

Customs capacity building through Partnership in Customs Academic Research and Development (PICARD): achievements and future directions.

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Abstract

This paper discusses how the World Customs Organization (WCO) has been cooperating with the academic community in the context of the WCO Partnership in Customs Academic Research and Development (PICARD) program, in order to enhance the capabilities and professionalism of customs administrations and customs experts through higher education and to better inform strategic customs decision-making through applied academic research. It discusses key PICARD initiatives and achievements and seeks to determine whether the PICARD program has met its objectives and fulfilled stakeholders' expectations. It also addresses the program's future directions and considers how it can continue to keep pace with the rapid changes affecting Customs, and how it can be further developed and enhanced for the benefit of all stakeholders.

1. Introduction

At the turn of the 21st century, capacity building became a matter of high priority on the World Customs Organization (WCO) agenda. According to the WCO, the challenges and demands of the 21st century posed by factors such as globalisation, rapid technological developments, global security concerns and the dynamic nature of international trade, necessitate a professional approach to the management and operations of customs administrations (WCO, 2008b). The role of a modern customs manager demands an understanding of complex issues and the ability to transform knowledge into practical applications and operational policies using latest techniques, best practices and new technology, which requires a much higher level of knowledge and broader set of skills and behavioural attributes than has been traditionally required (Mikuriya, 2007; Danet, 2007).

Recognising that the increasing complexity of customs work requires a more rigorous approach to customs education and training and that it can benefit from more academic research, the WCO decided to develop a cooperative partnership with the academic world. This led to the introduction of the WCO Partnership in Customs Academic Research and Development (PICARD) program in 2006, effectively providing a framework for the cooperation between Customs and academia. Since then, a number of important initiatives have been introduced and jointly progressed.

As the PICARD program is approaching its 15th anniversary, it is timely to reflect on what has been done and achieved to date, as well as on what remains to be done. This paper provides an overview of the PICARD program, its key initiatives (or rather instruments) and their objectives, and discusses PICARD's outcomes and achievements, in order to determine whether the PICARD program and related

PICARD instruments have met their objectives and fulfilled stakeholders' expectations. It also considers how PICARD can continue to keep pace with the rapid changes affecting the world of Customs and how it can be further developed and enhanced for the benefit of all stakeholders.

2. PICARD program overview

The WCO PICARD program was introduced in January 2006 and officially launched at the 1st PICARD conference in March 2006. At that time, there were no established standards for the customs profession, no recognition of Customs as an area of legitimate academic pursuit, no internationally recognised academic programs in Customs, no academic journals dedicated specifically to customs matters, and no international conferences at which the customs and academic communities could exchange ideas and report research results (Widdowson, 2015b).

Recognising that research and professionalism are necessary tools of many governments around the world; the aim was to advance customs professionalism and to advance customs-related research (WCO, 2007). According to Widdowson (2015b), since the PICARD program's introduction, the collective aim has been to raise the academic standing of the customs profession, but it was not always clear how this would be achieved. However, *research* and *professionalism* have been the two pillars of the PICARD program since the beginning, and the program's objectives have been:

- to raise the academic profile of the customs profession
- to raise the professional knowledge and standing of customs practitioners
- to provide a cooperative framework for cooperation between Customs and academia
- to encourage more academic research in the customs field
- to encourage national adoption of integrated education, training and development schemes by education authorities
- to initiate new approaches to whole-of-career development strategies
- to encourage academic institutions and customs administrations to increase their cooperation in the field of customs education and research
- to promote the development of educational products and services and explore potential resources for funding
- to support the future activities related to this collaboration (WCO, 2008c).

In PICARD's early days, senior officials of the WCO expressed their hopes that this partnership would attract many participants and would also encourage multilateral cooperation (WCO, 2005b). In the intervening 15 years, the WCO in partnership with academia and other stakeholders have progressed several important initiatives under the PICARD program and several milestones have been reached. Table 1 provides a snapshot of the PICARD timeline, its key initiatives, and milestones.

Table 1: PICARD timeline and milestones

Feb 2005	International Network of Customs Universities (INCU) established
Jan 2006	PICARD program introduced
Mar 2006	First PICARD conference held (Brussels, Belgium) and PICARD program launched
Mar 2007	2nd PICARD conference held (Brussels, Belgium) and World Customs Journal (WCJ) launched
Mar 2008	PICARD Advisory Group formed
May 2008	3rd PICARD conference held (Shanghai, China) and WCO Professional Standards published
Jun 2009	WCO adopts Professional Standards and Curricula Recognition Guidelines
Sep 2009	4th PICARD conference held (San Jose, Costa Rica) and WCO and INCU signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)
Jan 2010	WCO accredits first academic programs under Professional Standards
Nov 2010	5th PICARD conference held (Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates) and WCO announces 'knowledge' as its theme for 2011
Sep 2011	6th PICARD conference held (Geneva, Switzerland) and it was agreed to develop PICARD Strategy 2020
Sep 2012	7th PICARD conference held (Marrakech, Morocco) and WCO and INCU re-signed the MOU
Feb 2013	WCO adopts the PICARD 2020 Strategic Document
Sep 2013	8th PICARD conference held (Saint Petersburg, Russia) and PICARD Youth Forum launched
May 2014	Inaugural INCU Global Conference held and INCU Baku Resolution adopted
Sep 2014	9th PICARD conference held (Puebla, Mexico)
Feb 2015	INCU celebrates 10th anniversary
May 2015	WCO establishes the PICARD Scientific Board
Sep 2015	10th PICARD conference held (Baku, Azerbaijan) and INCU Baku Regional Office opened
Mar 2016	PICARD program's 10th anniversary
Sep 2016	11th PICARD conference held (Manila, the Philippines) and 10 years of WCJ was acknowledged
Sep 2017	12th PICARD conference held (Hammamet, Tunisia)
Oct 2018	13th PICARD conference held (Malatya, Turkey)
Apr 2019	WCO adopts revised Professional Standards and revised Curricula Recognition Guidelines

Oct 2019	14th PICARD conference held (Skopje, North Macedonia)
Feb 2020	INCU celebrates 15th anniversary
Mar 2020	WCO unveils the PICARD 2030 Strategic Document
Nov 2020	15th PICARD conference (upcoming, web-conference)
Jan 2021	PICARD program's 15th anniversary

Source: authors.

Initially, it was agreed that the WCO in partnership with the International Network of Customs Universities (INCU) would work together to organise a conference specifically dedicated to cooperation between Customs and academia; develop an academic journal to publish research on customs-related topics; and investigate the possibility of developing international professional standards for the customs profession and setting up the process of WCO recognition of academic customs programs (WCO, 2005a; WCO, 2005b). Looking at how PICARD has developed over time, it can be noted that cooperation between the WCO and academic institutions has led to the introduction of several key initiatives including the establishment of the INCU, the creation of the *World Customs Journal (WCJ)*, organisation of annual PICARD conferences, the development of the WCO Professional Standards for operational and strategic customs managers and the associated process of recognition of university customs curricula.

The successful introduction of these initiatives into the PICARD program can be considered an achievement in itself, considering that the development of these initiatives required an investment of a considerable amount of time and other resources, as well as a collaborative approach and active engagement of all who were involved in the development of PICARD. In that regard, it can be argued that at least some of the objectives of the PICARD cooperation had already been achieved more than 10 years ago, in the earlier stages of the program's development.

However, each of these initiatives was developed for a particular purpose and with a specific set of objectives, aiming to achieve certain outcomes. In effect, these initiatives are the tools or '*PICARD instruments*' that have been created for use by stakeholders, to help them achieve their desired outcomes, so the introduction of these instruments was just an intermediate step, only a means to an end, and not the final output. Therefore, it is first important to review the purpose and objectives of each of these instruments in order to determine whether those objectives have been achieved and whether the expectations of all stakeholders have been met.

3. Overview of PICARD instruments and their objectives

Specifically, the following have been identified as PICARD instruments on which the subsequent discussion will focus: 1) the network of academic institutions, 2) the academic conference, 3) the academic research journal, 4) the advisory group, 5) the professional standards, 6) recognition of university programs, 7) Memorandum of Understanding, 8) the strategic document and 9) the scientific board. These PICARD instruments and their specific aims and objectives are outlined below, while the resulting outcomes that ensued from these instruments are discussed in section 4.

3.1 The INCU network

Recognising the need for a mechanism that would facilitate better networking and coordination among universities with an interest in customs research and education and the need for a single body to represent the common interests of academia, in February 2005 academic institutions established the INCU. The INCU is an international not-for-profit organisation established with the main aim *to promote the academic standing of the customs profession*. At the time of its establishment, the objectives of the INCU were to:

- promote academic excellence in customs law and administration
- generate greater public awareness of customs matters
- provide the WCO and other organisations with a single point of contact with universities and research institutes that are active in the field of customs research, education and training
- develop an international customs academic journal
- provide a global resource for governments and the private sector, and an educational source for students wishing to further their knowledge in the field of customs, international trade, and logistics (INCU, 2007).

Subsequently, the INCU objectives were amended (see INCU, 2020e) to:

- promote the academic standing of the customs profession
- promote academic excellence in customs matters
- support research in customs matters
- generate greater public awareness of the customs profession
- promote the collective interests of its members
- provide the WCO and other organisations with a single point of contact with universities and research institutes that are active in the field of customs research, education and training; organise academic conferences
- provide a global resource for governments and the private sector, and an educational source for students wishing to further their knowledge in the field of customs, international trade, and logistics (INCU, 2014).

It was intended that, among other things, the INCU would serve as a mechanism for academic institutions and individuals to contribute to the customs knowledge base ‘and to exchange ideas and best practice that not only helps organisations and individuals to build capacity but also serves to build closer links between government, academia and the private sector’ (Widdowson, 2015b, p. 216). The INCU website was intended to provide a platform for developing a comprehensive database of universities and other academic institutions involved in customs research, education, training, development, and capacity building activities, and a means for disseminating information about the PICARD program, its activities and developments as well as other items of interest to the academic community (INCU, 2007).

3.2 PICARD conference

The PICARD conference is another important early initiative and instrument of PICARD. The inaugural PICARD conference was held in March 2006 at the WCO headquarters in Brussels and was designed to:

- provide a forum for constructive ideas for the advancement of academic research and professionalism in the customs domain
- bring together and emphasise the link between Customs and academic institutions
- guide the future policy of the WCO on its engagement in the field of academic research and customs professionalisation
- further formalise the relationship between the WCO and academic institutions
- facilitate the development of a global network of academic institutions (WCO, 2006; WCO, 2007).

One specific objective during the 1st PICARD conference was to identify and discuss research areas and topics relevant to the global customs community. Following a literature review and a survey with a broad community of customs experts, academic community, and supply chain professionals, Hintsa (2006) suggested multiple topics in need for future research, including (i) finding the right balance between security and facilitation; (ii) identifying benefits of security measures; (iii) developing business–customs relationships; and, (iv) risk reduction/prevention.¹ It is worthwhile to note that a number of research papers and panel sessions have focused on these topics since then, throughout the 14 PICARD conferences held to date, but conference papers and presentations also covered many other topics of interest to the customs community.

3.3 World Customs Journal

Responding to the identified need to improve the quality of information available to customs managers on the basis of which important strategic and operational decisions could be made, the *WCJ*, initiated by academic institutions through the INCU, was officially launched at the second PICARD conference in March 2007. This marked another important milestone in the development of the PICARD program. To ensure academic rigour and quality of the publication, the *WCJ* was set up as a peer-reviewed academic journal and has become the INCU's flagship publication.

The *WCJ* was primarily created to provide a forum for customs professionals, academics, industry researchers, and research students to contribute items of interest and share research and experiences to enhance its readers' understanding of all aspects of the roles and responsibilities of Customs (INCU, 2020f). At the time of its launch, the WCO leaders expressed their hopes that the journal 'will grow as a valuable reference source for the customs community to meet the requirements of the new strategic environment and for the wider international community to deepen their understanding of the customs world' (Mikuriya, 2007, p. v; Danet, 2007, p. v).

3.4 PICARD Advisory Group

The next instrument introduced under the PICARD program was the creation of the PICARD Advisory Group (PAG) in March 2008, comprising of WCO officials and representatives of academic institutions selected on the basis of their active participation and contribution to the development of the PICARD program. The purpose of the PAG was to assist the WCO with the delivery and management of the program and to promote cooperation and open dialogue. Initially, the role of the PAG included:

- providing advice on WCO Professional Standards, including advice concerning their ongoing validity

and recommendations for change, as required

- preparation and planning of the annual PICARD conferences
- following on and resolving issues arising at the PICARD conferences (and elsewhere) of relevance to the PICARD program (Karlsson, 2008; Widdowson, 2008c).

The original members of PAG were: Michael Wolfgang, University of Muenster, Germany; Aivars Krastins, Riga Technical University, Latvia; Jan Janson, Riga Technical University, Latvia; Juha Hintsa, Cross-border Research Association, Switzerland; Stephane Lauwick, University of Le Havre, France; Claire Morris, Leeds Metropolitan University, United Kingdom; and David Widdowson, Centre for Customs and Excise Studies, Australia (Karlsson, 2008).

3.5 Professional Standards

In parallel, working in cooperation, the INCU and WCO developed a set of common international standards for strategic and operational customs managers, which were published and discussed at the 3rd PICARD conference in May 2008 (WCO, 2008b), and were endorsed by the WCO Council in June 2009. The publication of the WCO Professional Standards marked another major achievement of the PICARD program. As argued by Fonseca (2008, p. 12), collaboration under the framework of PICARD ‘is firmly based on international standards and aims to reflect the requirements of contemporary society’.

Subsequently, the Professional Standards were revised, and a new version was adopted by the WCO in 2019. The key updates, which, according to the WCO (2020c, p. 21), ‘reflect new challenges stemming from changes in the customs operational environment’, include a general simplification and reorganisation of the standards, and a stronger emphasis on emerging technologies, risk management, security and facilitation, coordinated border management, and international supply chains (WCO, 2019a, p. 9). According to the WCO (2008b, p. 10; 2019a, p. 10), the Professional Standards provide for:

1. the establishment of benchmarks which can be developed into job profiles for customs recruitment
2. the development of benchmarks against which the member’s current in-house training can be measured
3. the development of standards against which academic development can be designed or procured
4. benchmarks against which the private sector can design standards for customs professionals.

3.6 Recognition of university curricula

At the same time, complementary to the Professional Standards, the WCO and INCU jointly developed guidelines that established a formal assessment and recognition process for university customs curricula at the bachelor and master’s levels. The aim was to enable educational programs that comply with the Professional Standards to be formally recognised by the WCO and bear the WCO label certifying that the program meets the international standards for the customs profession (WCO, 2019a). The WCO recognition guidelines (WCO, 2009) were endorsed by the WCO Council in June 2009 and were subsequently amended in 2013 and 2019 (see WCO, 2019b).

3.7 WCO-INCU Memorandum of Understanding

The next significant milestone in the partnership between the INCU and the WCO was achieved in September 2009 with the signing of an MOU between the two organisations, at the 4th WCO PICARD conference that was held in San Jose, Costa Rica. The MOU, which formally recognised the INCU as the single point of contact between the WCO and those universities and research institutes that are active in the field of customs education and research, serves to formalise their joint efforts to promote the academic standing of the customs profession (Widdowson, 2009).

The MOU's objective is to 'promote co-operation in the development and provision of world-class customs training, education, capacity building and research', whereby the WCO and INCU agreed, among other things, to:

develop a long-term strategic alliance that will mutually benefit each other's aims and objectives; to permit reference to the professional association between the organisations to be made by either party in public documents; to recognise the status of the WCO and INCU as international representative bodies; to explore opportunities to cooperate in the areas of training, education, research, e-learning, capacity building and management development; to seek to optimise the level of synergies between the training and capacity building provided by the WCO and its members and the education and training programmes provided by the INCU members; to explore opportunities to jointly enhance Customs training, education, research and capacity building activities; and to facilitate cooperative arrangements including, but not limited to, providing each other with observer status at each other's annual meetings, as well as appropriate access to each other's websites (INCU & WCO, 2009; INCU & WCO, 2012).

Subsequently, the two organisations signed a replacement MOU at the PICARD conference in Morocco in 2012 to reflect a change in the legal name of the INCU to 'International Network of Customs Universities'.

3.8 PICARD Strategic Document

Recognising that the world economic context and the global environment in which customs administrations operate has changed significantly since the commencement of PICARD, and that the program needs a strategic direction in order to remain agile and responsive, the WCO in consultation with the INCU and other stakeholders, in late 2011, commenced preparation of the PICARD 2020 Strategic Document (WCO, 2013), which was adopted by the WCO in 2013. Subsequently, in late 2019, a revised version of the PICARD strategy was developed and the PICARD 2030 Strategic Document (WCO 2020a), was endorsed by the WCO Capacity Building Committee in March 2020 (WCO, 2020c).

According to the WCO (2013, p. 1), the aim of the original strategic document was to outline the vision, strategy and key elements to further enhance the PICARD program partnership between the WCO and partners from academia and the private sector related to effective tackling of key questions arising from past PICARD conferences and interactions as well as those raised by the WCO Capacity Building Committee. The PICARD 2020 Strategic Document goes on to list six initiatives (see WCO 2013, pp. 1–2), which can be summarised as follows:

- to promote integration of research outcomes and advice in customs modernisation efforts
- to make best use of and build on the Professional Standards developed within the PICARD program
- to further promote Customs as a knowledge-based profession
- to enhance regional representation and global coverage within the PICARD program
- to consolidate cooperation between academic institutions and regional and national customs training centres

- to secure, maintain and expand involvement of WCO member administrations, academia and the private sector in this program.

The PICARD 2020 Strategic Document also contains a Vision Statement announcing that the PICARD program ‘aims to be: indispensable to the professional development for all Customs practitioners, influential to Customs decision makers by [promoting] knowledge-based research, and successful by partnering with academia and other relevant stakeholders’ (WCO, 2013, p. 3). The new PICARD 2030 Strategic Document has the same aim as the PICARD 2020 Strategic Document, which is ‘to outline the vision, strategy and key elements to further enhance the PICARD Programme partnership between the WCO and partners from academia and the private sector’ (WCO, 2020a, p. 2). The Vision Statement in the PICARD 2030 Strategic Document had been slightly amended stating that ‘the PICARD Programme aims to be: responsive in shaping the future of Customs, indispensable to the professional development of all Customs practitioners, influential to Customs decision makers by providing academic and applied research, and successful by partnering with academia and other relevant stakeholders’ (WCO, 2020a, p. 3). The PICARD 2030 Strategic Document has yet to be formally adopted by the WCO Council.

3.9 PICARD Scientific Board

In 2015, WCO decided to establish another advisory team, the PICARD Scientific Board (PSB), with a specific purpose of reviewing and selecting papers and presentations for the PICARD conferences. Unlike the PAG with a long-term composition, the PSB is appointed by the WCO on an annual basis and is typically comprised of academic and customs experts, representatives of the conference host organisations, as well as WCO Secretariat officials directly responsible for organising the conference. The PSB and its related procedures and activities are coordinated by the WCO Research Unit which has had the responsibility for organising PICARD conferences since 2014. Typically, the WCO Research Unit sends each PSB member a set of submitted documents such as research papers, presentations and panel proposals. PSB members then undertake a peer review and provide their decisions to the WCO Research Unit. The WCO then takes the advice of PSB members into consideration and makes the final decision on paper and presentation selections. The first PSB was formed in May 2015 for the 10th PICARD conference held in Baku, Azerbaijan,² and since then has been a regular feature in the organisational and planning stages of the PICARD conferences.

4. Achievements and outcomes of PICARD instruments

Having briefly discussed the key PICARD instruments and their objectives, it is appropriate to consider the results and outcomes generated through or by these PICARD instruments. This section of the paper provides a summary of outcomes and achievements of each of the instruments. The extent to which these instruments, and the PICARD program as a whole, have achieved their intended objectives, is addressed in section 5.

4.1 The INCU network

Initially, the INCU was established as a non-incorporated association, not a legal entity. As the INCU and the PICARD program continued to evolve, it has become necessary to formalise its governance arrangements to continue to fulfil its objectives and, in 2008, the INCU became a legal entity registered as an incorporated association. This meant that the INCU could now engage in contractual arrangements with other organisations and stakeholders in order to remain a key player in developing the PICARD program and continue to drive the PICARD agenda, as well as to continue to provide useful services to its members.

Established in 2005, the INCU has grown into a dynamic non-governmental international organisation representing the collective interests of institutions and individuals who are active in the field of customs

research and education, and this year the INCU celebrates its 15th anniversary. In its 15 years of existence, the INCU has built its reputation and achieved international recognition as an organisation that can provide valuable academic input in the areas of Customs, border management and international trade. The efforts of the INCU have been recognised not only by the WCO, but also by other prominent international organisations such as the World Trade Organization (WTO). For example, the Director-General of the WTO publicly commended INCU for its role in promoting the trade facilitation agenda (see Azevêdo, 2015).

Having firmly established itself as a reputable international organisation, the INCU took steps to further develop its organisational arrangements. In response to a growing demand from the academic and customs community, in 2012, the INCU underwent an organisational and membership restructure and expanded its membership rules to allow not only institutions, but also individuals to become members in order to facilitate an expanded policy, and management input from across the INCU membership that will provide an opportunity for all members to participate in its management and decision-making processes (INCU, 2020e; Widdowson, 2011b).

While at the time of its establishment, the INCU membership base comprised of only four institutions,³ the membership has been steadily growing and today the INCU represents some 340 members from more than 80 countries, which include academic institutions, customs administrations, private sector companies and individuals (INCU, 2020d). Over the years, the INCU has progressed and implemented a number of its own initiatives such as providing advice and assistance to members with respect to the WCO Professional Standards and recognition process, supporting academic journals, running student internship programs and organising academic conferences (the inaugural INCU global conference took place in May 2014 in Baku, Azerbaijan). In September 2015, the INCU established its first regional office in Baku, which marked another milestone in its development (INCU, 2020b). The INCU website, which was intended to be a mechanism for coordination among academic institutions and a global resource for those interested in customs affairs, customs education and research, has been upgraded several times since its launch and now has a members-only library of PICARD-related materials as well as other resources and publications.

4.2 PICARD conference

The PICARD conferences have proved to be an excellent avenue to guide the future policy of the WCO on its engagement in the field of education and academic research and to pave the way for future directions for the PICARD program. The main achievement of the first PICARD conference was the decision to formalise cooperation between the WCO and academia by way of the PICARD initiative, more specifically, to establish an academic journal dedicated to customs matters and to pursue the development of professional standards and associated procedures for formally recognising university customs curricula.

The PICARD conference has become one of the major annual WCO conferences that serves as a regular exchange, discussion and networking platform for researchers, educators and practitioners in the customs context (WCO, 2020a), and it provides a great opportunity for all PICARD stakeholders to get together, to share experiences and debate ideas, and to identify how this unique customs-academia partnership can be better utilised for the benefit of all stakeholders (Widdowson, 2011a). To date, 14 PICARD conferences have been held (see Table 1), each conference building on the success of the previous ones. The annual PICARD conference provides a forum for academics and practitioners to debate ideas and share research findings and has ‘served to highlight the synergies of the WCO and INCU and to identify areas in which collaboration is not only possible but highly desirable’ (Widdowson, 2015a, p. v). Priority research themes and related topics of the PICARD conferences over the 15 years, as announced in Calls

for Papers, are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: PICARD Call for Papers 2006–2020

Conference	Conference themes and topics highlighted during 2006–2020
15th PICARD (Nov 2020)	Lessons learned regarding Customs' response and role in supply chain continuity during the COVID19 pandemic; Customs fostering Sustainability for People, Prosperity and the Planet; and Organizational Performance Measurement.
14th PICARD (Oct 2019)	Big Data Analytics, Coordination and Cooperation at Borders, Cross-border E-commerce, Special Economic Zones, Technology at the Border, Predominance of Protectionism.
13th PICARD (Oct 2018)	Securing the Business Environment; Data Analysis; Trade Facilitation; Cross-border e-Commerce; Connectivity in Customs; and Customs and the Fourth Industrial Revolution.
12th PICARD (Sep 2017)	Data Analysis; Trade Facilitation; Security; and Customs-Tax Cooperation.
11th PICARD (Sep 2016)	Digital Customs; Security; Taxation and other revenue matters; and Illicit trade.
10th PICARD (Sep 2015)	Connection between global value chains (GVC) and Customs procedures, Taxation and other revenue matters, and Smuggling.
9th PICARD (Sep 2014)	WTO Agreement on Trade Facilitation: Implications for Customs; Digital Dilemma in Customs; and Customs Role in Securing Supply Chains and Preventing Illegal Trades.
8th PICARD (Sep 2013)	The impact on Customs of the development, implementation, and administration of regional integration initiatives; The WCO Economic Competitiveness Package (ECP); and Enhancing Professionalism in Customs: how to operationalise the PICARD 2020 Strategic Document.
7th PICARD (Sep 2012)	Emerging and evolving risks on Customs administration; The Impact of Regional Economic Integration and Preferential Trade Arrangements on Customs Services; and Customs Strategic Human Resource Management.
6th PICARD (Sep 2011)	Coordinated border management, Performance measurement of Customs, Economic security and poverty reduction, Integrity.
5th PICARD (Nov 2010)	Customs-Business partnerships; Performance measurement; Customs and revenue collection; and the Impact of climate change on international trade and customs management in the post-Copenhagen era.

4th PICARD (Sep 2009)	The impact of the economic crisis on Customs and international trade; the impact of Regional Trade Agreements on Customs and trade; the impact of climate change and environmental protection on Customs and trade.
3rd PICARD (May 2008)	The pilot projects based on the PICARD professional standards developed by the WCO together with the INCU; recent academic research and existing educational programs and future research capabilities related to Customs; research needs and areas identified by the customs administrations to assist them to achieve their strategic objectives; increasing the knowledge and interest of the donor organisations about the academic research projects related to Customs.
2nd PICARD (Mar 2007)	To develop a set of professional standards for strategic managers; to launch the first edition of the WCJ with the theme ‘Customs in the 21st Century’ and discuss the content of the second edition; to review and discuss recent innovative research material on supply chain security as a prelude to its inclusion in the second edition of the Journal; to provide an opportunity for institutions to join the INCU.
1st PICARD (Mar 2006)	To examine existing and current research in the field of Customs; to explore how the institutions and the WCO could play a role in further development; to examine the need for professionalism in Customs; to examine how the field of Customs could be developed as a specialised area of study; to determine how academic programs recognition could be standardised and accepted internationally.

Source: authors based on WCO (2020b) and INCU (2020c). Note: the right column in Table 2 presents a non-exhaustive list on themes and topics, meaning that submissions on other topics have also been accepted.

Despite the seemingly broad variation in the research themes across the conferences, a few topics appear to be repeated occasionally, including data analytics, digital customs, security, climate change impact, customs performance management, illicit trade, e-commerce and taxation matters. One item to consider is whether a more proactive, multi-year research theme planning, would make sense in the future. One could opt for example to repeat in every second conference certain research themes and topics of fundamental customs importance. These could include rapidly evolving themes such as e-commerce and extraordinarily complex themes such as data analytics.

Next, achieving practical relevance is a common challenge in academic research, including those presented and discussed in PICARD conferences. Table 3 illustrates the theme of producing explicit ties between academic research generated through PICARD and the real customs world. The examples consist of Cross-border Research Association (CBRA) and the Centre for Customs and Excise Studies (CCES) research projects that address customs research topics of importance identified through PICARD and that have been presented and discussed at past PICARD and INCU conferences during 2014–2019.

Table 3: Examples of PICARD research links with the 'real customs world'

Research area/topic	Research publication (and conference where it was presented)	Links with the 'real customs world'
Enhancing Customs Risk Management with Big Data and Data Analytics	Männistö T., Hintsä J., Migeotte J., Molenhuis M., Alpstedt A., Wong Chan S., & Hameri A-P. (2019). (Presented at the 14th PICARD conference)	Five WCO member administrations are active partners in 3-year H2020 PROFILE project, ⁴ exploring, e.g. usage of external data sources in customs risk assessment.
Review of Australia's Progress Towards Implementation of the Single Window	Widdowson, D., Blegen, B., Short, G., Lewis, G., Garcia-Godos, E., Kashubsky, M., Baker, H., & Juratowitch, B. (2018). (Presented at the 2nd INCU International Student conference 2017).	Research provided advice to the Australian Border Force and the Australian industry on the latest international trends on establishing Single Window and How to Take It Forward in Australia.
Customs-Academia Collaborative Research-Development-Innovation Projects	Hintsä, J., Wong Chan, S., Grainger, A., & Czyżowicz, W. (2018). (Presented at the 13th PICARD conference).	Thirteen WCO member administrations are active partners in 5-year H2020 PEN-CP project, ⁵ trialling a variety of Open Innovation instruments.
Trade Facilitation and Border Management Performance Measurement	Hintsä, J., & Männistö, T. (2017). (Presented at the 12th PICARD conference).	Research materials exploited, e.g. in a Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation (GATF) capacity building project.
Review of Australia's National Committee on Trade Facilitation	Widdowson, D., Blegen, B., Short, G., & Kashubsky, M. (2017). (Presented at 2nd INCU International Student conference 2017).	Research project, commissioned by the Australian international trading industry, provided advice to the Australian Government and industry on latest international trends in establishing National Committees on Trade Facilitation.
Authorised Economic Operator Program Benefits	Hintsä, J., Urciuoli L., & Tan, Y. (2016). (Presented at the 11th PICARD conference). ⁶	Research data on Authorised Economic Operator (AEO) programs and associated benefits was collected during WCO Global AEO conferences (2014 and 2016; plus final follow-up in 2018).
Global Customs Revenue Benchmarking Database	Hintsä, J., Wong, S., Rudzitis, N., Phan, H., Mommen, B., Hameri, AP., Heijmann, F., & Männistö, T. (2015). (Presented at the 10th PICARD conference).	Research triggered a follow-up process in WCO to explore in detail features and benefits of revenue benchmarking databases.

<p>Review of Accredited Operator Schemes: Enhancing the Competitiveness of Australia’s International Traders</p>	<p>Widdowson, D., Blegen, B., Kashubsky, M., & Grainger, A. (2014). (Presented at the Inaugural INCU Global conference and 10th PICARD conference).</p>	<p>This research project was a major catalyst in the introduction of the Australian Trusted Trader program by the Australian Government in 2015.</p>
<p>Customs Role in Minimising Negative Socioeconomic Impacts of Trafficking</p>	<p>Hints, J., Mohanty, S., Rudzitis, N., Fossen, C., & Heijmann, F. (2014). (Presented at the 9th PICARD conference).</p>	<p>Research helped multiple WCO members to better understand and articulate the value of customs to society.</p>

Source: authors. See also Hints (2014).

While the majority of papers and presentations in future PICARD conferences may remain of an independent academic research nature, and stand alone to an extent, it would be a good idea to encourage showcasing research projects and activities with a reasonable degree of practical relevance to the customs community.

As the last observation on PICARD conferences, the 8th conference held in Saint Petersburg, Russia in September 2013 for the first time included in its program a Youth Forum, which has now become a regular part of the conferences. The PICARD Youth Forum brings together customs students from various academic institutions and provides a great opportunity for them to participate in PICARD conferences, and to network and discuss their ideas and research on topics related to the conference with more experienced customs professionals and academics from around the world. As noted by the PAG, the Youth Forum complements the PICARD conference and strengthens the PICARD initiative as a whole, and provides an effective student-expert exchange platform (WCO, 2014).

4.3 World Customs Journal

The *WCJ* has remained the INCU’s flagship publication and is recognised as the leading international academic journal on customs matters. The journal continues to be published twice a year and 27 editions of the *WCJ* have been published to date (INCU, 2020f). The *WCJ* contributors represent a broad range of professionals including academics, students, researchers, and officials from customs administrations, the WCO, other government agencies, as well as practitioners from the private sector. The practitioner contributions that are published in the *WCJ* usually provide some excellent insights into the way in which customs administrations are seeking to address current and future challenges (Widdowson, 2008b).

Many papers presented at the annual PICARD conferences have been published in the *WCJ* after undergoing a rigorous peer-review process, and PICARD presenters are still encouraged to submit their papers for consideration to the *WCJ*. Through PICARD, the INCU has been focusing its research efforts on areas of specific relevance and importance to the WCO and customs administrations. A number of *WCJ* editions have focused on specific themes that are of particular importance to the WCO and the customs community including capacity building, trade facilitation, supply chain security, integrity, the impact of the Global Financial Crisis, and other topics. For example, the September 2019 edition of the *WCJ* included a section specifically dedicated to papers on data analytics based on a series of innovative WCO workshops on this topic (see for example Widdowson, 2019).

Widdowson (2015b, pp. 218–220) noted that applied research activities and projects have proven extremely valuable in informing strategic customs decision-making and provided examples of how academic research has a practical impact on customs decision-making. In particular, he describes how

a masters student in customs wrote a dissertation that was subsequently published in the *WCJ* (see Hesketh, 2010), ultimately forming a key element of the work of the European Union's CASSANDRA (Common Assessment and Analysis of Risk in Global Supply Chains) Framework Program 7 project which was seeking to make container security more efficient and effective (Widdowson, 2015b).⁷

Widdowson (2015b) also discussed a research project undertaken by CCES on how to improve the competitiveness of Australian international traders through the introduction of an 'Accredited Operator'-type of program in Australia. That research project was a major catalyst in the introduction of the Australian Trusted Trader program by the Australian Government in 2015 (see Charles Sturt University, 2020).

4.4 PICARD Advisory Group

The PAG is the central link for cooperation between the WCO and academia in the context of PICARD and it has served and continues to serve as a main mechanism for coordination of PICARD-related matters and activities. As the name suggest, the PAG has an advisory role, but over the years it has been instrumental in guiding the WCO PICARD agenda.

Since its establishment, the PAG has been meeting regularly to, among other things, discuss matters relating to the PICARD program's development and planning of the PICARD conferences. The PAG also monitors and advises the WCO on relevant academic developments including customs programs and research projects. The PAG played a key role in reviewing and updating the WCO Professional Standards and WCO recognition guidelines and developing the PICARD 2020 and 2030 Strategic Documents. The PAG has also played an important role in the development of the WCO Framework of Principles and Practices on Customs Professionalism and provided support to the WCO in relation to its other activities such as career development in Customs.

4.5 Professional Standards

The WCO Professional Standards have become the cornerstone initiative of the PICARD program. The standards have been instrumental in recognising Customs as a profession, which has never been done before at an international level, and recognised Customs as a legitimate area of academic pursuit (Widdowson, 2015b). The creation of the Professional Standards has enabled academic institutions to introduce internationally agreed standards into their customs curricula (WCO, 2008b). For the first time there was a clearly defined pathway to education in customs matters at bachelor and master's levels. These standards are now being used by universities around the world to develop new educational customs programs and to upgrade their existing programs to comply with international standards for academic qualifications for customs professionals from both the public and private sectors and thereby to raise the academic profile of the customs profession (Widdowson, 2015b). Over the years, several new academic institutions and research centres have emerged, actively pursuing training and education of customs officials and/or customs-related research and development functions.

The Professional Standards have also been used as a basis or a reference resource to support other WCO capacity building programs and activities such as the Leadership and Management Development Program (LMDP), People Development and the Framework of Principles and Practices on Customs Professionalism (WCO, 2010a; see also WCO, 2015). For example, the LMDP workshop has an entire module dedicated to strategic management and the Professional Standards (see WCO, 2012). As noted by the WCO (2019a), these standards have been widely disseminated and have guided modernisation efforts of customs administrations based on an 'investing in people' approach.

4.6 Recognition of university curricula

Clearly, prior to the introduction of the Professional Standards and related WCO recognition process, there were no internationally recognised customs university programs and international benchmarks for academic programs in Customs. The first academic programs were formally recognised by the WCO on 26 January 2010 at a ceremony at the WCO headquarters in Brussels, which was ‘a clear endorsement of the commitment shown by the universities over a period of many years to raise the academic standing of the customs profession’ (Widdowson, 2010, p. v). Since then, a number of academic institutions have applied for and attained WCO recognition of their educational programs. As of August 2020, twenty-five university programs (see Table 4) have been formally recognised by the WCO as meeting the Professional Standards.

Table 4: WCO-recognised academic programs 2010–2020

Program/course name	Institution/university name	Country	Recognition date
Graduate Certificate in International Customs Law and Administration	Centre for Customs & Excise Studies	Australia	January 2010
Graduate Certificate in Excise Studies	Centre for Customs & Excise Studies	Australia	January 2010
Graduate Diploma in International Customs Law and Administration	Centre for Customs & Excise Studies	Australia	January 2010
Graduate Diploma in Excise Studies	Centre for Customs & Excise Studies	Australia	January 2010
Master of Customs Administration	Centre for Customs & Excise Studies	Australia	January 2010
Master of International Customs Law and Administration	Centre for Customs & Excise Studies	Australia	January 2010
Master of Customs Administration, Law and Policy	University of Muenster	Germany	January 2010
Professional Bachelor program: Administration of Customs and Taxes	Riga Technical University	Latvia	January 2010
Professional Master program: Administration of Customs and Taxes	Riga Technical University	Latvia	January 2010
Baccalaureate in Customs Administration and Foreign Trade	University of Costa Rica	Costa Rica	November 2010
Licentiate in Customs Administration and Foreign Trade	University of Costa Rica	Costa Rica	November 2010
Master in Customs Administration and International Trade	University of Costa Rica	Costa Rica	November 2010
Graduate Diploma in Customs Administration	International Business and Law Institute, ITMO University	Russia	November 2010
Master of Foreign Economic Activity (Customs Field)	International Business and Law Institute, ITMO University	Russia	November 2010

Master of Business Administration (Customs Management)	East and Southern African Management Institute	Tanzania	March 2014
Bachelor of Border Management	Centre for Customs & Excise Studies, Charles Sturt University	Australia	July 2015
Master of Customs Administration	Centre for Customs & Excise Studies, Charles Sturt University	Australia	July 2015
Foreign Trade and Customs Expert	International School of Foreign Trade	Uruguay	July 2015
Specialist in Customs Affairs	North-Western Institute of Management, Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration	Russia	April 2016
Specialist in Customs Affairs	Russian Customs Academy	Russia	June 2018
Bachelor of Customs Administration	Shanghai Customs College	China	May 2018
Executive Master in Customs and Supply Chain Compliance	Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University	Netherlands	March 2019
Specialist in Customs Affairs	Al-Farabi Kazakh National University	Kazakhstan	March 2019
Specialist in Customs Affairs	Institute of Law and National Security, Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration	Russia	March 2020
Specialist in Customs Affairs	Samara State Technical University	Russia	March 2020

Source: authors, based on INCU (2020a).

WCO recognition has further promoted the importance placed on higher education and academic qualifications for customs managers. In turn, this has encouraged more competition among academic institutions to offer high-quality academic curricula, and the recognition by the WCO can be used by institutions to further assure the quality of their programs and services.

4.7 WCO-INCU MOU

The WCO and INCU have established a very open and productive working relationship since the start of PICARD, helping to support the objectives and members of both organisations. The activities mentioned in the MOU such as permitting reference to the professional association between each other in public documents and providing observer status at each other's annual meetings, are now well established and the MOU has formalised the relationship between the WCO and INCU as a long-term strategic alliance (INCU & WCO, 2009; INCU & WCO, 2012).

Since the signing of the MOU, the WCO and INCU have worked closely together in the PICARD program and they continue to explore opportunities to cooperate in various areas of interest to both organisations. The representatives of both organisations participate in each other's official meetings and events such as the WCO Capacity Building Committee, WCO Council meetings and the INCU annual general meetings, in order to stay apprised of each other's developments, activities and plans.

4.8 PICARD Strategic Document

As discussed earlier, the PICARD Strategic Document outlines the vision, strategy and key elements necessary to enhance the PICARD program (WCO, 2013; WCO, 2020a). According to the WCO (2013), to successfully implement the strategies outlined in the PICARD Strategic Document, strong cooperation between all PICARD stakeholders is the key and this has been occurring.

In addition to the PICARD instruments and initiatives discussed above, the WCO and INCU have worked collaboratively on other capacity building initiatives and programs such as the WCO's Columbus program, WCO E-Learning program, the WCO framework for customs professionalism (see WCO, 2015), career path development, and LMDP. The LMDP contains a common syllabus designed for Customs managers, based on the core components of the Professional Standards and there is a training module in the LMDP workshop that is focused on PICARD and Professional Standards (WCO, 2010b). The WCO (2013, p. 4) further noted that as it continues to roll out the LMDP, 'academic partners will continue to be involved in its delivery as well as in the potential acknowledgement of the programme as pre-learning to studies at their universities.'

Another major outcome and achievement of the PICARD program and the PICARD instruments outlined above is that they have significantly improved customs-academia dialogue and coordination as well as promoted and generated multilateral cooperation among all PICARD stakeholders and have spawned a multitude of other cooperative projects and activities which are difficult to quantify in this paper. These include a range of activities and projects relating to customs to academia, customs to customs, academia to academia, customs to private sector, and academia to private sector cooperation. Accordingly, there is now more multilateral cooperation among various PICARD stakeholders resulting from the introduction and roll out of these PICARD instruments.

4.9 PICARD Scientific Board

The PSB was established and commenced its operation in 2015, and since then it has played an active role in the peer review and selection of papers and presentations for PICARD conferences. To date the PSB has assisted the WCO with paper selections for six PICARD conferences and has reviewed over 250 papers and paper proposals. The PSB's contribution to this process has helped to ensure the quality and relevance of presentations and discussions at the PICARD conferences.⁸ Besides helping to ensure the quality and relevance of conference content and research results presented at the conference, the PSB has provided assistance with chairing PICARD conference panels and leading the discussions during the conference including, to some extent, assistance during the PICARD Youth Forum.

5. PICARD future directions

Having summarised PICARD instruments and their objectives, and having discussed the achievements and outcomes of these PICARD instruments and the PICARD program as a whole, this section will focus on the future directions of PICARD and will highlight areas where further improvements can be made.

5.1 General observations

The PICARD program has seen a rapid expansion, especially in the early years since its introduction and has evolved over time to respond to the changing environment facing Customs in the 21st century (WCO, 2010b). According to the WCO (2013), since the PICARD program's beginning, it has enjoyed a sound and productive partnership with academic institutions, which aims to create a cooperative framework, where customs administrations, customs practitioners and academic partners can work together and contribute to advance customs professionalism and customs-related research.

Looking at the objectives of the PICARD instruments and their respective resulting outcomes and achievements discussed above, it is apparent that the INCU network has been actively working to fulfil its objectives and to promote the academic standing of the customs profession, and as envisaged by Fonseca (2008), the INCU has proved to be an effective instrument for customs capacity building. While the cooperation between INCU and WCO under the MOU has been positive and satisfactory progress has been made, there is scope to do more and take this cooperation to the next level.

The benefits of the *WCJ*, which is published by the INCU, are twofold. First, it provides a platform through which research results are reported and disseminated; and second, it serves as a valuable reference resource for customs practitioners, academics, students, and other researchers as well as for the broader international community. In this regard, it is considered that the *WCJ* has firmly achieved its stated objectives. As a result of PICARD, there has been an emergence of other international and national academic journals on customs aspects, for example, the *Customs Scientific Journal (CSJ)*, which was first launched in April 2011 and has established itself as a reputable academic journal in which many academics who are active in PICARD publish their papers (see Kashubsky et al., 2016).

Looking at the PAG's role and purpose, it can be concluded that not only did it meet its objectives, but exceeded them, and it continues to play an important role in cooperation between the WCO and academia. Similarly, the PSB, established in 2015, has served its purpose well in that it has provided important support to the WCO with respect to PICARD conference paper selections, ensuring their quality and relevance, and to some extent provided assistance with chairing conference panels and leading the discussions during the conference.

As outlined above, the WCO Professional Standards and related WCO recognition process are probably the most significant instruments of PICARD. Not only have the Professional Standards been the central feature of the PICARD program and helped to establish and recognise Customs as a profession, they have also been widely disseminated and have guided modernisation efforts of customs administrations, as well as being used to support other WCO capacity building activities and programs (see WCO, 2010a; WCO, 2015). As a result of introducing the WCO recognition process to PICARD, customs administrations now have more options of WCO-recognised academic programs where they could potentially enrol their officers. Furthermore, WCO recognition is, in effect, a quality assurance process for academic programs in Customs, which ensures that the quality and content of the programs adheres to the Professional Standards. Looking at the list of academic programs that had been formally recognised by the WCO (see Table 4), it can be concluded that these PICARD instruments have truly achieved their stated aims and objectives.

Considering the PICARD developments and activities that took place since the adoption of the PICARD 2020 Strategic Document in 2013, while efforts aimed at achieving the vision and aims of the PICARD strategy have continued, two noticeable outcomes or outputs resulting from the implementation of the PICARD Strategic Document have been the review and adoption of the revised Professional Standards and associated curriculum recognition procedures and guidelines, and the development of the revised PICARD strategy in the form of the PICARD 2030 Strategic Document.

However, the PICARD cooperative partnership is not without shortcomings and there is scope for improvement and enhancement on a couple of PICARD fronts. Much has been achieved, but there is still much to be done. Widdowson (2011a) has pointed out that this unique customs-academia partnership under PICARD can be better utilised for the benefit of all stakeholders.

5.2 Meaningful research themes and topics

PICARD provides good opportunities for matchmaking between customs administrations (that is, research demand) and academia (that is, research supply). As Hintsä (2012) noted in his key witness report at the 7th PICARD conference in Morocco, ‘one should systematically collect and analyse research needs from customs administrations and share them with the academic community’. Similarly, Widdowson (2011a) highlighted the need to ensure that academic research remains demand-driven rather than supply-driven, otherwise it will not be valued, or it will not even be read by those who could potentially benefit from it. Although this has been done in PICARD, at least to some extent, since 2012, it would be beneficial to continue developing and implementing such matchmaking schemes to the maximum extent possible, in order to facilitate production of customs research with high practical relevance. Of course, one should not underestimate the potential difficulties relating to the sensitive nature of customs information and data and the multidisciplinary nature and high dynamics of the customs field (see Hintsä, 2006), but with joint efforts and some good will on the part of all key stakeholders (that is, the WCO, customs administrations and academia), the relevant challenges can be overcome.

Alongside a continuous process where real knowledge gaps articulated by customs experts play a key role in defining PICARD research themes and topics, researchers should explore options to exploit a variety of WCO groups, meetings and events for both collection of research data and dissemination of research outcomes. For example, the multi-year ‘AEO benefits’ research led by CBRA (see for example Hintsä et al., 2016) strongly benefited from survey data collected at the WCO Global AEO Conferences (years 2014, 2016 and 2018). Another example relates to dissemination of research outcomes. When going back to the first two years of PICARD, the key findings of the WCO-mandated study on ‘The 21st Century Supply Chain Model’ (Hintsä et al., 2007) were presented at the WCO Council Meeting in June 2007, feeding directly into broader WCO activity on ‘Customs in the 21st Century’ (see WCO, 2008d). Many opportunities and potential synergies lie in front of us, in the context of PICARD research and proactive collaboration between academics and customs practitioners.

Regarding several customs research themes and topics of fundamental importance, topped with a high degree of complexity and dynamics, one should consider repeating them at regular intervals in PICARD conferences and related Calls for Papers. One example from the past is the fast-evolving and complex topic of customs risk management, with the following three illustrative milestones, the earlier ones feeding into later ones:⁹ (i) risk management was first identified as a high priority research topic during the 1st PICARD conference in 2006 (Hintsä, 2006); (ii) the results of the WCO-mandated study to explore risk priority, technical and organisational issues in customs risk management were published in 2010 (Hintsä and Männistö, 2010; Hintsä et al., 2010); and (iii) European Union Horizon 2020 project ‘PROFILE: Enhancing Customs Risk Management with Big Data and Data Analytics’ was launched in 2018, with five WCO member administrations as end user partners (Männistö et al., 2019; Männistö and Hintsä, 2019). Regarding the future of PICARD, it is highly recommended to construct continuity regarding high priority customs research themes and topics.

Open Innovation remains to a large extent an underexplored opportunity in the world of Customs. In the future, PICARD could play a key role in scoping, publishing and organising calls for open innovation activities, such as challenge competitions, hackathons or crowdsourcing ideas. The European Union Horizon 2020 project Pan-European Network of Customs Practitioners (PEN-CP) (see for example Hintsä, 2019; Francis et al., 2019; Hintsä et al., 2018b) provides a practical example of a network where multiple customs administrations jointly identify needs and priorities for future innovations, which with help from academic partners are converted into conference themes as per the relevant Calls for Proposals, as well as similar announcements, covering a variety of innovation instruments.¹⁰ The first tangible step in this direction could take place, for example, in the form of a PEN-CP-PICARD co-organised ‘Customs Innovation Award’ competition, from 2020 onwards.

Ultimately, PICARD can provide a unique platform for identifying high priority customs research topics; enabling access to research data; publishing and disseminating the research outcomes; and even reporting back whether administrations have benefited from the results, in a ‘feedback-loop and continuous improvement’ style (Hints, 2012).

5.3 Balancing research and professionalism pillars

Another area of improvement relates to the PICARD conferences and implementation of the PICARD strategy, but it impacts the entire PICARD program. The first issue is that since 2014, the WCO has stopped producing the reports of the PICARD conferences. Accordingly, apart from short news items published by the WCO after the conclusion of each PICARD conference, which only briefly summarise conference highlights and key outcomes, there are no official records documenting the discussions that transpire at the PICARD conferences. This oversight can be easily corrected by the WCO by publishing the PICARD conference reports again, possibly beginning with the 2020 PICARD conference.

In the past, the annual PICARD conferences were jointly organised by the WCO, the INCU and the host academic institutions and/or customs administrations. However, since 2014, there appears to be little academic involvement in organising the PICARD conferences and the PAG’s role in planning the PICARD conferences appears to have been replaced with the PSB’s involvement in reviewing conference papers. Furthermore, in recent years the PICARD conference has become almost exclusively focused on research, presentation of research papers and reporting of research results. Relatively little attention and time is devoted to discussions and work relating to the professionalism pillar of the PICARD program, and to the implementation of the PICARD Strategic Document relating to customs professionalism. This impacts the entire PICARD program because the balance of interest and priorities appears to have largely shifted towards research, while more attention could be given to professionalism.

To ensure the continued success of such PICARD initiatives and instruments, Widdowson (2015b, p. 221), emphasises the importance of maintaining ongoing collaboration and a partnership approach between the key players and ‘working together to find practical solutions based on sound information and empirical evidence’. Therefore, the WCO could consider achieving a more equal balance between promoting research and promoting professionalism. The WCO can also place more effort into implementing ‘professionalism’ aspects of the PICARD Strategic Document. This may be done relatively easily by giving more significance to topics that address the implementation of the PICARD Strategic Document and by allocating adequate conference time to those topics. This would provide participants with an opportunity to debate those matters at the PICARD conferences and to help the PICARD conference regain its initial status as the PICARD instrument that guides the policy of the WCO on its engagement in the field of education and academic research. It would also help to pave the way for future directions for the PICARD program and to continue to develop new cooperative frameworks and structures as well new PICARD instruments for further advancement of PICARD.

In progressing further the implementation of the PICARD Strategic Document, the WCO could play a more active role in facilitating and encouraging various cooperative arrangements between PICARD stakeholders. While it is stated in the PICARD Strategic Document that customs administrations should enter into cooperative partnerships with their national academic institutions, the WCO could be more active in boosting and facilitating such collaborations among its members and local academic institutions and in encouraging national governments to place more significance on partnerships between Customs and academia.

6. Conclusion

From its inception in 2006, the PICARD program has come a long way. It developed rapidly and has remained a major dynamic capacity building program of the WCO. In short, it can be said that the program has been a success. The success of the PICARD program is a testament to the strong backing of the WCO leadership including former and present WCO Secretaries-General who have been supporters of PICARD from the start. The way the WCO has approached its partnership with academia is commendable and should serve as a good example for other international organisations that are developing cooperation and partnerships with academia.

While adequate progress has been made to date, there is scope for further improvement by all key players and stakeholders as well as scope to do and achieve more, and together to advance this customs-academia partnership. The PICARD instruments that have been put in place and discussed in this paper should remain key tools of the program and should be further promoted and utilised by all stakeholders.

As for the question of whether PICARD has met stakeholders' expectations, that question cannot be answered in this paper with certainty because the views of all stakeholders would need to be considered. However, in broad terms, it is considered that significant progress and a number of important achievements have been made for the benefit of both Customs and academia. It further can be concluded that the PICARD program and its key instruments have met their stated and intended objectives.

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Notes

- 1 The complete list of top ten research topics identified in the area of supply chain security, border security and port security management, in priority order: 1) analysing cost of security, 2) identifying efficient security measures and standards, 3) finding the right balance between security and facilitation, 4) identifying benefits of security measures and standards, 5) defining common security standards, 6) developing and testing new security technologies, 7) developing business–customs relationships, 8) risk reduction/prevention, 9) trade policies and 10) security legal systems (see Hintsä, 2006).
- 2 The members of the first PSB that was formed for the 2015 PICARD were: Iqbal Babayev, State Customs Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan (Azerbaijan); Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly, Professor, University of Victoria & Editor, *Journal of Borderland Studies* (Canada); Thomas Cantens, Technical Officer, WCO Research Unit & Researcher at the Centre Norbert Elias, School of Higher Studies in Social Sciences; Chang-Ryung Han, Technical Officer, WCO Research Unit; Juha Hintsä, Director, Cross-border Research Association (Switzerland); Rachel McGauran, Research Analyst, WCO Research Unit; Mick Moore, Professorial Fellow, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex & Chief Executive Officer of the International Centre for Tax and Development (United Kingdom); Christine Msemburi, Executive Director, WCO Regional Office for Capacity Building (East and Southern Africa); Cedric Parizot, Researcher, National Center for Scientific Research, Research and Studies Institute of the Arab and Muslim World, University of Aix-Marseille (France) & AntiAtlas; Mariya Polner, Policy Advisor, WCO Enforcement Sub Directorate; Gaël Raballand, Senior Public Sector and Governance Specialist, World Bank; David Widdowson, President, International Network of Customs Universities & Editor-in-Chief, *World Customs Journal* (Australia).
- 3 The four founding INCU institutions were the Centre for Customs and Excise Studies at the University of Canberra (Australia), University of Muenster (Germany), Riga Technical University (Latvia) and Cross-border Research Association (Switzerland).
- 4 For more information see PROFILE (2018).
- 5 For more information see PEN-CP (2018).
- 6 The AEO benefit research outcomes are also shared as an animation on CBRA's YouTube Channel (with over 5000 views as of September 2020). See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XIf-AjgLy_U
- 7 (i) For more information on the CASSANDRA project (see for example Hintsä and Uronen, 2012); (ii) the Framework Program 6 project INTEGRITY (Intermodal Global Door-to-door Container Supply Chain Visibility, 2008–2011), the predecessor project to CASSANDRA, was presented during the 3rd PICARD conference, in Shanghai Customs College (Hintsä, 2008); (iii) the Framework Program 7 project CORE (Consistently Optimised Resilient Secure Global Supply-Chains) became an important follow-up project for CASSANDRA; partners including WCO and CBRA (see for example Hintsä et al., 2018b).
- 8 It should be noted that the WCO Research Unit developed a methodology for the paper selection process which was communicated to members of the PSB at the time, and the key criteria for selecting papers were determined to be: (1) quality of the writing and analytical thinking; and (2) originality of the ideas presented (Ireland, 2015).
- 9 However, naturally, there are numerous other papers on customs risk management presented at the PICARD conferences.
- 10 PEN-CP provides following short definitions on the innovation instruments: (i) prototype grants – co-develop and field test promising technologies with customs practitioners; (ii) challenge competitions – submit your blueprint to solve a specific customs problem, and receive seed funding towards making it a reality; (iii) hackathons – unleash your IT development and programming skills, in an intensive session to design and pilot algorithms and tools for the brighter future of digital customs; (iv) crowdsourcing ideas – submit your out-of-the-box ideas to gain recognition and fame as a forward-thinking customs innovator; (v) innovation awards and prizes – share the outcomes of your innovative customs projects to claim a trophy of excellence; (vi) PEN-tournaments – demonstrate your skills in head-to-head competitions against other experts from the customs community; and (vii) expert reports – produce a consulting report on a specific topic of customs interest (see Pan-European Network of Customs Practitioners, 2020).

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Juha Hintsa

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