more confident in the data; it is better if the data are comparative (evolution of the figures for several years, comparison of the local data with the data about similar degrees organized in other institutions). Until now, most degrees are *re-habilités*: their good or bad job placements are not taken into account; nevertheless, things could be changed: in February 2006, the national committee of *Licences Professionnelles* had not delivered the *ré-habilitation* for a significant proportion of the professional licences.

If a degree is *ré-habilité* after a period of 4 years, its human and financial resources stay the same as before: resources depend on the number of registered students, they do not depend on the efficiency and effectiveness of the degree. The fourth weakness of the evaluation procedures is the absence of a link between the actual results and the amount of resources given by the State. There is no challenge for the courses which have strong partnerships with economic employers, good internships or apprenticeships and good job placements.

Developing the evaluation of the education–employment relationship: quality charts

In those contexts of the deterioration of the access conditions to the labour market, of an explosion in the number of vocational courses and of an absence of control and evaluation by the national evaluation bodies, how do we improve the evaluation of the education–employment relationship? How do we involve the economic world in the evaluation, in the quality assurance processes?

Several revolutions could be imagined. Each new project of course would be *habilité* only after 2 years of experimentation, financed by the university resources; so, the results after 2 years could be judged by the experts; in the case of *habilitation*, the university would receive the financial resources, including for the 2 years of experimentation. Probably, in that new context, universities would become more cautious to propose new projects! For the *ré-habilitation*, a new procedure could be imagined. Every degree should have to produce a report including results obtained during the period, particularly in the field of the education–employment relationship, and including a plan to improve its weak points. The indicators should be notified, certified by an internal evaluation unit in the university (the internal evaluation units should be developed and may be compulsory) and by the economic partners.

From our case studies [1], we have observed that most of our interlocutors find that the graduates have a good theoretical knowledge and a good ability to learn; but they find their practical abilities and their problem-solving capacities insufficient. How do we improve graduates' weak points? The idea is to develop subject benchmark statements allowing a large degree of flexibility in provision (diversity was not viewed negatively). France is in a paradoxical situation: for the DUTs, 90% of the subject contents and the pedagogical methods are strictly regulated by law (it is not the case for the *Licences Professionnelles*). In spite of this, the local adaptations to improve the quality of subjects and of graduates are largely possible, partly because there no external inspections. However, the local adaptations, the good practices, are not always easy to implement: the evolutions can be limited by a lack of financial resources (difficulty to buy new costly equipment) or by a reluctance from some academics (every evolution increases their workload and they are not paid for that increase).

The economic world wants graduates with capacities of autonomy, of problem solving. The 2002 reform insists on the pedagogy of project. For the HVE degrees, it exists by law, but it has to be implemented seriously. The reform also insists on the students' responsibility during their studies: they have to build their project of studies and their professional

project; a greater possibility to choose the subjects is given to them. If the target is met, HVE graduates will have a greater capacity to organize projects.

Thanks to a quantitative survey [1], we have observed that there is a relatively weak involvement of companies not only in the daily functioning of the course, but sometimes also in the design of new degrees. A lot of companies are concerned, but the intensity of contact is weak. Nevertheless, the respondents say that the relationship between their company and the degrees are not developed enough. But they say that a higher involvement is difficult for their company, essentially because of a lack of time.

How do we involve economic partners more? It is certain that the initiatives to improve the partnerships have to be initiated by the HVE institutions. They have to make their continuous vocational training service more professional, their employment and internship service more professional, and the people working in those services more professional; in another part, the Centres for Training by Apprenticeship have to develop and to make their activities more professional. A solution to develop the participation of economic partners could be imagined, but would suppose a change in the regulation of continuous vocational learning. Currently, the participation of managers in HVE is not considered, for them and for their company, as an activity of continuous training; so their company may not include their external teaching in the so-called "financial participation to the continuous vocational training". If it was possible, maybe more companies would send their managers to teach and to manage the HVE degrees.

The ultimate step could be the implementation of quality charts. The first step of the chart should be the delivery of internal quality labels after a rigorous internal evaluation: quality of information and communication for student and partners, quality of studentsw selection, quality of teaching and learning, quality of economic partnerships, quality of graduate job placements and quality in financial matters (diversification of resources and rationality of expenses) [30]. An example of a quality chart (62 quantitative indicators) can be consulted at <http://www.univ-mlv.fr/ecosoc/?rub=charte&sousrub=charte>. The result of the first

step would allow closing of the ‘bad’ degrees. The second step should be to look for an external accreditation near independent authorities (for instance, EQUIS, the European Quality Improvement System). The idea is to look for a signal that recruiters know [quality certifications such as the ISO (International Organization for Standards) label].

Conclusion: universities have to develop an offensive strategy of evaluation

The development of quality charts and the diffusion of their indicators would clearly show that there are, within universities, degrees of good quality and degrees of poor quality. In principle, poor quality courses should be abolished. It is not evident: quality charts are needed to improve the courses, but they are not sufficient. I have, as the former director of an observatory, the experience in my university of ‘bad’ degrees which still exist. To understand that, we have to analyse the behaviour of university presidents with regard to evaluation results, to understand the university governance. Our survey on university presidents in France and in Italy reveals that only a few presidents develop an offensive strategy of evaluation [31]. Such a strategy consists of systematically diffusing the evaluation results, in using the results in the decision-making process, in explicitly basing decisions on the results produced by evaluation (creating or abolishing a degree, increasing or decreasing the allowed resources). The offensive strategy also shows that such decisions are needed to improve the implementation of the university missions, to have additional advantages in the competition between universities.

Why is the offensive strategy difficult to set up? It is not easy because university presidents do not assume some political risks, do not have political courage. The first risk deals with the power of internal evaluation units. These units have a power from their rigorous analysis, from the independence of their judgements. If a president systematically takes into account the motivated advice given by evaluation units, he loses part of his power. The second political risk deals with the growth of conflicts within the university. If a president decides, for instance, to close degrees with bad results

revealed by evaluations he will have to face faculty directors and dissatisfaction will be growing in the university. If the dissatisfaction results in a coalition of faculty directors against the president, the president's power is threatened. The third political risk deals with the nature of the political power: exercising a political power is not only making decisions based on evaluation results, but also taking risks, experimenting, innovating, mobilizing people and giving dreams to them; presidents do not want to be accused of being only ‘rational’. The evaluation dies if it is only a management control, the respect of constraint of decreasing the costs, the sanction of bad results. A ‘political president’ has to be able to loosen external constraints, to get new human and financial resources for his university.

How can a university that wants to excel in its teaching and learning missions prove that, in an ocean of thousands of licences and masters, its courses are particularly effective for graduates’ job placements? That university has to develop a comprehensive strategy: only setting up degrees based on an important potential of academic staff, communicating about its degrees (precisely describing graduates’ and postgraduates’ skills), practising an equitable selection at the entry of vocational degrees, reinforcing the evaluation processes and taking into account the results, further professionalizing the degrees by the systematization of apprenticeship job contracts, and developing the partnerships with local and regional firms, getting quality certifications. That university, with such an offensive strategy and with regard to other universities, would increase its chances of guaranteeing good job placements to its graduates and postgraduates.

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