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Re-enrolment Patterns in the Catalan Public Higher Education System



This study based on information from Catalan university students has found several profiles of students who drop out of university and later return. The results suggest, among other things, the need to establish plans for the transition to college, and the reception and support of university students to avoid the abandonment and subsequent change of studies. It is therefore necessary to improve the system of guidance and access to the university to improve student performance and the quality of the university system.

Studies of student re-enrolment patterns in Higher Education constitute, along with traditional studies of persistence and dropout, a key element for improving the quality of Higher Education Institutions. However, these studies tend to be limited as they are centred on a single institution, due to the lack of national-scale datasets for monitoring students between different institutions.

Using a longitudinal population-based dataset provided by the Catalan University Assurance Agency (AQU), which includes information records on 21,473 undergraduate students, the study published on *Higher Education Research & Development* aims to develop and test an exploratory model of student re-enrolment, specifically in the Catalan public university system. We are not only interested in student re-enrolment, but also in whether they do so during the first year after dropout or in the same area of knowledge.

In a nutshell, our findings regarding student re-enrolment patterns in higher education suggest the existence of the students we could call 'experimenters' and who drop out from their initial courses after a short period of time and with very few credits passed, and re-enrol for a different area of knowledge the year immediately after dropping out. This fact is an evidence of clearly dysfunctional and inefficient guidance and university entrance systems. There is also a large group of students that, after dedicating several years to their university education and almost completing their studies, decide to drop out, with a very low likelihood of re-enrolling and when they do, this tends to be after a long non-enrolment spell and in a different area of knowledge. Finally, the study suggests a strong connection between age, nationality and re-enrolment probabilities, which questions non-traditional student policies, especially those addressed at both international students and students over 25.

In short, the findings suggest, on the one hand, the importance of early detection of students that are at risk of early departure and re-enrolment (i.e., 'experimenters') and, on the other, the need to develop policies that avoid the dropout and transfer-out of senior students with almost all their credit hours earned. In addition, the results point out the need to set up plans for transition into university, and for reception and accompaniment while there, that include the instruments and supports required to avoid, first, student dropout and, second and once dropout has occurred, the transfer of students to other areas of knowledge and/or universities. These plans require, on the one hand, joint action involving all university agents and structures, ensuring the complementarity of guidance activities of different origin (system, university, school and degree) and, on the other, the combination of general policies with more targeted actions for specific groups that improve both students' performance and the quality of our university system.

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References

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