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Since 1987, British higher education has substantially expanded and experienced major changes in funding and structure. The former is now the responsibility of the Department of Education and Science, and what had been separate systems of universities and polytechnics have been joined to a unitary university system. But these external changes have not been matched by appropriate internal changes of values, purpose, and activity. As a result, Briatin now has a system which has become mass in its size and structure but which remains elite in its values. The author discusses these matters and describes a number of possible scenarios for the future.

Change and Continuity in Higher Education

From Elitist to Mass Participation

The five years between 1988 and 1993 were ones of rapid change for British higher education, unmatched in their impact since the period between 1964 and 1969 some 25 years earlier. The Robbins Report of 1963 created an environment of optimism and growth, and, as a result, a number of major developments in the subsequent five years: an expansion of student numbers and funding that more than matches recent experience; the creation of new universities; the transformation of colleges of advanced technology into universities; the start of polytechnics and The Open University; the establishment of the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) and of a new Department for Education and Science (DES); and a substantial increase in overseas student fees.

The post-Robbins expansion began higher education's initially slow march from elitist to mass participation. In the early 1960s, prior to Robbins, about 8 percent of the 18-year-old age group entered full-time higher education. The total number of full-time students was around 220,000, with just over 50,000 entering each year. Robbins estimated that the percentage of the age group in full-time higher education (the participation rate) might double to over 16 percent between the mid-Sixties and the early 1980s. However, by the early 1980s, the participation rate had risen only to about 13 percent.

Figure 1 shows what has happened since 1987. In the five years that followed, the participation rate almost doubled from 14.6 percent to 27.8 percent. First-year numbers overall increased by 72 percent in the five years from 260,000 to 446,000. The total enrollment growth has continued in 1993 and 1994, reflecting the increased intake in the preceding years.

Figure 1
U.K.Student Numbers

	1987	1992	% Increase
18-20 Participation Rate	14.6%	27.8%	90%
First Year Full- Time Entrants	260,000	446,000	72%
Full-Time	626,000	958,000	53%
Part-Time	367,000	486,000	32%
Total	993,000	1,444,000	45%

We can imagine what a shock this rapid growth has been to the higher education system compared to its crab-like progress over the previous two decades. Indeed, after the initial post-Robbins burst during the 1970s, the participation rate hardly changed and the small rise in numbers was a result of the increase in the 18-year-old population. But from 1987-92 there was an increase not only in the participation rate of 18 to 20 year-olds, but also in the rate for more mature students, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2
Mature Full-Time Students

	1987	1992
21-24 Participation Rate	6.7%	9.5%
% of First Year Undergraduates 21 & Over	26%	33%

We see that nearly 10 percent of the 21 to 24 age group entered full-time higher education in 1992. That group, together with those who are even older, now comprise a third of all new full-time undergraduates. In addition, given that almost all part-time students are 21 or over, the majority of new entrants in higher education overall are mature. Even for full-time students, the 18-year-old coming straight from school is, for many universities, a minority of their entrants. These changes in size and composition are not properly understood by many inside higher education, let alone by those outside.

Figure 3 indicates one more dimension of the changes since 1987: the gender balance is shifting due to a sharp rise in the percentage of women in higher education over the five years since then. As of now, the percentages of men and women are about evenly balanced.

Figure 3
Gender of U.K. Full-Time Students

	1987	1992	% Increase
Men	346,000	496,000	43%
Women	281,000	461,000	64%

Thus by the mid-1990s, Great Britain, in terms of numbers, has a larger, broader education system as a result of two major periods of expansion twenty years apart. But there have, of course, been other, more fundamental, changes since the 1960s.

Changes in Funding and Structure

The transfer of responsibility for universities from the Treasury to the newly created Department for Education and Science in 1964 marked the end of the hands-off approach to university finance. Prior to 1964, the Education Ministry did not deal with the universities. Funds were given by the Treasury direct to the University Grants Committee, made up of university representatives, which disbursed them to each university. Over the last 30 years, the practice of pushing a cheque through the letter box and walking away has changed. Governments and their funding agencies have increasingly wanted first to knock on the door, then to open the door, then to peek inside, then to walk inside, then to observe what they saw, then to ask questions, then to expect answers, then to suggest changes, and now and then to change the size of their cheques if the changes did not occur.

The establishment of the polytechnics in the late 1960s as a group of institutions with a national identity were bound, if they were successful, to lead to a greater national, and lesser local influence over their planning and governance. Indeed this happened over the years, culminating in 1992 in the final transformation that eliminated the binary division of institutions into universities and polytechnics. The CNAA's successful role in quality assurance and development for the public sector in the 25 years after Robbins eventually led to the translation of its principles to the whole of higher education, with much greater central oversight of the allocation of state funds. Details of the current funding process can be found in the article by Tim Wilson in the previous issue of *Metropolitan Universities*. In addition, the raising of overseas student fees in the late 1960s began a process that continued through the 1970s and 1980s towards full costing of such fees and, more significantly, to the development of an entrepreneurial approach to all sources of income other than that provided by the state.

Finally, there is the change in the level of funding. The earlier expansion of the 1960s was fully funded both for recurrent and capital expenditures. In contrast, the more recent growth has been accompanied by severe reductions in unit funding, more intensive use of buildings, and minimal public contribution to capital development. For example, funding per student fell by more than 25 percent between 1987 and 1992. This may be all that is needed to explain why the post-Robbins changes took place in a mood of optimism and confidence about the future while the more recent ones have been accompanied by pessimism and gloom. But I believe the reasons are deeper and more profound.

External and Internal Worlds

The changes of growth, funding, and structure of institutions are concerned essentially with the *external* world of higher education, those issues that are decided for higher education primarily by others, particularly government and its agencies. These do not cover the *internal* issues of values and purposes, of curricula, and of teaching and learning that higher education determines much more for itself. One hybrid of external and internal worlds is student number growth, the quantitative measures of the move from elite to mass higher education. From one perspective, this is an internal issue, for it is higher education itself that determines how many students it wishes to enroll. However, as Tim Wilson discusses in his article, this internal decision is heavily influenced by external factors. The rapid growth of the early 1990s was in part a response to the government-imposed financial squeeze and funding policies. The 25 percent reduction in funding per student fueled expansion, as institutions found it easier to manage problems created through declining unit costs by taking advantage of the economies of scale that result from growth.

The contrast between the changes in the external and internal worlds of higher

education over the past 30 years is stark. For while the external changes in the 1987-1992 period can be seen as further developments of the post-Robbins changes, the focus in the internal issues is of continuing debate rather than change. Moreover, in some instances the debate seems hardly to have moved on in the past 30 years.

Credit accumulation and transfer is a good example. This system, used throughout higher education in the United States, allows for flexibility and greater student choice. The issue was raised in the Robbins Report and its first major introduction came in 1970 with the credit-based operation of The Open University, which then began a search for agreements with traditional institutions on the transferability of its credits. It is this transferability and the need to create a system of credits that can be applied across universities which has created the difficulties in Great Britain. In 1979, the DES funded a major feasibility study. A government-sponsored report in the early 1980s advocated its widespread development but, significantly, recognized that the reform "was one of the hardest to implement." The CNAA established its own national scheme in the early 1980s and some regional schemes and consortia were also developed. Yet, despite many projects and numerous reports, DES felt it necessary to set up yet another study in 1991, resulting in 1994 in a major report again advocating the development of a credit system. The initial response does not give grounds for optimism that any rapid changes will occur.

This crab-like process of change is experienced in many other areas of higher education's internal life. Robbins advocated more degree courses covering a broader knowledge of a range of subjects rather than a deeper knowledge of one subject. There is also in Robbins' discussion of the aims of higher educatio—a hint of the need to inculcate what has become known in the last decade as "transferable personal skills." Progress has been made in both these areas. The broadening of degree courses' curricula has been led by the polytechnics while, in recent years, the Enterprise in Higher Education project has influenced perceptions of the personal skills higher education can provide for its graduates. However, in the hierarchy of esteem, the supremacy remains of a curriculum focused on a single discipline that pays little regard to either of these elements.

Teaching and learning are other areas of slow change. Robbins discusses the virtues and vices of lectures and tutorials, yet these are still the main forms of teaching most students in higher education. There have been numerous reports, many pilot projects, regular programs of support, and some very exciting pockets of innovation in many institutions. Most of it, however, is marginal and unsystematized. Too often, the emphasis is on the technology rather than on pedagogic problems. The hardware and software available to improve, enrich, and make more effective and efficient the learning experiences of our students has moved far beyond the interest and capacity of most staff in higher education to use. Indeed the greatest progress might be made by persuading academics to use the technology of the last

decade more effectively rather than tackling the technology of the years ahead. Many academics are opposed to making any significant changein their approach to teaching, their view best exemplified perhaps by this splendid excerpt from a 1991 letter to the newspaper *The Guardian* from a lecturer (associate professor) at Nottingham University:

> I do not wish to be a teacher, I am employed as a lecturer and in my naivety I thought my job was to 'know' my field, contribute to it by research and to lecture on my specialism! Students attend my lectures but the onus to learn is on them. It is not my job to teach them.

New Institutions

The end of the 1960s saw the establishment of new institutions of higher education. Some like The Open University and the polytechnics were outside the traditional framework of the university system. Even though The Open University had university title and powers, it was separately funded by DES, and its vice-chancellor was not initially a member of the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals (CVCP). The polytechnics had neither university titles nor their degree-granting powers, and were subject to greater regulation and a completely separate funding system. This contrasted with the establishment of the new universities such as Lancaster, Essex, and Kent, and the implementation of the Robbins recommendation that the colleges of advanced technology, such as Aston and Bath, should be designated technological universities. Both the new and the technological universities were integrated into the existing system.

The establishment of The Open University and the polytechnics as separate systems was an admission that their missions were not being delivered and could not be delivered by the traditional universities. In the former case, the focus was on adults seeking a second or, in some cases, a first opportunity. In the latter case it was professional and vocational higher education more closely integrated with the world of employment.

Both these innovations have undoubtedly been successful on their own terms. They have delivered what they were set up to do. In fact, virtually all the innovations that have occurred in the internal life of higher education since the 1970s have been led by The Open University and the polytechnics. Both, in their different ways, have shown that access need not lead to lower standards and that a far greater proportion of the population than was previously imagined can benefit from and succeed in higher education. Both have pioneered modularization and credit transfer. The Open University has shown the benefits to be gained in quality and student satisfaction from a systematic approach to teaching and learning that uses modern media intelligently and effectively. The polytechnics have broadened the curriculum

base and shown how professional and vocational higher education can maintain rigor and reflection.

Yet there is little evidence until recently that their experience has had much impact on the traditional universities. This is not surprising. The very establishment of different institutions, structurally distinct to carry out different functions, legitimizes the traditional role of traditional institutions and is a barrier to change permeating them. Their defenders can argue that if it is the role of The Open University to cater to adults and the polytechnics to be more vocationally oriented, there is little point in others competing in the same market. Similar arguments can be applied to The Open University's teaching approach, which may be appropriate for the needs of distance learning, but may not be suited to traditional campus life. Credit accumulation also may be appropriate to the inevitably fragmented nature of Open University study, but cannot be applied to the more intensive experience of traditional higher education with its more specialized degrees. And while it is understandable for the polytechnics, with their need to recruit students, to create new markets with new combinations of subjects and new areas of study, the traditional universities have no need for such gimmicks.

As a result, the very recent move to mass higher education system is manifested more in the external than the internal world of higher education. We have a system that has become mass in its size and structure but that remains elite in its values. The recent external changes of numbers, structures, finance, and governance have not been matched by appropriate internal changes of values, purpose, and activity.

The structural changes of the early 1990s that combined the universities and the polytechnics into a single system of universities are, therefore, very significant. They can be seen as an attempt to create change through integration rather than separation, and thus trigger change from within. This is a bold move. Most observers are pessimistic about the outcome, believing that the "aristocratic embrace" of the traditional universities will smother the innovative jabs and prods of the former polytechnics and The Open University. We will see.

Elite and Mass Higher Education

In 1994, Peter Scott, in his inaugural lecture as Professor of Education at Leeds University, characterized the persistent elite values as a desire for intimacy. This intimacy is reflected in the affirmation of collegiality, narrowness of curricular structures, standardization of student profiles, conformity to the traditional patterns and styles of teaching, and the attraction of individual and small group research. Scott argues that it is the "loss of intimacy" experienced with mass higher education which creates ambivalence about the recent changes.

The ambivalence is shared by most universities that understand the mass nature of the current experience they offer students (and staff) but continue to affirm the

romantic intimacy experienced by previous generations. Nowhere is this better expressed than in the information provided in the prospectus. Ernest Boyer, reflecting on his perusal of catalogues in the U.S. (but whose observations could equally apply to the U.K.) commented as follows:

> I was impressed with the way 'family' and 'community' found their way into the language [of the catalogues]. Indeed, I then studied all the pictures and I was impressed that they too conveyed this close connection between faculty and students. From the pictures alone I concluded that about 60 percent of all classes in America are held outside, underneath a tree by a gently flowing stream."

The post-Robbins changes 30 years ago were safe and limited. It was assumed that different functions required different types of institutions that in any event were expected to accept the values and mores of the traditional institutions. The CNAA, for example, was expected to ensure that its awards were "comparable in standards to awards granted and conferred by universities." The system as a whole might have been opening up, but there was little challenge to elite values and the structure itself created a differentiated hierarchy of esteem, power, and funding.

The changes of the 1990s are much more risky, seeking integration, not separation. They have occurred at a time when the move to a mass higher education system has seemingly gone beyond the political point of no return. The clash between elite values and that mass system is a daily feature of academic life. How is it to be resolved?

A Look to the Future

Given British experience and temperament, perhaps the safest assumption is that it will not be resolved and that we will continue to muddle through with a mass system externally and an elite system internally. By the end of the century, the 18-year-old, full-time participation rate might rise from 30 to 40 percent, but the group of 18-year-olds will be a minority overtaken by mature students both in full-time and part-time higher education. Yet the system, its funding, and its structure will still assume the dominance of the 18-year-old full-timer. And the media will continue to represent higher education in terms of Oxbridge. In this situation, the tension will remain stretched almost to breaking point but as always not quite breaking, as we all adjust to new realities.

It is a depressing scenario of more of the same. But it is not inevitable. There are other options. We might revert to an elite external system to restore harmony with the existing elite internal system. Alternatively, we might change the internal values of higher education to enable it to reflect better the mass external world in which it now operates.

A Return to Elitist Higher Education?

Higher education has remained elite in its internal world. Can it match this by a reversal to elitism in its external world? At first sight it would seem difficult to substantially reduce the numbers admitted to higher education, seek a much more homogenous student body, increase the resources spent per student, and redivide the sector on binary or even ternary lines. However, we must remember that the mass system, in terms of size, is of only recent experience and might not be firmly based. Moreover, a single system of finance and a unitary structure are capable of being manipulated to recreate old divisions or hierarchies, battles that are currently being fought. Furthermore, a mechanism for bringing all this about is available and attracting increasing support. And that is private funding.

As I indicated earlier, the recent expansion has been funded at a declining rate, so that while total expenditures have risen by some 25 percent, spending per student has fallen by about the same amount. Most observers, the latest being the Labour Party's Commission on Social Policy, now believe that full state funding of higher education cannot continue. Already part-time students pay fees, and full-time students or their families increasingly contribute to their maintenance costs either directly or through loans. What are the possible consequences of further increasing private contributions to the costs of higher education, and in particular, of beginning to charge the tuition fees that are increasingly suggested?

Charging students tuition fees on top of asking them to contribute increasingly to their maintenance costs could have profound effects on the move to mass higher education in the following ways:

- Some universities would be able to charge significant top-up fees generating income well above current levels, which would enable them to offer a higher level of resources and quality of service.
- These universities could use some of this income to offer scholarships to those they wished to attract but who were unable to pay the fees. In this way they would attract both the wealthiest and most able students.
- Except for this small number of students obtaining scholarships, opportunities for full-time, higher education, particularly away from home, would be re stricted even more to those with parents in the upper income group.
- Full-time enrollments would drop. Some students would no doubt switch to part-time or a mixture of the two. Higher education, having marched to the top of the hill in participation rates for 18-year-old full-timers, could just as swiftly march right down again to less than 15 percent, the rates of a decade ago.
- The elite institutions, whose values would dominate the system, would be able to charge high top-up fees in a declining market, attracting full-time students nationally to a well-resourced experience with little innovation in course struc-

tures, curricula content, and teaching and learning strategies. The majority of universities, particularly if public expenditures fell would find themselves in a downward spiral of resources, a narrower, increasingly part-time student clientele, desperately seeking to maintain quality, lacking the resources to innovate, and at the same time being compared unfavorably with the performance of the elite universities. Some, inevitably, would close.

This is a depressing but not impossible scenario. It is possible because the internal life of higher education remains elite and because the external life could be radically altered through changes to the funding system.

Making Internal Changes

The more desirable alternative is to match the diversity created by the changes in the external life of higher education by diversity in its inner life also. This will not be easy. As Martin Trow (1989) has pointed out, the British are ambivalent about the idea of diversity and tend to substitute marginal differences for genuine diversity.

Part of the ambivalence is a concern for boundaries. An elite system draws its boundaries in clear but narrow terms. The fear, sometimes unspoken, is that a mass and diverse system has elastic or even no boundaries and that within it anything goes. Thus attempts are made to define what characterizes a university that are often in elite terms and most usually in terms of its research and disciplinary focus. Scott, as mentioned earlier, describes these elite values as "a desire for intimacy," although to the outsider it sometimes seems more like a desire for inertia. Moreover, the research and disciplinary emphasis, far from producing the collegiality that is claimed for elite higher education, more often produces internecine intellectual warfare in which collegiality is almost the last value being affirmed.

I believe that there are boundaries to what constitutes higher education, but that these are not formed by the anachronistic teaching/research divide. For help I turn again to Ernest Boyer and his recent report, *Scholarship Reconsidered*, well known to most American readers of this journal. Boyer argues that the defining characteristic of higher education is scholarship and proposes a four-part paradigm of scholarship: the scholarship of discovery, the scholarship of integration, the scholarship of application, and the scholarship of teaching.

It is scholarship in all these dimensions to which universities must be dedicated but each university will vary in the emphasis it gives to each dimension. Some will wish to concentrate on the scholarship of discovery. But a genuinely diverse system must give equal status, esteem, and recognition to other forms of scholarship. In particular, the scholarship of teaching must be elevated and rewarded. The diversity tof the student clientele that has been achieved since the late 1980s will only be sustained if it is matched by diversity in the structure of courses and awards offered

to them, in the range of curricula available, in the modes of attendance allowed, in he pedagogic styles and techniques applied, and in the range of assessments offered. The scholarship of teaching is vital to all those developments.

To achieve that, however, not only must we embrace a wider definition of scholarship but of excellence too. The elite system recognizes and rewards only one form of excellence—research. Indeed, the most telling evidence of the dominance of these values in our culture is the assumption, at all levels among informed and uninformed opinion, that the excellent universities are those with the strongest research records. A genuinely mass and diverse higher education system would apply the term excellent to all the dimensions of scholarship, not only to disciplinary research but to the synthesis of knowledge and its application, and most importantly to teaching. It would give rewards, recognition, and status to those who seek to make higher education diverse rather than narrow.

The external changes of recent years in numbers, structure, governance, and finance have been momentous and their implications are still being absorbed. But for all the upheaval they have created, they may be only surface deep. The internal values of higher education remain largely rooted in the pre-Robbins period of 30 years' ago and more. The external changes and the objectives of wider opportunity, greater diversity, and a more educated and trained society for meeting the needs of our nation cannot be sustained without changes to these internal values also. It will not be easy, because these values are not only deeply embedded in the reward system of the higher education community itself, but also in the consciousness of wider society. And that is why these changes cannot be left to higher education alone.

Suggested Readings

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Historically, most universities have been associated with cities, but the relationship between "the town and the gown" has often been distant or abrasive. Today the metropolitan university cultivates a close relationship with the urban center and its suburbs, often serving as a catalyst for change and source of enlightened discussion. Leaders in government and business agree that education is the key to prosperity, and that metropolitan universities will be on the cutting edge of education not only for younger students, but also for those who must continually re-educate themselves to meet the challenges of the future.

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