

TEN YEARS

Changing higher education in a changing world

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The anniversaries to be celebrated in this report are all very approximate. The first and most minor of these – close to home – is the tenth anniversary of the creation of the Centre for Higher Education Research and Information (CHERI) at the Open University. Originally called the Quality Support Centre, CHERI was created at the end of 1992 as a result of the demise of the Council for National Academic Awards in the same year. The Council's research and development activities were transferred to the Open University, along with some of the staff who had provided them. The demise of the CNAA was a part of a much larger - but also approximate - anniversary of the ending of the binary division in British higher education, involving the creation of over thirty new universities out of the former polytechnic sector.

CHERI's activities have evolved during its ten years of existence and today focus on the changing relationship between higher education and society, nationally and internationally, and comprise research projects, consultancies, publications, conferences and seminars. This report provides some information about CHERI's activities, past and present.

But it also offers some perspectives on the relationship between higher education and society by including original articles on some of the major changes that have been occurring in this relationship and in which CHERI's activities have become involved, albeit in quite minor ways. Thus, in addition to the ending of the binary division in the UK and the massive expansion of higher education that occurred shortly thereafter, the report looks also at the changing role of universities in post-communist central and eastern Europe and in post-apartheid South Africa. A final article considers the world-wide growth in higher education quality assurance activities and agencies in the last ten years.

These articles are written by CHERI staff and by friends of CHERI. Although quite a small centre, CHERI has undertaken many large-scale activities through partnerships and collaborations with other universities, agencies and individuals in many parts of the world. Some of these are listed at the end of this report.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND SOCIETY IN POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA

Saleem Badat¹

Introduction

Social, political and economic inequalities of a class, race, gender, institutional and spatial nature generated by apartheid profoundly shaped, and to differing degrees continue to shape, all spheres of social life, including higher education (HE) in contemporary South Africa. In this context, government and the public have high expectations of HE in post-1994 democratic South Africa to transform itself and to also make a powerful contribution to the transformation of society.

The inherited HE system was essentially designed to reproduce, through teaching and research, white privilege and black subordination in all spheres of society. All higher education institutions were, in differing ways and to differing extents deeply implicated in this. HE was also fragmented and divided along racial and ethnic lines, and reflected severe social inequalities of 'race' and gender with respect to student access and success and the composition of academic staff. The serious current under-representation of black and women students in particular fields and at postgraduate level and the domination of the academic labour force and knowledge production and of high level occupations and professions by white and male South Africans are eloquent testimony to the apartheid legacy.

Thus, one key policy imperative of democratic South Africa is to transform HE so that it becomes more socially equitable internally and promotes social equity more generally by providing opportunity for social advancement through equity of access and opportunity.

Previously, research and teaching were extensively shaped by the socio-economic and political priorities of the apartheid separate development programme. Instead, HE is now called on to address and become responsive to the development needs of a democratic South Africa. These needs are crystallised in the *Reconstruction and Development Programme* of 1994 as a fourfold commitment. First is 'meeting basic needs of people'. Second is 'developing our human resources'. Third is 'building the economy', and finally is the task of 'democratising the state and society'.

Finally, South Africa's transition occurs in a context of globalisation and a global economy in which economic growth is increasingly dependent on knowledge and information. However, an uncritical embrace of globalisation and unadulterated integration into the global economy, are highly unlikely to enable South Africa to achieve 'political democratisation, economic reconstruction and development, and redistributive social policies aimed at equity' (*Education White Paper 3, 1997*). The challenge for HE is to produce through research and teaching and learning programmes the knowledge and personpower that will enable South Africa to engage pro-actively, critically and creatively with globalisation and participate in a highly competitive global economy.

The overall context of the challenges for HE is well captured by *Education White Paper 3 of 1997, A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education*:

(T)he South African economy is confronted with the formidable challenge of integrating itself into the competitive arena of international production and finance....

Simultaneously, the nation is confronted with the challenge of reconstructing domestic social and economic relations to eradicate and redress the inequitable patterns of ownership, wealth and social and economic practices that were shaped by segregation and apartheid (emphasis added).

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CHERI in Africa...

- South Africa is participating in the CHERI/ACU project on *The role of universities in the transformation of societies*. Nigeria and Senegal are the other African countries involved in the project.

- CHERI's John Brennan was an international member of a team that reviewed South Africa's quality assurance arrangements and is currently a member of the South African Higher Education Quality Committee's international reference group.

- Mala Singh, director of the South African Higher Education Quality Committee, is a visiting associate of CHERI.

- CHERI's Yann Lebeau is a member of the advisory panel of the research initiative on the 'public roles of Universities in Africa', launched by the Social Science Research Council (SSRC, NY) in 2001.

Social purposes of higher education

The high expectations of HE are well reflected by the various, and indeed diverse, *social purposes* that HE is being called upon to serve. These are:

- Attention to the pressing local, regional and national needs of the South African society and to the problems and challenges of the broader African context
- The mobilisation of human talent and potential through lifelong learning to contribute to the social, economic, cultural and intellectual life of a rapidly changing society
- Laying the foundations of a critical civil society, with a culture of public debate and tolerance which accommodates differences and competing interests
- The training and provision of personpower to strengthen this country's enterprises, services and infrastructure. This requires the development of professionals and knowledge workers with globally equivalent skills, but who are socially responsible and conscious of their role in contributing to the national development effort and social transformation
- The production, acquisition and application of new knowledge: ...a well-organised, vibrant research and development system which integrates the research and training capacity of HE with the needs of industry and of social reconstruction

The social demands on HE are also manifested in the core values that it is required to advance – equity, quality, democracy, development and academic freedom – and the various goals that have been defined for the system and for institutions. These include:

- 1 Increased and broadened participation within HE to meet personpower needs and advance social equity – crucial given the history of disadvantage of black, women and disabled South Africans, especially of working class and rural poor origins
- 2 The establishment of a national, integrated, co-ordinated and differentiated HE system and extensive academic and other collaboration especially between institutions in close geographical proximity. This is vital if the inherited racially structured HE landscape, which is more the product of the 'geopolitical imagination of apartheid planners' that any rational planning, is to be transcended
- 3 Improved national steering and institutional planning and management, including the development of three-year institutional plans to ensure focused institutional missions and greater effectiveness and efficiency
- 4 Enhancement of quality and quality assurance through the accreditation of programmes, programme evaluations and institutional audits and quality promotion by the HE Quality Committee of the Council on HE
- 5 A new framework for the funding of public HE that is directed towards the achievement of the new policy goals and objectives
- 6 Good governance and effective management and administration of HE through co-operative governance of the system and institutions, partnerships and capacity building initiatives
- 7 A new academic policy framework for the offering of qualifications and programmes, including their incorporation within a National Qualifications Framework designed to promote articulation, mobility and transferability
- 8 Curriculum restructuring and knowledge production that is responsive to societal interests and needs.

Overall, the goal is the development of a HE system characterised by equity, quality and excellence, responsiveness and effective and efficient provision, governance and management. Many of the goals and initiatives advanced are, of course, not unique to South African HE, but taken together and being part of a

reconstruction and development programme mean that the HE transformation agenda is comprehensive and of a fundamental nature. Of course, such an agenda has major financial and human resource implications that will unavoidably shape the trajectory, dynamism and pace of the implementation and the achievement of policy goals and objectives.

Critical issues

South African HE has considerable strengths. In a number of areas of learning and teaching, its institutions offer academic programmes that produce high quality graduates with knowledge, competencies and skills to practice occupations and professions anywhere in the world. Various areas of research are characterised by excellence and the generation of high quality fundamental and applied knowledge for scientific publishing in local and international publications, and for economic and social development and innovation and public policy. In a variety of areas, there are also important and innovative community service initiatives that link academics and students and communities.

The extent and pace of the deracialisation of the student body and of many institutions must be a source of pride and celebrated as a considerable achievement, as must be the extent of internationalisation of the student body's and activities of some institutions. To address changing economic and social and educational needs there have been considerable efforts on the part of various institutions to be more developmentally responsive and build a greater outward focus. In the face of declining levels of public subsidies, some institutions have embarked on a range of innovative and entrepreneurial activities to tap new sources of income for financial sustainability. Overall, to the extent that it continues to face up to its critical challenges, some of which are noted below, South African HE has great promise to contribute to the economic and social development needs of South Africa, the Southern African region and the African continent.

- 1 First, the transformation agenda in South Africa, including within HE, is riveted with paradoxes. That is to say, government and institutions are impelled to pursue *simultaneously*, a number of goals and strategies that stand in severe tension with one another. This establishes difficult political and social dilemmas and choices and decisions. Key actors have to creatively address the paradoxes and find the policies and strategies that can satisfy multiple imperatives, can *balance* goals and enable the pursuit of equally desirable goals. Trade-offs are inevitable and a consciousness that they are being made and an understanding of their implications for goals is important.
- 2 Second, it is vitally important that the responsiveness and contribution of HE to the needs of the economy are expanded. However, it is also necessary to guard against a number of dangers. On the one hand, there seems to be a thrust from certain sectors towards HE qualifications and programmes that are focused on a narrow skilling and excessive vocationalism. The appropriateness of such an approach must be questioned on a number of grounds. First, it flies in the face of the principle of holding education and training together. Second, it does not seem to grasp the kind of personpower that is required for a changing and increasingly 'knowledge' economy. Finally, the prospects of social advancement for those who are narrowly skilled may be unwittingly limited.

The second danger is to analyse labour market demand in a way that focuses on quantitative issues alone. A key issue is the changing nature of the jobs held by HE graduates today. A HE response to labour market needs requires investigation of what are the knowledge, skills, competencies, capacities and attitudes required by the South African economy and society generally and by its different constituent parts specifically.

It is also dangerous to blithely assume that the production of high level personpower in the natural science, technology, engineering and other fields in HE will in itself have transformative effects, irrespective of the 'external'

institutional and structural order. In other words, the formation of personpower through HE is a *necessary condition* but it is not a *sufficient condition* for reconstruction and development and global competitiveness and innovation. It depends on knowledge and skills but also on the values and attitudes of graduates, and whether there is a receptive institutional economic environment outside of HE - in particular, investment capital, venture capital and the openness and receptivity of the business sector and enterprises – that can put high level graduates to work.

Finally, concern must be signalled about the restricted notion of 'responsiveness' that has emerged in recent years in contrast to the elaborate, broad and 'thick' notion of the social responsiveness of HE that is required to give effect to the social purposes and goals defined for HE. As Mala Singh notes, the 'social responsiveness in the discourse on HE transformation is being thinned down and reduced to the terms of market responsiveness'.² Further, 'the traditional knowledge responsibilities of universities (research as the production of new knowledge, teaching as the dissemination of knowledge, and community service as the applied use of knowledge for social development) are increasingly being located within the demands of economic productivity and its requirements for particular kinds of knowledge and skills' (ibid.) The danger, of course, is that the 'the notion of responsiveness (could become) emptied of most of its content except for that which advances individual, organisational or national economic competitiveness' (ibid.).

HE is, of course, crucial for the production of skilled and trained personpower and for the production of knowledge for economic growth and development and its contributions in this regard must occupy the minds of HE leaders. However, the function of HE cannot be reduced to the production of graduates and/or research related to the needs of the labour market and business alone. The consequences of such a one-dimensional approach to HE responsiveness could be greatly impoverishing for the broader social role of HE. The responsiveness of HE to the general and specific needs of the economy can only be a subset of a more complex and multi-faceted notion of responsiveness. It is vital that, in a country like South Africa, where HE transformation is part of a larger process of democratic reconstruction, social responsiveness is not entirely subsumed to economic responsiveness.

- 3 Third, the strengths of South Africa in policy formation have not necessarily been matched in the crucial arenas of the planning of policy implementation and actual policy implementation. Creative change management is, of course, critical to successful transformation. Yet, the remarkable intellectual ingenuity, creativity, and inventiveness, the strategic and tactical acumen, and the stolid purpose that was prevalent in ridding South Africa of tyranny and fashioning its democracy have sometimes been all too lacking in the innovation of the technologies, instruments, mechanisms and processes of transformation.

On the one hand the weakness around strategies of change may be a symptom of the under-theorisation of or/and difficulty in theorising change under new conditions. The key issues here include the roles of state and HE institutions and organisations; possibly differing conceptions of co-operative governance; notions of autonomy and accountability in a post-apartheid democracy; the appropriate balance in specific areas between institutional self-regulation and central prescription, the differing preoccupations, exigencies and capacities of key actors and institutional mechanisms for ongoing consensus-building and policy engagement within stipulated timeframes. On the other hand, it could also be related to the dearth of personpower with the requisite specialist expertise and experience of initiating and managing system and institutional change.

² Singh, M (2001) *Reinserting the public good in HE transformation*. Kagisano, CHE HE Discussion Series, No. 1, November

- 4 Fourth, conceptualising, managing, legislating, planning and implementing a comprehensive transformation agenda is a massive undertaking. It is not possible to overemphasise the enormity of the restructuring that South Africa seeks to undertake. It places huge pressures and demands on the Ministry of Education, key HE organisations and institutions and on the need for financial and expert human resources. It requires sober, careful, comprehensive and realistic planning. Comprehensive national and institutional level implementation plans – indicating strategies, structures and instruments, available financial resources, sources of expert personpower, time frames, etc. – become vital. It becomes a major test of whether the Ministry of Education and the South African state more generally can function in a genuinely developmental manner, not only within HE but also, crucially, at the *confluence* of HE, the wider science and technology system and economic and social sectors.

Conclusion

Much is expected and required of HE. Certainly, HE can contribute to social transformation, and to do so requires that it itself becomes an equitable, high quality, dynamic and economically and socially responsive ensemble of learning and teaching, research and community service. However, HE cannot *on its own* transform the economic and social structures and practices of wider South African society. This requires other and simultaneous economic, political and social interventions.

An enabling HE policy framework that includes thoughtful state supervision, effective steering, predictability in policy and adequate public funding is a corollary for optimising the contribution of HE. However, while hugely important, an enabling policy framework on its own is not enough unless it is supported and reinforced by facilitative economic and social policy frameworks.

The Ministry of Education's commitments to increasing enrolments and the participation rate and to access and equity are, notwithstanding significant increases in contributions, handicapped by the inadequacy of the budget devoted to the National Student Financial Aid Scheme. The creation of equity of opportunity and enhancement of quality are retarded by no or limited funding for academic development programmes at institutions. There has thus far also been limited funding to effect the institutional redress that is essential to enable historically disadvantaged institutions to produce research and high quality graduates as part of serving new social purposes and goals in a new HE landscape.

In reality, a comprehensive HE transformation agenda has confronted an inadequately supportive macro-economic policy and fiscal environment and financial constraints that have inevitably affected the contribution and potential impact of HE to social transformation.

HIGHER EDUCATION IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE: A TURBULENT REFORM PROCESS

Andrée Sursock¹

Post-industrial economies and globalisation have placed knowledge at the centre of economic development. Although the rise of the knowledge society has been some time in coming, awareness of its importance is slowly becoming clearer in Europe. In fact, the first European statements on these issues resulted from meetings of the EU Council in Lisbon (2000) and Barcelona (2002) but, despite the recognition that the “knowledge economy” was a challenge to be met, the role and potential contribution of higher education were only implicitly recognised.

In this perspective, have universities in central and eastern Europe contributed to their region’s economic, political and social development and to the creation of a knowledge economy? The answer to this question is mixed.

The Soviet period

The years spent in the Soviet orbit led to sweeping changes in higher education throughout the region, in particular in the splitting of research in the science academies, the fragmentation into overly specialised universities and the close monitoring of ideologically prone disciplines, such as the social sciences and the humanities.

In addition, while secondary education was theoretically open to all, higher education participation rates were low (averaged ten per cent) and produced a small intelligentsia, some of whose members were issued from and destined to feed into the political leadership class. The revolving door between academia and government was a consequence of the small elite size and, although students did play a political role in 1956, 1968, 1981 or 1989 in several countries, universities were not necessarily a hotbed of change everywhere.

Finally, in many countries universities were characterised by:

- weak central leadership, compounded by: line-item budgeting, money flowing directly to faculties, and ministerial appointment and management of staff as well as of student admissions and scholarship grants;
- lack of co-operation across faculties that led to inefficiencies and lack of interdisciplinarity; and
- the absence of civil society in the form of either buffer bodies or non-governmental organisations.

The transition

Much has changed since then, but the rate of change has varied. It is important to note in this respect that it is impossible, in the short space available, to do justice to the variety of situations in central and eastern Europe. While these countries were part of the Soviet bloc for fifty years, each had a distinct history pre-dating its inclusion in the Soviet orbit.

In particular, their long-term affiliations to different empires before World War I have had a profound influence upon their bureaucratic cultures and structures and upon how bureaucracies are viewed and organised. As a bureaucratic type, universities are a reflection of these historical roots and their relationship to the state varied depending upon these historical factors.

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CHERI in central and eastern Europe...

- CHERI has led many projects in central and eastern Europe:

Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions in Bulgaria
Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Central and Eastern Europe

Quality Assurance Systems for Higher Education in Macedonia
Strategic Study on Legislation, Recognition and Quality Assurance

Methods in the Field of Open and Distance Learning in Central and Eastern Europe

The European Dimension of Institutional Quality Management
The Support of the Accreditation System in Albania

- With the support of the Soros Open Society Institute, a number of countries, institutions and individual scholars are participating in CHERI’s project on ‘The role of universities in the transformation of societies’

- CHERI has undertaken an evaluation of the Open Society Institute’s summer school programme in central and eastern Europe

For instance, the Prussian and Austro-Hungarian bureaucratic models recognised two actors in higher education: the State and the professoriate, while further to the east, the Ottoman model cultivated cumbersome administrative rules and clientelism with its attendant risk of corruption.

In either case, the notion of the university as an autonomous institution with a capacity for strategic planning and responsiveness to social, political and economic change was notably absent while the faculties were the significant institutional units.

In addition, the picture is complicated by the fact that some countries were ready for the transition earlier than others. In Hungary and the Baltic States for instance, during the Perestroika period, educators were getting prepared for higher education reforms, while in other countries it has taken ten or even twelve years to pass new higher education framework laws. In the countries where initial elite change was cosmetic, this feature led to selective borrowings from a multiplicity of international consultants – advice that was put together in frameworks aimed at maintaining the current elite in power. In yet several countries, the first wave of legal reforms were quickly swept away by a second or third wave to reflect a growing maturity in assessing needs but nevertheless providing for an ever-fluctuating legal landscape.

A turbulent reform process

Post-socialist countries in central and eastern Europe have had to face multiple challenges since 1989. They have had to reform their structures in profound ways and on multiple fronts – political, social and economic – and deal with oscillations in policy directions and, in some cases, civil strife. In circumstances where economic or political survival was at stake, the “knowledge economy” seemed an abstract goal and globalisation a somewhat remote trend.

Political volatility and constrained economic circumstances are not propitious pre-conditions for long-term higher education sectoral planning. Even at institutional level, reform-minded rectors have found it difficult to achieve strategic goals and to sustain them when reform processes are undermined by political swings.

Several years were spent after the ‘changes’ with professors recapturing lost academic grounds especially in the softer disciplines, and societies struggling to steer away from any planning because it evoked painful memories of empty and failed exercises.

Today, the situation is one of contrast, yet still difficult for most. Many countries suffer from an ageing and poorly paid academic corps, which lead professors to hold parallel posts in several institutions in order to make ends meet. They can be teaching up to forty hours per week, leaving no time for research, while international research projects have been focused on individual researchers and have resulted in brain drain for those who could find better conditions elsewhere. Library holdings and laboratories reflect the financial constraints under which universities function. Their paucity in some places serves as a brake on updating curricula and providing strong research training.

Alongside the (historical) public institutions, the significant rise of private institution has been a challenging issue almost everywhere in the region and a sign of strong demand for higher education since students are willing to scrape together funds for their tuition fees. Since there is generally a strong correlation between socio-economic background and academic achievement, paradoxically it is those with the ability to pay who are usually granted merit scholarships in the public sector while those who fail to gain access to it and have the least resources must pay tuition fees in the public and private institutions.

The existence of private higher education is also symptomatic of governments’ inability to build appropriate capacity levels and, in some cases, of universities’ unresponsiveness to new demands for practical education (e.g., business, computer science) and shorter study courses. While many of these private institutions have been started by highly creative and innovative local pioneers, the combination of their emphasis on training rather than education and their

tuition-driven budgets constitutes a fragile foundation on which to build both the institution and the country it is seeking to serve.

Nevertheless, some countries have managed to reach relatively quickly access rates of 20 to 30 per cent and several have undertaken wide-scale reforms. These have involved institutional mergers, introduction of tuition fees and student loans, new funding formulas, the emergence or disappearance (as the case may be) of a non-university sector, curricular development, integration of doctoral training in the universities accompanied by the abolishment of the science academies, quality assurance procedures, etc. Reforms were aimed in several countries at increasing and widening access, and strengthening institutional autonomy.

More often than not, however, these reforms have been implemented in a context of declining resources where finance ministries are often the key decision makers in situations where higher education has clearly not been a political priority.

It is important to note, nevertheless, that despite these constraints, good education and research can be found throughout the region as is evident from the fact that out-going students are admitted in good academic institutions or develop meaningful professional or research careers abroad.

Needless to say, these daunting and pressing challenges are resulting in a sometimes massive brain drain of young people. Their flight is often (but not only) at graduate level, further depleting national capacities for innovation and academic staff renewal. "In Bulgaria, for instance, the number of doctoral students has dropped from 5,000 to 3,400 since 1996"². The rigidity of some of the region's higher education systems and financial constraints make their return as post-doctoral students unlikely since their foreign degrees are not always recognised in their home country.

European Union

The situation, however, is not hopeless as the region is now poised to join the European Union and as European policies are centred on the creation of a higher education area (through the Bologna process) and a European research area. These goals focus the mind and offer a clear direction for reforms and greater opportunities for networking, benchmarking and exchange both at the level of institutions and governments.

The current European policies point to the need for strengthening the link between research and teaching, developing governance models that increase the institutional capacity for self-steering and change, including mechanisms for internal quality monitoring and related attitudinal changes, curricular reforms to promote inter- and trans-disciplinarity, structural degree reforms and clarification of qualification levels to facilitate mobility, exchange and partnerships.

These changes will require not only financial and human resources. It is also becoming increasingly clear, at least to institutional leaders if not always to governments, that these reforms will only succeed if institutions are working within a set of suitable pre-conditions, including meaningful autonomy, appropriate accountability, and a stable legal and financial environment.

They also require that all actors develop a realistic vision of the role of higher education and the contributions it can make to civil and economic society and to the creation of a knowledge society. In this respect, it is important to point out that higher education cannot be seen as the single key to development, and especially to economic development. It is too tall an order for a single institutional type and one that has other missions alongside this one.

The change process must involve building a healthy and innovatively minded university sector that does not lose sight of its core missions and is embedded in a

² World Bank (2003), *Constructing Knowledge Societies: New Challenges for Tertiary Education*, p.49.

sound economy and vibrant civil society. Thus, the change process must involve appropriate dialogue with stakeholders and, most importantly, synchronised initiatives on the economic, socio-political and education fronts.

Globalisation and Europeanisation

Additionally, the construction of a greater European Union within a context of increased globalisation can lead to larger disparities and to distortions in policy priorities: if global competition becomes the short-term goal for Europe, it will lead to the sub-regionalisation of pockets of academic excellence and increased peripheralisation for the rest of the higher education sector.

Thus, it is important that European policies are mindful of the need to create a level-playing field between east and west and ensure that funds are distributed equitably throughout Europe. Governments must also become aware of the need to increase and widen access, to combat brain drain and develop research capacity. Finally, higher education institutions must concentrate on developing their capacity for strategic cross-border partnerships in research and teaching to ensure that they remain at the centre of academic activities.

Undoubtedly, change will take time – perhaps several generations – but the political will and aspirations of the academic community – students and academics alike – will no doubt carry it through, with the support of national governments and societies as well as the wider European higher education sector and the non-governmental and inter-governmental bodies in which the region is now fully engaged.

20 YEARS OF HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY IN THE UNITED KINGDOM: LOOKING BACK 10 YEARS AND FORWARD TO THE NEXT DECADE

Bahram Bekhradnia¹

One thing I encountered that I had not expected as I prepared this paper – despite my close involvement in policy development through the 1990s – was the way many of the policy concerns of 10 years ago seem to match those of today. Therefore, before looking to the future, I am going to begin by spending a little time looking back over the decade, particularly as I think there are lessons for the future which we can draw from the immediate past.

The last decade

In many ways, the last decade has been very positive as the table below indicates.

Table 1: The last decade in summary

For better	For worse
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Much more inclusive system • Participation widened • Ivory towers breached • Research quality improved • Student contributions introduced • Institutional diversity maintained 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expansion on the cheap (failure of prophecy) • Inequalities persist in participation • Risk to quality • Alienation of the profession • University autonomy at risk • Institutional diversity at risk

We have undoubtedly moved from a restricted to a much more inclusive system of higher education. Universities have come out of their shells, and are much more engaged with the wider world – whether in their links with industry or with their communities more generally. The quality of our research has been maintained, and, I believe, improved. The government has had the political courage to require the beneficiaries of higher education to pay – the current arrangements may not be ideal, and of course they are changing, but nobody should underestimate the significance of having made this first step. It will be so much easier to introduce more rational and progressive systems in the future as a result. And we have, through all this, maintained a system probably as diverse as any in the world – and arguably as high quality too.

There are negatives as well. Expansion has been on the cheap – a 35% cut in the unit of funding. Arguably, participation is as polarised between the haves and have-nots as before – I do not myself believe this, but that is arguable. Much of the efficiency that we have achieved has been at the cost of the goodwill of the academic profession. And there is a widespread belief that there are increasing pressures towards uniformity and homogeneity in the missions and activities of institutions.

These alternative views of the past decade are, in some respects, contradictory, and deliberately so. I will pick up these points and show how it is possible to come to these sometimes conflicting conclusions.

I now want to go back 10 years – actually a little over 10 years – to the 1991 White Paper. And may I say in passing that I am going to be concentrating on the 1991 White Paper, the policies and developments that followed, and the 2003 White Paper and what might follow that. I am deliberately not dealing with the 1997 Dearing Report and am very aware that in treating the subject in this way I am missing some potentially important aspects of this topic. Some key extracts from the 1991 White Paper are provided below.

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CHERI in the UK...

- CHERI maintains a higher education research database for the Department for Education and Skills, the Higher Education Funding Council, Universities UK and the Higher Education Academy.

- CHERI has undertaken many policy-related research projects in the UK over the past decade

- Access to What? Improving employment prospects for graduates from socially disadvantaged groups

- The Impact of Debt and Term-time Working on Higher Education

- Student Feedback

- The Impact of Teaching Quality Assessment

- CHERI's conferences on higher education policies and developments have been attended by several thousand people from most UK higher education institutions over the last decade

- CHERI's Higher Education Digest charts higher education developments in the UK and internationally. Contributors have included Philip Altbach, Robert Aylett, Ron Barnett, John Brennan, Roger Brown, Sandra Burslem, Nico Cloete, David Jary, Joan Dassin, David Dill, Michael Gibbons, Guy Haug, Mary Henkel, Margaret Hodge, Richard Lewis, Brenda Little, Brian Ramsden, John Randall, John Richardson, Naomi Sargant, Peter Scott, Michael Shattock, Harold Silver, Ulrich Teichler, Gareth Williams.

Table 2: Main points of the 1991 White Paper

- The Government's policies for schools, and in particular examination reforms, are encouraging more young people to stay on in school or college after 16 and then to apply for a place in higher education - by the year 2000, the Government expects that approaching one in three of all 18-19 year-olds will enter higher education
- The Government believes that there is a case for increase in the provision of high quality two-year full-time diploma courses, particularly those with a vocational emphasis.
- The Government believes that it is in the interests of universities, polytechnics and colleges to continue to look for increased levels of funding from private sources in particular from industry and commerce, from benefactors and alumni, and from present sources of fee income
- Increasing national wealth in the five years from 1992-93 can be expected broadly to match the projected increase in the number of students. The Government's commitment to awarding higher education a fair share of public expenditure is clear.
- The Government believes that the increasingly artificial and unhelpful barriers between the universities, and the polytechnics and colleges should be broken down.
- The Government recognises the importance of maintaining the diversity of institutions
- The Government's policy is that funding for research should be selectively allocated to encourage institutions to concentrate on their strengths

Many of the issues were dealt with in the 1991 White Paper, and the conclusions reached could have been taken from the 2003 White Paper. There was to be substantial growth, over the decade, reaching around one third participation by the year 2000. In fact, the one third participation had more or less been reached by the time those words were written, and then it stagnated for the rest of the decade — so it was accurate as a prediction, but not in the way intended. Sub degree numbers should increase. In fact, there was a steady decline in sub degree numbers right through the decade. Higher education institutions should

Figure 1: Student numbers between 1984 and 1994

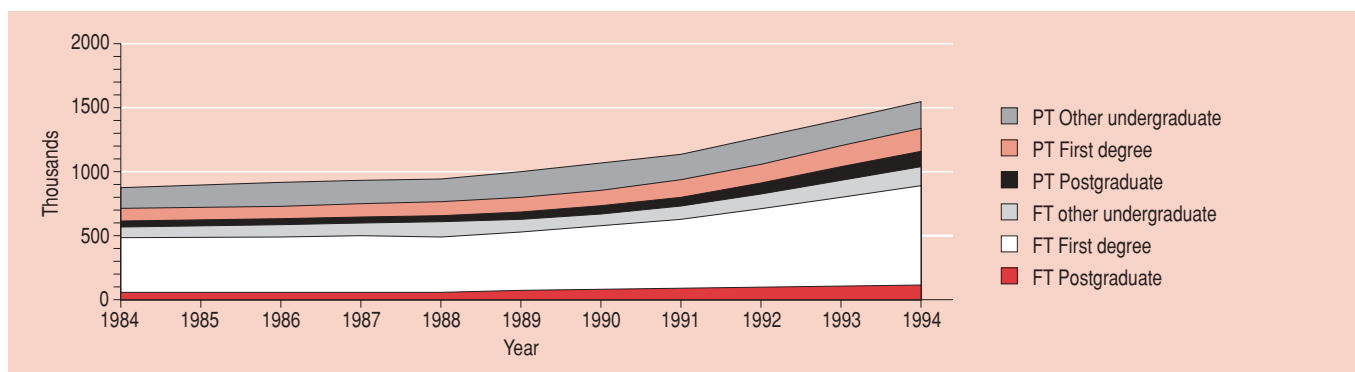
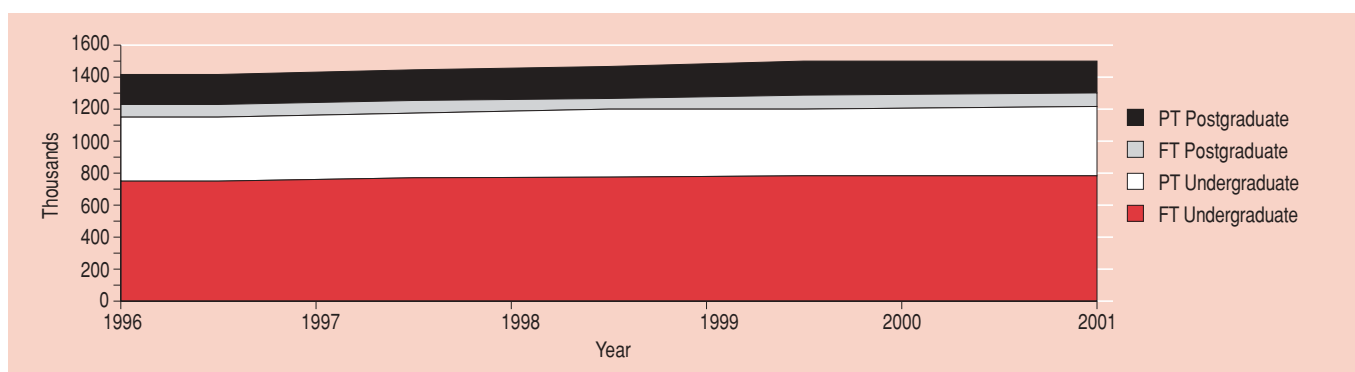


Figure 2: Student numbers between 1996 and 2000



have multiple sources of funding. Interestingly, these did not include fees from students. The unit of resource will be maintained! It does not actually say quite that, but a reasonable man would be permitted to draw such a conclusion from these words. Access to university title should be liberalized. Institutional diversity should be maintained. Research funding should be increasingly selectively allocated. Much of this resonates today.

Let us look at one or two of these policies and how they worked out. These two figures on student numbers are well known. They come from the HEFCE supply and demand report produced in 2001. Numbers went up very rapidly in the first few years of the decade, and then abruptly came to a halt.

This pattern closely reflects what was happening to young participation, which more or less doubled in the early part of the decade — a real social revolution. In a very small number of years the proportion of young people who decided that they would go to university doubled. And then, just as abruptly, the increase came to an end. It is as though there was a pent-up demand that was released, and finding its natural level, it then stabilised. The other really interesting thing that has happened is that women, having been a significantly smaller minority of students, are now the majority by a significant extent. It will be seen also that there are some signs that towards the end of the decade young participation had begun to pick up.

Looking at mature student numbers, exactly the same pattern can be observed. A dramatic increase in just a few years, followed by an equally dramatic halt to the

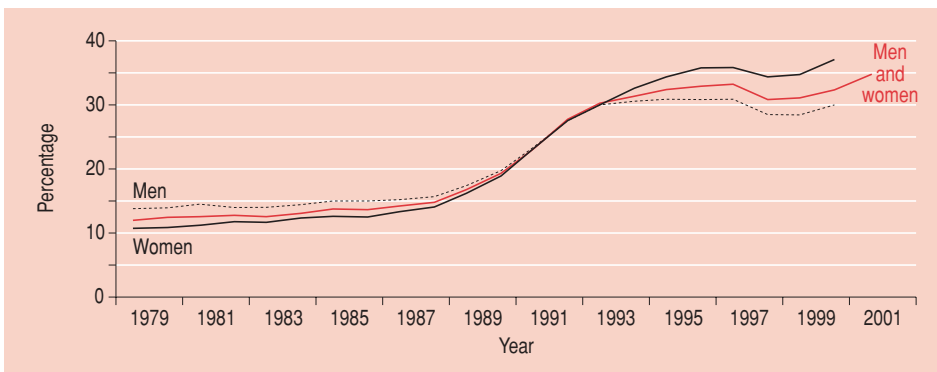


Figure 3: Growth in participation of young people

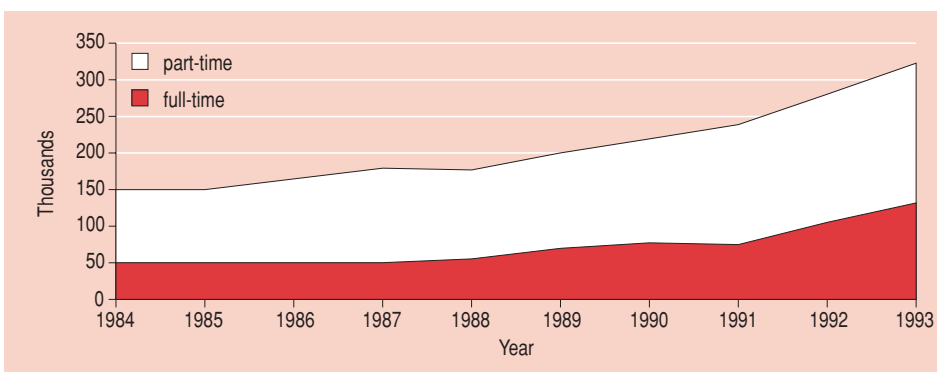


Figure 4: Number of mature students in HE 1984-93

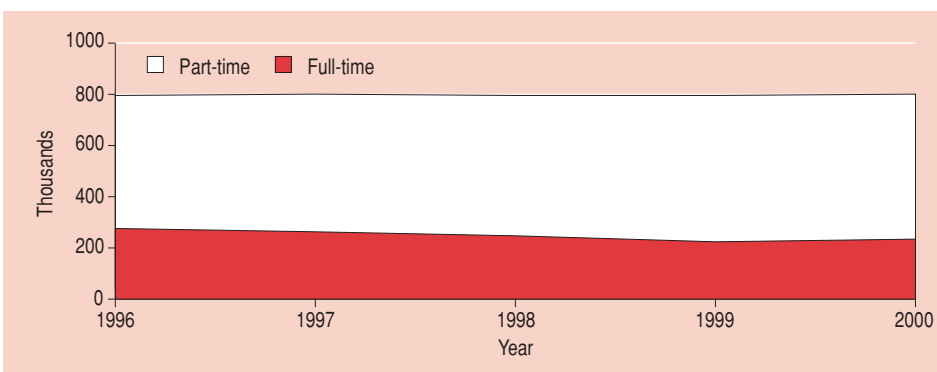
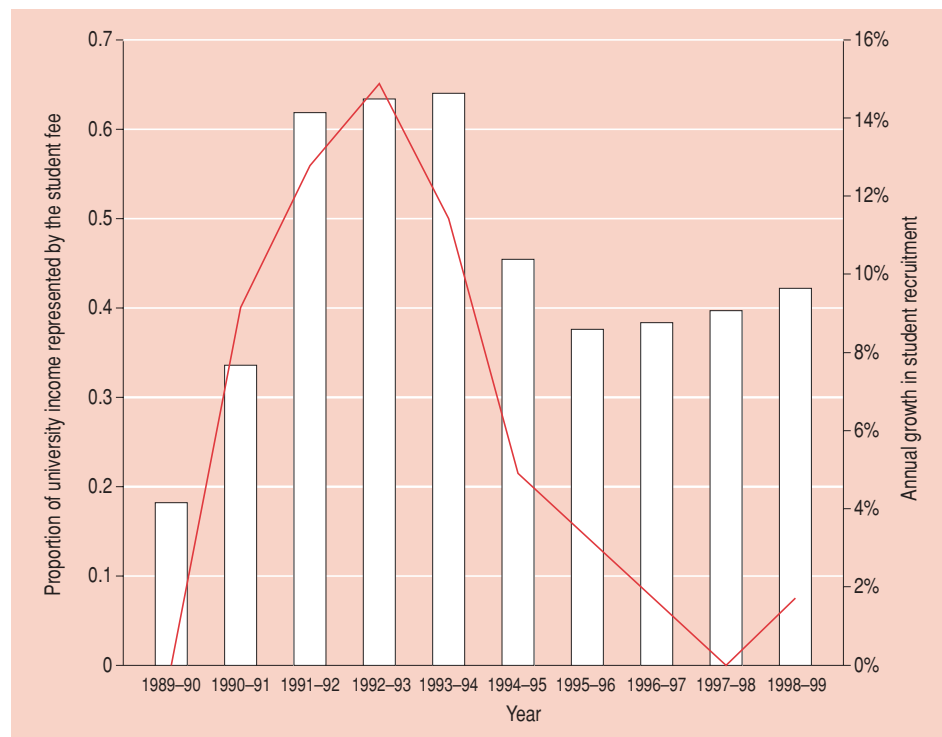


Figure 5: Number of mature students in HE 1996-2000

growth. Now, this is a puzzle, as very different dynamics apply to the participation of mature students and young students. For young students to participate in higher education, there has to be preparatory work in schools, and sixth form numbers have to increase first. That is not so with mature students. This lends some support to the view that increasing supply, or at least the rhetoric surrounding the government plans for increased supply, may have influenced mature students to participate in higher education. And then when supply was cut off, the growth in numbers stopped. And if it works for mature students, then why not for young students? There are reasons for concluding against this, but it is something we need to look at in greater detail

Now, was this growth as a result of government and Funding Council policies? To some extent, perhaps.

Figure 6: Relationship between marginal income and student recruitment



This chart certainly suggests that the funding regime may have had some effect. When the government increased the student fee — the amount of money each university received for each student it recruited — and reduced the grant (the bars, and the left-hand scale) student numbers increased rapidly (the line, and the right-hand scale), but when they changed the balance, the annual increase in student numbers dropped rapidly. I have no doubt that funding methods played a part, but I think we should be careful in our interpretation of this graph. If potential student demand is not there, then incentivising institutions to recruit more students will be ineffectual. And the graph illustrates, also, that student number growth continued to decline at the same rate, even after the balance between grant and fee stabilised.

And through the Nineties we had good examples of the difficulty of implementing policies on student numbers through supply-side action. Each year, for example, the Government sets targets for the number of students to be recruited — and in most years the number of students has borne little relation to these targets. In addition, specific targets have been set for the number of part-timers, which have not been met, and for sub-degree students, whose numbers declined steadily through the period, despite the increasing number of places provided.

My conclusion, after 12 years in the funding Council, is that supply-side policies are really rather blunt. The only really effective policy action is demand-side, and this is long term. Supply must follow, when demand rises, to enable demand to be met. But until demand is there, there is no point in increasing supply — except, perhaps, at the margins.

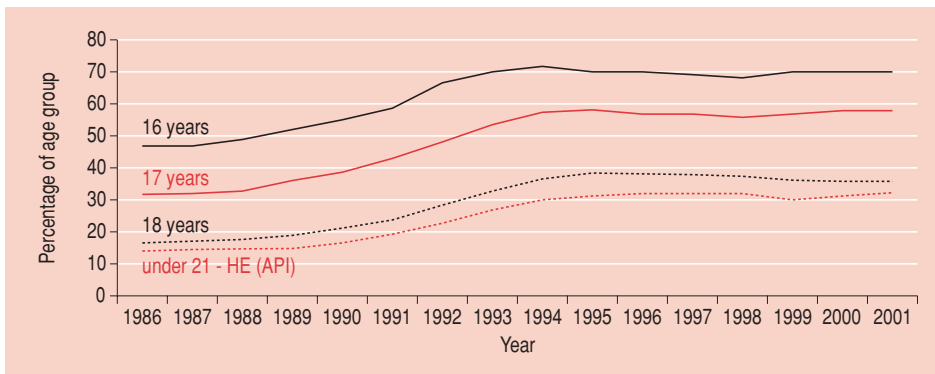


Figure 7: Participation in FT education by 16-21 year olds

The above chart, taken again from HEFCE's supply and demand report, shows quite clearly how the number of students in HE directly follows demand in school. When 16-year-olds began to stay on in increasing numbers, a couple of years later so did 18-year-olds and university entrants went up. When 16-year-olds staying on tailed off, so did higher education participation. Policy intervention can work – dramatically – but the most effective intervention is that which stimulates demand further down the supply chain.

So student numbers went up very rapidly and then held steady. As I have said, the extent to which higher education policy was a factor in this, I am hesitant to say. At the most, I think we can say that higher education policy enabled, but it certainly did not cause, the changes.

I move on now to the decline in the unit of funding.

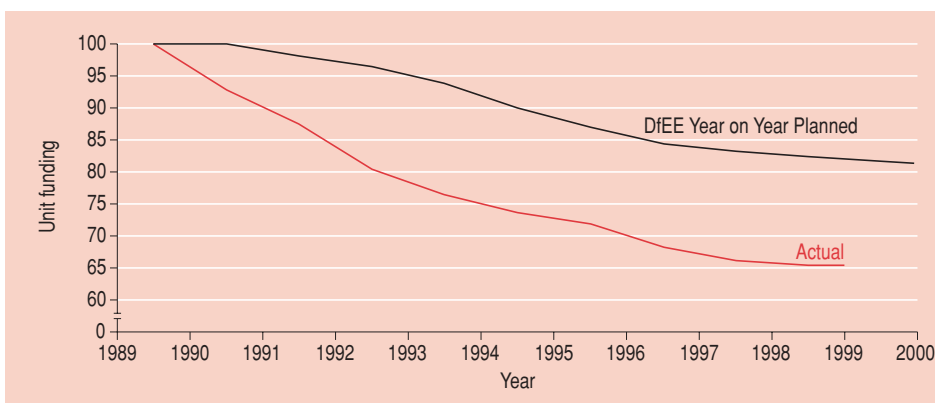
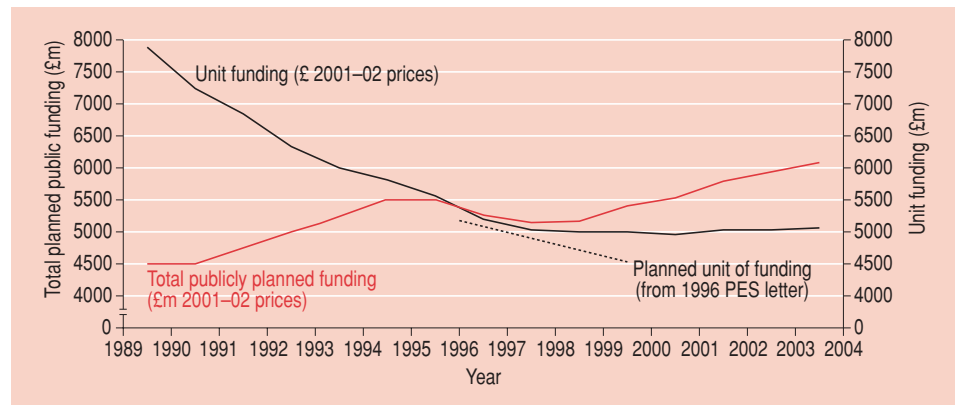


Figure 8: Actual and planned reduction in unit funding 1989-1999

This has led government ministers, on more than one occasion, to describe the present funding situation as being one of "crisis". This is reassuring, and enables the conclusion that we will not once again suffer growth at marginal cost, with a declining unit of resource. But look, in the last period of growth, how much worse institutions themselves made things. The government plans were for a 17% cut in the unit of resource. Institutions offered up a 34% cut by taking many more students for the same money. Now, I have not time to go into the reasons for this, and it is certainly the case that official policies were partly to blame — the PCFC funding method, for example, took money away from institutions and then required them to bid for it back, providing additional numbers for the same money – a brilliant technique for achieving growth with limited funds, but arguably it went too far; and the rules for university status undoubtedly led some institutions to grow very much more rapidly than was wise. I think that this is a cautionary tale from the last period of growth, and we need to be a little aware as we move forward to another period of growth.

The next chart shows how things have stabilised since the coming of the present government.

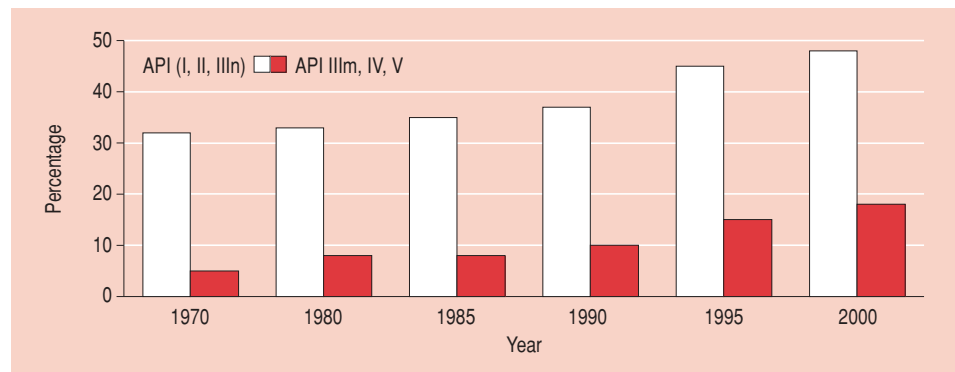
Figure 9: The stabilisation of governments funding for HE



Part of the stabilisation is the student contribution, but no matter. Let us remember in this context that in New Zealand in the early 1990s government funding per student reduced no less dramatically than in this country. But they maintained their unit of resource, because they had a flexible student fee, and universities were able to increase their income from the student fee to match the decline in government funding. We had no such flexibility here, but we still had the cut in government funding. This is part of the answer to those who worry that increasing contributions from students will simply be an invitation to the government to cut their contribution. They can still cut it anyway.

I said earlier that I thought one of the negatives of the past decade has been the alienation of the academic workforce. Over a 16 year period the pay of academics did not go up in real terms. And this was at a time when student staff ratios were increasing rapidly, and when the selective funding of research meant that many academics had less time for research. The compact between academic staff and the state was broken — many had joined believing that they would be paid less than in other jobs, but that there would be compensations. The pay has remained the same — comparatively it has deteriorated even — but the compensations have gone. I suspect that this is unsustainable, and that we will not be able to maintain a high-quality higher education system unless this changes. This is a really difficult legacy from the past decade.

Figure 10: Actual age participation rates of lower and higher social groups



Source: Table 1.1 Dearing Report 6. Updated from Social Trends (dataset ST30313).

The 1991 White Paper was silent on the question of widening participation and fair access, and that is one of the main changes in the policy environment. Over the past decade the absolute gap between the participation of the lowest and the highest social groups has stayed the same — in fact, it has slightly widened from 28 percentage points to 30. On the other hand, the lower groups have increased their participation rate by 90%, whereas the higher groups increased theirs by just about 25%. Have things got better or not?

This slide shows that in 2000 the higher groups were 2.8 times more likely to participate in higher education than the lower groups. This is a very large difference, and we still have a long way to go to widen participation to a point where there is equality of opportunity. Nevertheless, in terms of relative change, this is a whole lot better than the difference of 3.6 times in 1990 — an improvement of nearly 25% in a decade. And remember that the size of the

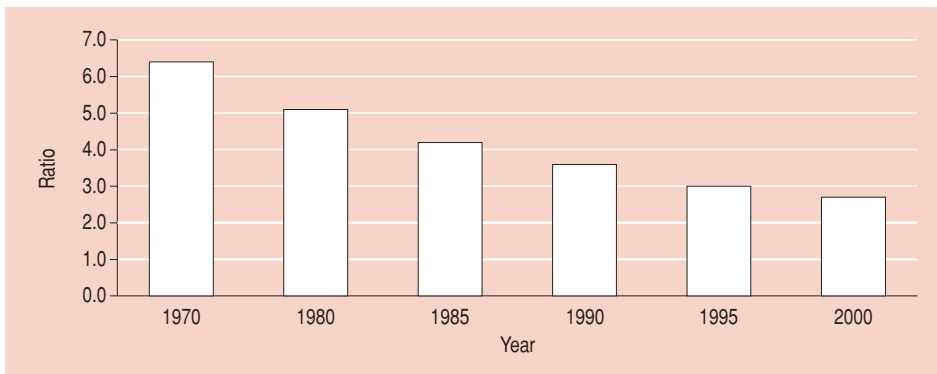


Figure 11: The greater likelihood of people from higher socio-economic groups entering higher education

Source: Table 1.1 Dearing Report 6. Updated from Social Trends (dataset ST30313).

lower social groups has reduced very substantially. My conclusion is that there has been steady progress, but there is some way to go. But this is more of a school and general societal issue than one primarily for HE.

Moving on to research, the 1991 White Paper announced a policy of selective allocation of research funds, for very much the same sorts of reasons as the present White Paper, and we can see how that policy was put into immediate effect following the 1992 research assessment exercise, and how research funding has been progressively more selectively allocated following subsequent exercises. The following chart shows how selectivity has increased over the last ten years.

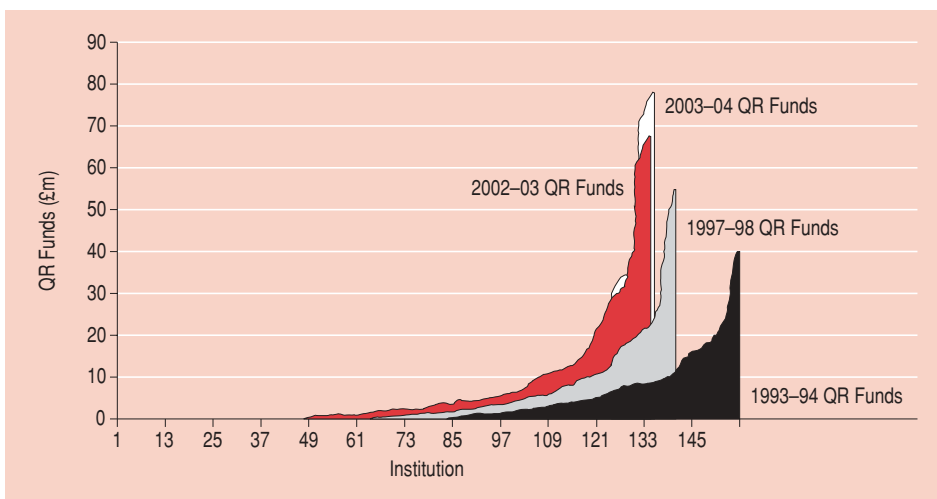


Figure 12: Increasing research selectivity

And it shows how the maximum allocated has doubled over the decade. There is not the equivalent in research of the unit of resource in teaching, but at a time when funding for teaching was in relative decline, there was no such decline in funding for research — if anything, the contrary.

I cannot say if diversity increased over the decade — I do not have a before and after. But there is no doubt that at the end of the decade we still have an extremely diverse higher education system — actually, the most diverse public system that I am aware of in the world.

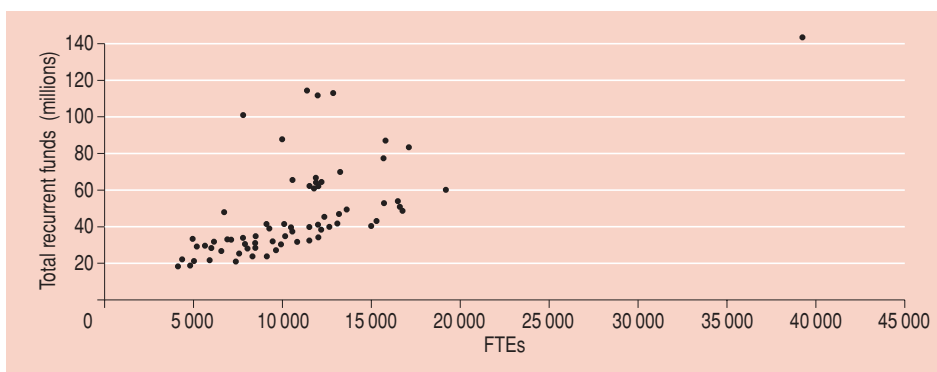


Figure 13: Institutional funding and student numbers

Some aspects of diversity not everybody will applaud. Figure 13, for example, shows how different institutions with similar numbers of students can receive very different amounts of grant. You need to be careful in looking at this graph, because it does not compare like with like. I am sure that those institutions at the top have medical schools and receive large amounts for research compared with institutions with similar numbers further down the graph. But there is also no doubt that they are very different types of institutions.

I commend to you a report produced by Brian Ramsden for Universities UK a couple of years ago, which shows on a large number of different measures how very diverse the English higher education system is. They show the different levels of dependence on Funding council grant, the different percentages of postgraduate and part-time students, and differences in the percentages of students not taking first degree. On all these measures and many more there is an enormous range of performance in our institutions.

The next decade

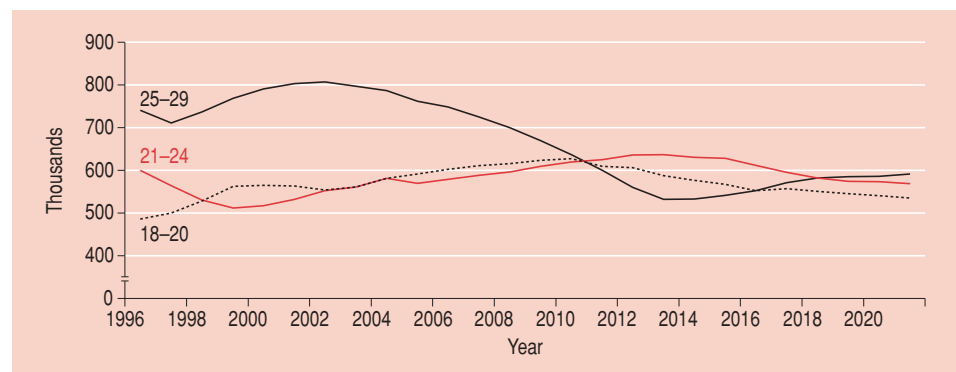
Table 3: Main points of 2003 White Paper

- Continue to increase participation towards 50 per cent of those aged 18-30
- ... mainly through two-year work focused foundation degrees
- The Government will continue to be the major funder of universities but they should have greater freedom to access new funding streams on their own account. Providing incentives to build up endowments is one way
- Selectivity ... The Government will invest more in our leading research departments and universities
- The challenges we face are: to recognise and encourage diversity of role within universities and colleges.
- From 2004-05 it will no longer be necessary to have research degree awarding powers to become a university

And so to the present and the future. In the next decade too, we are seeking to increase student numbers, and to do so primarily by increasing numbers on sub degree courses. Universities and colleges are to be encouraged to secure funding other than from the state, with a particular focus on endowments. Research funds are to be more selectively allocated, in part in order to secure best value from our research funding, but in part also to increase diversity. The criteria for university title are to be relaxed, and more institutions are to be designated universities.

Picking up one or two of these; first, there is almost certain to be very substantial student growth.

Figure 14: Population growth: 1996-2025



Even if participation does not increase, demography will ensure this. Although the number of 25-29-year-olds in the population will decline, much more significant for higher education numbers is the fact that all the younger age groups will increase significantly over the decade.

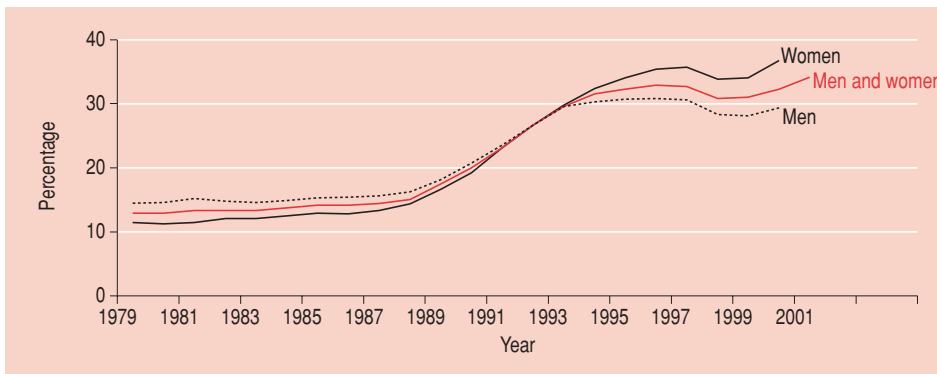


Figure 15: Growth in young participation

And remember this figure shows the beginnings of an upturn in young participation towards the end of the last decade and the beginning of this. If this turns out to be more than a blip, then this too will have significant implications for student demand. The Government's 50% target would easily be met if we have the beginnings of a trend here. How the Government responds to that demand is key, but given the Government's policy of what looked at the time to be ambitious growth when they announced it, one can only assume that the demand will be met.

The Government also say that they wish the demand to be met by participation in foundation degrees.

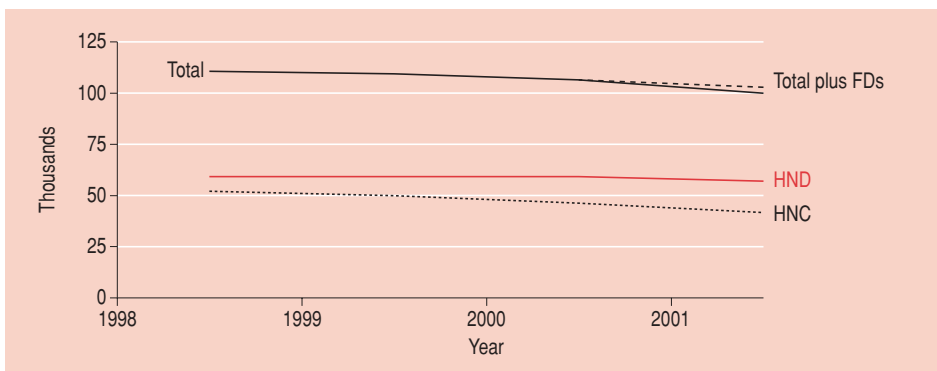


Figure 16: Student numbers on HNC and HND courses

I fear that the jury is out on that. If, as I believe may be the case, much of the increasing demand is driven by pupils in school taking traditional A-levels, then there is no reason to think that they will not demand the same sorts of courses as in the past. For this to change, and foundation degrees to become the dominant source of new demand, recent trends will need to be reversed, which have shown a declining interest in sub-degrees. I suspect that the key to this will be employer signals that foundation degrees are valued and are rewarded. Without that, I think we can be fairly confident that demand will be for more of the same. It really does depend on student demand, which itself will not materialize without employer signals. It will not be sufficient just to provide the places as we have done before.

I know that this is difficult politically, and when I was in the Funding Council I used to say that we would not be satisfied if it was more of the same. But actually I don't see why that should be the case. It would not be acceptable if more of the same meant the continuation of a socially biased higher education system. But if we achieve greater social equity and higher education participation, then we should be pleased if more students from poor backgrounds are seeking access to courses which provide the greatest benefits.

So far, I have concentrated on the similarities of the policy agenda in the past decade and the next. And there clearly are similarities. But there will be major differences too, especially in relation to:

- Level of funding
- Sources of funding
- Concern with fair access
- Increasing emphasis on relations with business and the community
- Emphasis on teaching quality enhancement, not assessment
- Diversity will be enforced
- Collaboration as a means of achieving diversity
- European convergence.

First, I think there is widespread recognition that the unit of funding for teaching is about as low as we dare take it without serious compromise to quality. Certainly, the statements of this Government acknowledge that. I don't see any appetite for further growth if it is not to be fully funded. I agree there is the complication of the Conservative party commitment to scrap the fee without any additional taxation, and that is something that will need to be faced if they ever come into government. I have to say, I am reasonably relaxed about that. History is full of examples of opposition parties which imagined that they could have their cakes and eat them – and then being confronted by the real world on taking office.

Second, the Government, to their great credit, have bitten the bullet and have made fundamental and welcome reforms of the structure for student fees. During the coming decade we will have differential fees, and although they will be capped initially, I think that logic will have its way, and in the same way as the fixed fee gave away quickly to the differential fee, so I believe that the capped fee will sooner or later give way to the uncapped fee. The pressure for this will become all the stronger if, as seems possible, there is strong growth in student numbers. The Treasury have so far shown no appetite for putting large amounts of additional public money into student growth.

Third, I think we had better believe that the government is serious in its commitment to fair access. This has already sent shock waves around the system, and there will be more. The debate is becoming increasingly sophisticated, and as long as that is so then this is a welcome development. It will take changes in the achievement of different social groups in schools to make a serious impact on this, but with increasing interest in more sophisticated means of identifying talent, a shake-up in the social profile of our most exclusive institutions should not be ruled out.

One respect in which the present White Paper is very different from the 1991 White Paper is that the earlier document made no reference at all to relations between industry and higher education, except in as far as industry might be a source of income. The climate is very different, and one way or another I think we can expect increasing emphasis on this, perhaps with additional sources of funds to encourage it.

The 1991 White Paper, and subsequently the 1992 Act, introduced the quality assessment process that has proved so difficult. The 2003 White Paper was entirely different in emphasis, with a very strong emphasis on quality enhancement, and a rejection of the assessment process. Given that there was never a very clear articulation of what the problem was that the assessment regime was intended to resolve, this can only be regarded as a major improvement.

I have shown how very diverse the higher education system is at present. I suspect that much of the policy effort over the next decade will be in maintaining and reinforcing this diversity. We can see the policy of increased research selectivity as a step in that direction, and measures like the huge increase in funding allocated to institutions active in widening participation can be seen in that light too. Some of the White Paper's proposals need to be worked through and may not work — for example the suggestion that there should be a fund to encourage institutions that are not very good at research to work with industry.

Many institutions — perhaps most — will happily find their niche. But there will be others that do not — one hears talk of the squeezed middle. An important

policy challenge for the next decade will be to accommodate all these institutions into an increasingly differentiated higher education system. This diversity, of course, will be increased if there are significant numbers of new universities, created as a result of the relaxation in the criteria for university title. But there could be one further twist, arising from the White Paper's commitment — which I believe is being fulfilled at the moment by the QAA — to review the criteria for degree awarding powers. This is pure speculation, and I have no idea what is in the mind of the Government, but these two measures together offer the possibility that during the coming decade we may have private, for-profit, universities. A measure which I suspect may have been conceived in part anyway to enable the NHU to award degrees and call itself a university may have far more far-reaching effects. Whether or not that is what the government had in mind, that is where this measure may take us.

THE SOCIAL ROLE OF THE CONTEMPORARY UNIVERSITY: CONTRADICTIONS, BOUNDARIES AND CHANGE

John Brennan¹

CHERI's research on students and graduates...

- One of CHERI's main areas of expertise concerns higher education's relationship to employment. Projects have included.....

Higher Education and Graduate Employment in Europe

The Role of Vocational Higher Education in Meeting the Needs of the Economy

Part-time Students and Employment

A review of Work-Based Learning

- CHERI's new ESRC project asks 'what is learned at university?'

The study will concentrate on students and graduates in three contrasting subjects – biology, business studies and sociology. For each subject, five study programmes will be selected to represent different social and organisational features. Students from these programmes will be investigated at various stages during and following their undergraduate careers with a focus on their conceptions of learning and personal and professional identity.

The wider applicability of findings from the initial three subjects will be assessed in relation to a further group of subjects.

The project team will work closely with the new Higher Education Academy and with the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in order to ensure close links with policy and practice. Employer inputs to the project will be secured through the Council for Industry and Higher Education.

The project, whose full title is The Social and Organisational Mediation of University Learning, is part of the ESRC Teaching and Learning Research Programme. The project is directed by CHERI's John Brennan, Associate directors are David Jary of the University of Birmingham, Mike Osborne from the University of Stirling, and John Richardson from the Institute of Educational Technology within the Open University.

Writing in the early 1970s, Martin Trow made the distinction between elite, mass and universal forms of higher education. In taking a 'long view' of the changes occurring in British higher education, it may be useful to recall these distinctions made some thirty years ago. Table 1 – based on a 1973 formulation for the Carnegie Commission – summarises Trow's distinctions in terms of ten features of higher education systems. While these may not capture all of the nuances of current higher education debates, they nevertheless appear to be remarkably prescient of some of the key issues that we face as we embark in the UK on the move, in Trow's terms, from mass to universal higher education.

Table 1 can only summarise the more subtle arguments contained in Trow's original text. It should also be emphasised that Trow never saw these distinctions as empirical descriptions of real higher education systems, rather as models or 'ideal types' to aid our comprehension of such systems. And a further point to remember is that although he saw these forms as sequential stages, he did not regard it as inevitable that the later stages would completely replace the earlier ones. In particular, he saw definite possibilities of examples of elite forms surviving into the mass and universal stages.

If we consider higher education policy making in the UK, the preservation of elite forms – while ensuring that they meet meritocratic criteria – seems to have been an overriding concern in the recent past. Perhaps this is hardly surprising when one considers that most of those in positions of power and influence are themselves products of those elite forms. As Peter Scott remarked in his 1995 *The Meanings of Mass Higher Education*, the British had found themselves with a mass system of higher education in terms of its 'public structures' but with an elite one in terms of its 'private instincts'.

This is surely evidenced in the reluctances to avoid hierarchy, to accept equivalences or to acknowledge the achievements of uncelebrated teachers and their students in unfashionable places. Notwithstanding the enormous growth in the quality assurance industry – from external examiners, audits, subject reviews, benchmark statements and so forth, nobody seems to be very *assured* that quality and standards are being consistently maintained across an enlarged and diversified higher education system.

Which takes us to the social role of the contemporary university. In his 1973 paper, Trow describes the functions of higher education in its three forms: (i) *elite*: shaping the mind and character of a ruling class; preparation for elite roles; (ii) *mass*: transmission of skills; preparation for a broader range of technical and economic elite roles; (iii) *universal*: adaptation of the 'whole population' to rapid social and technological change.

Trow's formulations of the functions of mass and universal forms of higher education do not sound out of place some thirty years on. And while his characterisation of the functions of an elite higher education has a rather old-fashioned flavour to it – justifications of elite forms today tending to stress research rather than teaching and to provide an ultimate *economic* rationale in achieving global competitiveness – it should be remembered that several studies during the 1990s (one thinks for example of Bourdieu (1996) and Brown and Scase (1994)) have conceptualised higher education's social role predominantly as one of 'elite reproduction'.

We can accept that most political concerns to maintain the strengths of elite higher education institutions would seek also to avoid the accompanying function of elite reproduction – although quite a bit of research (see above) suggests that the latter is what you are likely to get. When, however, one looks towards mass

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and universal forms, we can see predominantly economic rationales in ascendance and much policy debate and initiative in recent years has been concerned with improving higher education's contribution to the economy by producing the requisite numbers of graduates with the skills and competencies required by employers.

Table 1: Trow's conceptions of elite, mass and universal higher education

	Elite (0-15%)	Mass (16-50%)	Universal (over 50%)
i) <i>Attitudes to access</i>	A privilege of birth or talent or both	A right for those with certain qualifications	An obligation for the middle and upper classes
ii) <i>Functions of higher education</i>	Shaping mind and character of ruling class; preparation for elite roles	Transmission of skills; preparation for broader range of technical and economic elite roles	Adaptation of 'whole population' to rapid social and technological change
iii) <i>Curriculum and forms of instruction</i>	Highly structured in terms of academic or professional conceptions of knowledge	Modular, flexible and semi-structured sequence of courses	Boundaries and sequences break down; distinctions between learning and life break down
iv) <i>The student 'career'</i>	"sponsored" after secondary school; works uninterruptedly until gains degree	Increasing numbers delay entry; more drop out	Much postponement of entry, softening of boundaries between formal education and other aspects of life; term-time working
v) <i>Institutional characteristics</i>	Homogenous with high and common standards; Small residential communities; Clear and impermeable boundaries	Comprehensive with more diverse standards; 'Cities of intellect' – mixed residential/commuting; Boundaries fuzzy and permeable	Great diversity with no common standards; Aggregates of people enrolled but rarely or never on campus; Boundaries weak or non-existent
vi) <i>Locus of power and decision making</i>	'The Athenaeum' – small elite group, shared values and assumptions	Ordinary political processes of interest groups and party programmes	(The Daily Mail!) 'Mass publics' question special privileges and immunities of academe
vii) <i>Academic standards</i>	Broadly shared and relatively high (in meritocratic phase)	Variable; system/institution 'become holding companies for quite different kinds of academic enterprises'	Criterion shifts from 'standards' to 'value added'
viii) <i>Access and selection</i>	Meritocratic achievement based on school performance	Meritocratic plus 'compensatory programmes' to achieve equality of opportunity	'open', emphasis on 'equality of group achievement' (class, ethnic)
ix) <i>Forms of academic administration</i>	Part-time academics who are 'amateurs at administration'; elected/appointed for limited periods	Former academics now full-time administrators plus large and growing bureaucracy	More specialist full-time professionals. Managerial techniques imported from outside academe
x) <i>Internal governance</i>	Senior professors	Professors and junior staff with increasing influence from students	Breakdown of consensus making institutional governance insoluble; decision-making flows into hands of political authority

One of CHERI's long-term research interests has been in the relationship between higher education and the labour market. Several national surveys of graduate employment have been carried out by the Centre's staff, from the mid-eighties (as part of the CNAAs) to the late nineties. The most recent was undertaken in 1998 as part of a European study of graduate employment. What is striking about these - and other - studies of graduate employment is the general similarity of their findings, even after such a major growth in higher education participation rates. After three years or so, most graduates are in employment and most of them are in quite good jobs. Of course, some graduates do better than others but tables 2 and 3 do not suggest that any groups of graduates - whether defined in terms of their social background, the higher education institution attended or the type of subject studied - face a disastrous future when they enter the labour market. Tables 2 and 3 indicate, however, that there are inequalities at the point of exit from higher education - as there are at the point of entry. Students from working class backgrounds are a lot more likely to experience periods of unemployment when they graduate but there is only a modest salary difference of around £1000 per year once they have gained employment. On most measures, graduates from pre-1992 universities do better than graduates from other institutions but differences between graduates from different types of subject are even greater. We might summarise the social role of the contemporary university in the UK as follows: on the one hand, middle-class students maintain (and legitimise) social advantage by obtaining high value qualifications from high status institutions while, on the other hand, working class students achieve upward mobility by obtaining vocational qualifications from lower status institutions. Thus, both reproduction *and* transformation functions are achieved.

Table 2: The relationship between graduates' background and selected indicators of employment success (3-4 years after graduation)

	Unemployed once (%)		In 'graduate job' (%)		Don't feel overqualified (%)		Salary (£000)	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
<i>Parental occupation</i>								
Clerical/manual	15	8	74	65	76	73	21.1	17.5
Professional/Managerial	10	7	76	69	79	79	22.1	18.6

Table 3: The relationship between type of HE institution attended, subject studied and selected indicators of employment success

	Unemployed once (%)	In 'graduate job' (%)	Don't feel overqualified (%)	Salary (£000)
<i>Institution attended</i>				
'old' universities	9	73	82	20.8
'new' universities	9	71	76	19.2
Colleges of HE	11	68	67	16.7
<i>Field of study</i>				
Vocational arts	7	79	83	19.4
Vocational science	6	75	87	23.2
Non-vocational arts	12	62	67	17.7
Non-vocational science	11	77	80	19

Source: European graduate survey. Reported in Brennan et al (2001) and Blasko (2002)

Despite the evidence to the contrary, it is interesting to note the strong beliefs sometimes expressed that only attending a 'top' university is worthwhile. It is perhaps only to be expected that, in expanded higher education systems, advantaged groups will seek to maintain those advantages by denying the merits of those who have received their higher education in the 'less noble' institutions. Louise Archer has recently described how social hierarchies are transformed into academic hierarchies and recalls Bernard Shaw's description of universities as 'shops for selling class limitations'! (Archer, 2003)

Debate about the future shape of higher education in Britain following the publication of the 2003 white paper are focusing on issues of diversity, of sharpening the distinctions between institutions. Inevitably, with these distinctions come questions about the comparability of the achievements of students and their qualifications from different parts of the expanded and diversified system. Trow described the student experience in 'universal' forms of higher education in the following words:

Attendance at the emerging institutions of higher education designed for universal access is merely another kind of experience not qualitatively different from any other experience in modern society which gives one resources for coping with the problems of contemporary life..... (The students) do not in any sense comprise a community rooted in frequent association, shared norms and values and a sense of common identification.

(Trow, 1973)

What Trow is indicating is a weakening of higher education's boundaries, both within institutions – for example, the growth of inter-disciplinarity and of modular course structures – and between higher education and other parts of society. For example, over 50% of supposedly full-time students in the UK undertake paid work alongside their study. A growing proportion of students are 'mature' students, combining study with domestic as well as employment responsibilities. More students live at home or close to home.

These aspects of diversity can be mapped onto Trow's distinctions between elite, mass and universal forms of higher education. Several writers have suggested that new forms of institutional hierarchy within an expanded higher education system serve to reinforce higher education's social role of reproducing inequality. Thus, in reporting the views of some working class students and potential students, Archer writes

Thus respondents were generally aware that while access has been widened, the elite institutions remain mostly closed for working class groups and this would reduce the value of their degrees in the graduate labour market.

(Archer, 2003, p128)

A similar picture emerges in respect of students from ethnic minorities.

A crucial question raised by this perceived relationship between institutional and social hierarchies in UK higher education is whether it is based on real differences in achievement by students studying in different institutional settings. Of course, some differences are intended: students who enrol on work-related foundation degrees are not intended to learn the same things as students on a traditional single honours arts degree. But how far is 'what is learned in higher education' a product of a wider set of organisational and social variations in the context and setting of study? Are the same things learned on modular degrees as traditional single honours degrees? How does combining paid work with study affect what is learned? Does studying from home affect the outcomes of study?

A new CHERI study funded by the ESRC as part of its Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) will seek to answer questions of this sort. The four year project – which commenced in January 2004 – will examine the experiences of students studying in different organisational and social settings. It will compare the outcomes of learning in these different settings. Although the study does not refer explicitly to Trow's three forms of higher education, the kinds of distinctions to be employed by the new project map onto them quite well.

It is interesting to note the views of the students in the Archer study that

few, if any, respondents valued participation as a way to develop 'high quality skills', but a sizeable number valued participation as a means of changing social class and becoming socially mobile.

(Archer, 2003, p126)

Do graduates have better opportunities in the labour market because they possess different (and more valued) knowledge and skills than non-graduates? Do some graduates get better jobs than others because they possess more of these valued knowledge and skills? Higher education officially assumes one set of answers to these questions. Some students at least assume a different set of answers. The new ESRC project seeks to find answers that are empirically grounded and that will cast new light on the social role of the university.

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TEN YEARS OF INTERNATIONAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

Richard Lewis¹

Introduction

It was only just over ten years ago that, in 1991, the Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation (HKCAA) invited representatives of national quality assurance agencies to a conference from which emerged the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE). It is easy to forget that, at the time, very few countries had comprehensive systems of quality assurance in higher education. There was, of course, the United States where the first regional accreditation agencies, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges and the Southern Association of Schools, were founded in 1885 and which had, by 1991, been joined by six other regional accreditation agencies² and scores of specialist or professional accreditors.

Next in the field in the English speaking world were the British where there were in 1991 well established arrangements for the non-university sector of polytechnics and colleges who were subject to the quality assurance regime of the Council of National Academic Awards (CNAA) that had been set up in 1964. The universities were not subject to the CNAA but, in order to forestall threatened government involvement, the representative bodies of heads of universities, then called the Committee of Vice-chancellors and Principals (CVCP) and later re-branded as Universities UK, set up the Academic Audit Unit (AAU) in 1990.

In mainland Europe, France and the Netherlands were the pioneers. In 1985 the French established the Comité National d'Evaluation (CNE) and in the same year the Dutch set up the "Association of Universities of Professional Education" (or the HBO Council), which is responsible for quality assurance in the Dutch hogescholen, a sector that makes up 60% of higher education in the Netherlands. This was followed in 1989 by the "Association of Universities in the Netherlands" (the VSNU) which oversees quality assurance in the Dutch universities.

A number of Asian countries had set up agencies, the earliest being the Japanese Universities Accreditation Agency (JUAA), established in the American model, in 1947 followed by agencies in the Philippines in 1957 and Indonesia in 1966 but in these countries accreditation or quality assurance was essentially a voluntary process and it took some years for the countries to develop anything resembling a comprehensive national system. The HKCAA was established in 1990 but like the CNAA, on which it was based, it was concerned with only the non-university sector of higher education.

Other countries that set up agencies based on the CNAA to deal with the non-university sector were Ireland (where the National Council for Educational Awards³ was set up in 1979), Jamaica (the University Council of Jamaica - 1987) and Japan (the National Institution for Academic Degrees - 1991).

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² While there are, for the purposes of accreditation, six regions in the United States but in two of them, New England and the Western region, there are separate agencies for two and four-year colleges.

³ The NCEA has now been subsumed by the Higher Education and Training Awards Council.

⁴ Full Members are organisations responsible for assuring the academic quality of post-secondary institutions or education programmes other than their own, such as accrediting agencies, universities that accredit other institutions, evaluation agencies and similar organisations www.inqaahe.nl. Note, a small number of members that had been involved in mergers or are the successors of earlier bodies have been excluded from the table.

CHERI and quality assurance...

- CHERI has undertaken many national and international projects on quality assurance in higher education.

- A major international study for OECD resulted in the book: *Managing Quality in Higher Education: an international perspective on institutional assessment and change*, 2000, J. Brennan and T. Shah, Buckingham: Open University Press.

- Other books on quality assurance authored or edited by CHERI staff include:

Standards and Quality in Higher Education, 1997, J. Brennan, P. deVries and R. Williams, London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Quantity and Quality in Higher Education, 1997, J. Radford, K. Raaheim, P. deVries and R. Williams, London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Changing Contexts of Quality Assurance: recent trends in west European higher education, 1994, J. Brennan, P. Maassen and D. Westerheijden, Utrecht: Uitgeverij/Lemma BV.

Table 1: Dates of establishment of INQAAHE full members

Year	
Prior to 1991	30
1991	6
1992	2
1993	5
1994	4
1995	3
1996	8
1997	4
1998	2
1999	5
2000	8
2001	6
2002	2
Total	85

Source Members' database, INQAAHE website⁵.

An analysis of INQAAHE's database reveals that 30 of its full members⁴ had been established prior to 1991, of which 11 were in the United States. The growth in the last ten or so years is summarised in table 1.

While it is difficult to be precise, it seems that there are now at least 56 countries that have either established a reasonably comprehensive national system of quality assurance or are in the process of introducing such a system⁵.

In any paper on the subject of quality assurance it is necessary to be precise about terminology and coverage. In this paper the term quality assurance agencies will be used to describe all agencies responsible for assuring the quality of higher education outside their own institution. The paper will only be concerned with the evaluation of teaching and research and will not consider the evaluation of research.

The prehistory of quality assurance agencies

It would be most unfair to suggest that universities outside the USA were uninterested in quality assurance prior to the 1990s. The UK had its well established external examiner system under which academics from other universities were members of boards of examiners. This was a useful way of ensuring comparability of standards in a relatively small system and it served the UK system well, but it had two main drawbacks. One was that the universities themselves selected their own external examiners and the other was that the system was only concerned with the standards of the output and not the quality of the process.

Generally throughout the world it was thought that quality was best assured by inputs and particularly the quality of the full-time faculty but the problem was, of course, that the quality of potential new teaching staff was judged on their research rather than their teaching abilities. The consequence was that although the students might be very badly taught, they were at least taught by someone who really knew the subject.

Drivers of change

A number of factors lead to the worldwide movement to establish national quality assurance bodies including a general acceptance of the need to be more accountable for the use of public funds. In seeking reasons that are more specifically related to higher education we might journey back to the nineteenth century to explore the reasons for the birth of the US accreditation movement. The motivation was that the growing diversity of institutional forms and the lack of centrally defined standards led to a level of chaos that would have led to government intervention had the institutions not acted first (Kells 1989). This is a theme - "act first to prevent worst" - that recurs in the history of quality assurance in higher education. It was certainly one of the main reasons why in the UK the CVCP set up the AAU. A related theme is found in those countries whose governments had traditionally exercised tight control over the operations of its universities. In a number of countries detailed day to day control of the

⁵ A selection of countries with reasonably comprehensive HE quality assurance or accreditation systems in place or almost in place as at August 2003:

Albania, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Bahamas, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, China – Hong Kong, Costa Rica, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Kenya, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Malaysia, Mauritius, Mexico, Mongolia, Namibia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Oman, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, UK, USA, Vietnam.

Sources: INQAAHE website and the ENQA survey (2003).

NOTE: This does not purport to be a comprehensive list. It should also be noted that in some of the countries listed above the quality system is not yet in full operation, while in some countries the system may not encompass all types of institutions of higher education, for example the system may exclude private institutions or those that do not possess university status.

universities has been relaxed but in return governments have required the universities to be subject to some form of external quality assurance (Brennan and Shah 2000).

It is also worth noting that in a number of the pioneering countries, including Hong Kong, the Netherlands and the UK, the first significant developments in quality assurance were related to the non-university sector of higher education. Whatever was said about comparability of esteem, the non-university institutions were seen to be inferior sorts of institutions who could not call on generations of tradition or the belief that they knew more about what they were doing than any group of outsiders to justify the lack of an external involvement in their quality assurance. These new institutions, it was felt, needed to be kept under academic scrutiny and hence the establishment of external quality assurance bodies. While their remit did not extend into the universities, their existence made it more difficult to justify the absence of any systematic system of external involvement in quality assurance of universities especially as the number of students and institutions grew, bringing the end of small elite systems of university education and their replacement by mass systems.

National quality assurance systems- the four-stage model

With very few exceptions countries have adopted what the European Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (ENQA) describes as a four-stage model. (ENQA 2003). The stages are:

- Self-evaluation
- Peer group review
- Site visit
- Publication of results

Increasingly a fifth stage is emerging in many countries - the use of published criteria and standards. The operation of any quality assurance process is bound to involve a degree of subjectivity but prior to the specification of criteria and standards the process was heavily dependent on the peer group involved in the assessment.

This consistency of practice is in part a result of the influence of the US model of accreditation that had been developed over the years, but it is nonetheless surprising that other approaches have not been adopted. The most obvious alternative approach is a system of inspection and observation that is often found in other sectors of education. Such an approach has in general been resisted by higher education and this might in some part be due to the success of higher education in many countries of "acting first to prevent worse" and thus ensuring that the chosen system of quality assurance is one that they find palatable.

National quality assurance systems – the differences

The four-stage model does allow for considerable variations and these may be found relating to the following:

- Ownership and funding of the agency
- The focus of evaluation
- Whether the evaluation is of the programme, the course or the institution
- Whether the reports, rather than just the results of the evaluation, are published and whether the reports are graded

Ownership and funding

In 1992 a survey of the 60 INQAAHE members was carried out. The results have not been published but were presented to members at the INQAAHE workshop held in Montego Bay, Jamaica in April of that year. Sixty members responded to the survey of which 41% were from Europe, 17% from Asia, 16% from the USA and Canada, 10% from Latin America and the Caribbean, 10% from Australia and New Zealand, and 6% from Africa.

Table 2: Ownership of quality assurance bodies

	%
Government	26
Independent, but government initiative	29
Higher Education Institutions	21
Mixture of above	12
Professional bodies	12

In only about a quarter of cases does the government actually own the agency but it is clear that governments have had a major involvement in the establishment of the majority of the agencies.

A related question is who funds the agency. This was addressed in an ENQA survey of its members (ENQA 2003) which covered 34 agencies. From this it emerged that government (regional or national) was the main source of funding, - 75% of the respondents were in receipt of such funding, - followed by institutions of higher education, who provided funding for 28% of the agencies. But of course, for most public institutions the source of its funding from which it would make its contribution to the agency is governmental funding.

The real question is how independent can the agency be of government in its operations and the answer is that the agency must, even when not government funded or owned, at the very least look over its shoulder to register the reactions of government to its actions. Even in the United States, where accreditation is in theory a voluntary government free activity, accrediting bodies have lobbied extensively especially when legislation like the re-authorisation bill is being considered by Congress.

The UK has provided a dramatic example of the power of government to intervene in the affairs of an agency that it does not own and which it does not directly fund. The UK Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) is owned by the representative bodies of heads of institutions and funded by a combination of institutional subscriptions and fees received from the funding agencies which act as intermediaries between government and the institutions. In 2000/2001 there had been a campaign, led by a number of the elite universities, to reduce the degree of detailed scrutiny in the evaluations carried out by the QAA, or in other words to ensure that the QAA applies a "lighter touch". The campaign was successful but it was the then Secretary of State for Education and Employment, David Blunkett, who announced that the QAA would be changing its approach even though it was not clear that he had authority so to do (THES 2001).

In most countries the need to find a balance between the desire to apply a dispassionate academic approach to quality assurance and to implement the policies of the government of the day is an ongoing issue. What the UK example shows is that when the government is the ultimate paymaster, which it most often is, the attitude of the government will be crucial whoever owns the quality assurance agency.

The focus of the evaluation

There are two aspects to this topic. The first is whether the focus of evaluation is the programme (or the subject⁶), the institution, both the programme and the institution, or a particular theme that goes across an institution. An example of the theme might be the use of information technology or student services. The second aspect is whether the purpose of the evaluation is to make a binary yes/no decision or is merely to report on what is found.

⁶ Programme evaluation focuses on a course of study that leads to a qualification while subject evaluation is concerned with the teaching of a subject across the institution in all programmes. In much of the literature subject evaluation is consumed within programme evaluation.

Practice does vary quite considerably over the world. The INQAAHE 1992 survey revealed that 17% of agencies were primarily concerned with institutional evaluation, 37% with programme evaluation and 46% were engaged in both. The ENQA survey took a more sophisticated approach and reported that in terms of evaluation activities six of the 34 agencies were engaged in subject evaluation, 21 in programme evaluation, 12 in institutional evaluation and 10 in theme evaluation.

The most fundamental distinction is between institutional and programme evaluation and it might be useful to compare the two approaches.

As the name suggests, the focus of institutional evaluation is the institution and its advocates would say that it is based on the principle that “recognises that quality and quality assurance are primarily the responsibility of the higher education institutions themselves.”⁷ In its pure form, when it is not combined with programme review, an institutional review will be concerned with the institution presenting evidence of how it assures itself of the quality of the programmes it provides to its students and, possibly, additional aspects such as the quality of student services.

With programme review the focus is on the study programme and the peers will be making judgements themselves about the quality of what is provided.

Those who believe that institutional review should be the focus do so because they believe that the quality will best be assured if the institution is wholly committed to the task such that it underpins all its activities on a day-by-day basis. They believe that it is a better approach than one where the institution has to demonstrate the quality of its provision to a visiting party every five or six years. The more cynical of the institutional review supporters observe that universities are full of intelligent people who are quite capable of convincing external evaluators that the quality of what they are doing is good.

Both the INQAAHE and the ENQA surveys indicate that, while many agencies do both, programme review is more widely used than institutional review. Programme review is particularly popular in relatively small countries, such as the Netherlands, where it is possible to review all the programmes in a particular discipline within a relatively short time period using the same team of external peers. It might also be thought to be more appropriate in a culture where academics feel that they are more closely linked with their disciplinary group than to the institution where they work.

The second issue to be addressed under this heading is whether the declared purpose of the evaluation is to give approval or simply to report.

The word accreditation bedevils the world of quality assurance especially in non-English speaking countries because, due to the influence of the USA, it has been adopted and applied to describe quality assurance activities even when accreditation is not actually involved.

One of the most useful definitions of an “accreditation type process” is provided by ENQA.

“An accreditation type process is defined as one that has the following characteristics:

- accreditation recognizes (or not) that a higher education course, programme or institution meets a certain standard, which may be a minimum standard, or a standard of excellence;
- accreditation therefore always involves a bench-marking assessment;
- accreditation findings are based on quality criteria, never on political considerations;
- Accreditation findings include a binary element, being always either yes or no.” (ENQA 2003).

⁷ Paragraph 10 of INQAAHE’s Principles of Good Practice, www.inqaahe.nl

Perhaps the key point to note is the last one which emphasises that accreditation must involve a yes/no decision and that, normally, consequences will follow if a "no decision" is made.

The INQAAHE survey indicated that most of the agencies were engaged in accreditation.

Table 3: Percentages of agencies involved in accreditation

	Institutional Evaluation %	Programme Evaluation %
Accreditation	65	59
Non-accreditation	35	41

Virtually all quality assurance agencies, whether or not they are accreditators, state that they are more concerned with the improvement of quality than of the monitoring of quality.

Following the 1992 survey, INQAAHE members were asked to update their returns describing how they are set up and how they operate. These returns from 69 agencies were published by the Irish Higher Education and Training Awards Council in 2003 (HETAC 2003).

Agencies were asked to state the main purposes of their evaluation activities and to score them on a scale of 5 to 1, where 5 was "very important". Five suggested answers were provided but agencies could suggest other purposes.

The suggested purposes were:

- Accreditation
- Accountability
- Improvement/enhancement
- Benchmarking
- Providing information

There appeared to be some confusion between accountability and accreditation in that some agencies ticked both boxes while some agencies, who described themselves as carrying out an accreditation function, ticked only the accountability box. Thus, the results for accreditation and accountability have been combined for the purposes of the table 4. Where agencies gave a different score for the two purposes the higher score has been used in the table.

Table 4: Main objectives of quality assurance agencies

	Av score	No of agencies					Not ticked
		5	4	3	2	1	
Improvement/enhancement	4.5	55	8	1	0	0	5
Accountability/accreditation	4.0	43	8	9	1	0	8
Providing information	3.1	20	17	12	2	4	14
Bench marking	2.3	8	16	12	6	6	21

The nature of the published reports

The results of evaluations are published but in a large minority of cases the actual reports are confidential, at least in the first instance. The 1992 INQAAHE survey produced the following results

Table 5: Status of Reports (percentages)
%

Widely published	41
Public but not widely distributed	24
Confidential	35

The results might overstate the percentage of confidential reports as, in some cases, although the agency is not at liberty to publish the report the institution will make it publicly available.

Those who favour keeping reports confidential, as is the case in the USA, do so on the grounds that a more honest report will be written if it does not appear in the public domain. The counter argument is that the information should be available to all stakeholders in higher education and particularly the students, and their advisers, to help them decide to what institutions to apply.

In none of the surveys that are quoted in this paper were agencies asked whether they ranked institutions but this is another area where there are differences in practice. Perhaps the most elaborate system is found in India where the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) grades its accredited institutions on a nine point scale running from C to A double plus. A sharp contrast is Denmark where the Danish Evaluation Act explicitly prohibits any form of ranking of the evaluated educational activities or institutions.

International convergence or divergence?

Superficially there is a great degree of commonality in the way that external quality assurance agencies work in that they virtually all use the four/five stage model and they virtually all claim that the most important function is the enhancement of quality followed by accountability. But a more detailed examination suggests that there are significant differences in the way in which they work.

It might be helpful to compare the US system of accreditation which has survived over a century with the new systems that were established in the last decade.

The US system has the following key characteristics.

- It is, in theory at least, voluntary in that non-accredited institutions can operate, although the need to be accredited in order to have access to federal funds makes it a non-voluntary activity for virtually all institutions of higher education.
- It is carried out by private not-for-profit organisations especially created to carry out the work of accreditation. Neither state nor federal government is represented on the boards of the accrediting agencies.
- The agencies are funded by the institutions.
- The focus of the evaluation is on the institution although there are, of course, specialised and professional agencies that accredit professional disciplines such as law, business, engineering and medicine.
- The result is a binary one. An institution is either accredited or not accredited.⁸
- The agency does not publish reports although the accredited institutions often publish the reports themselves.

One consequence of the US system is that there is considerable variation in the quality of accredited institutions and some observers would question whether the minimum level is too low.

⁸ A new institution may be placed in a state of provisional accreditation before achieving full accreditation.

While there are considerable differences between the emerging systems it does appear that although countries have often adopted US terminology they have usually not adopted their practices.

Governments play a more central role in other countries and most agencies are either government agencies or were established at the expressed or implied behest of government and, as described above, are often funded by government. Programme review is becoming more popular in all parts of the world, but particularly in Europe (but not the UK). Reports are published and a good number of agencies see the provision of information as one of its prime functions - as described above the 2003 INQAAHE survey showed that 37 out of 69 agencies scored this objective as 4 or 5 on a five point scale.

Quality assurance agencies, often in partnership with other agencies, are taking a major role in the development of national qualification frameworks that set out the attributes that might be expected to be demonstrated by the holder of an award at a particular level and, in some countries and on a pan-European basis, are producing subject guidelines that, in the words of the QAA, "provide a means for the academic community to describe the nature and characteristics of programmes in a specified subject. They also represent general expectations about the standards for the award of qualifications at a given level and articulate the attributes and capabilities that those possessing such qualifications should be able to demonstrate" (QAA 2000).

It is perhaps worth noting that although the QAA has moved away from the universal application of programme review, institutions will still be required to demonstrate their compliance with the subject benchmarks or justify any departures from them. This is a good example of how an agency can retain some leverage over curriculum content even if it does not itself engage in programme review.

The combination of the factors that distinguish the approach of many new agencies to that traditionally used in the United States - including the publication of reports, the production of qualifications frameworks and subject benchmarks - suggests that quality assurance agencies are taking a more active part in the enhancement of quality and the maintenance of a degree of comparability of provision within systems of higher education that are becoming increasingly diverse.

Summary

There has over the last decade been a significant growth in the establishment of national quality assurance agencies and what was, in the early 1990s, a minority pursuit is now almost a universal practice. While there remains, at least superficially, a good degree of commonality in the ways in which agencies operate, there are in fact important differences in the ways that systems are developing and of the questions that are being asked of institutions. There are, however, two very important characteristics that are shared by many agencies - the desire to improve quality and the wish to inform the wider community about quality in higher education.

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CHERI's projects

	Dates
What is Learned at University. The Social and Organisational Mediation of Learning (funded by ESRC/TLRP)	January 2004 - December 2007
The Flexible Professional in the Knowledge Society (REFLEX) (funded by European Commission Sixth Framework Programme)	April 2004 - March 2007
The Role of Vocational Higher Education in Meeting the Present and Future Needs of the Economy (funded by Learning and Skills Council, the Department for Education and Skills, the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the Council for Industry and Higher Education)	January 2003 - July 2003
Responding to Students' Needs in the First Year of Study (funded by QAA Scotland and SHEFC)	October 2003 - January 2004
Student Feedback in Scottish Higher Education Institutions (funded by QAA Scotland and SHEFC)	October 2003 - January 2004
Greater Manchester Strategic Alliance (funded by HEFCE, the Learning and Skills Council and the North West Development Agency)	July 2003 - November 2003
Collecting and Using Student Feedback on Quality and Standards of Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (funded by HEFCE)	July 2002 – December 2002
Rolling Research Brief – Key Issues in Higher Education (funded by Department for Education and Skills)	July 2000 – ongoing
The Role of Universities in the Transformation of Societies (funded by Rockefeller Foundation and the Soros Foundation)	Nov 2000 – Dec 2003
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Access to What? Improving Employment Prospects for Graduates from Socially Disadvantaged Groups	January 2001 - December 2003
Improving Employment Prospects for Graduates from Socially Disadvantaged Groups (funded by Higher Education Funding Councils, HECSU, Universities UK, CIHE)	Jan 2001 –Dec 2002
UK Graduates and the Impact of Work Experience (funded by HEFCE)	2001/2
The Support of the Accreditation System in Albania (funded by the European Commission (Tempus))	Nov 1999 – Jan 2002
An Investigation of the Process of Transition from Higher Education to Employment (funded by the Open University)	Sept 2000 – Dec 2001
Assessment: A Meta Research Project (funded by the LTSN Generic Centre)	Sept 2001 – Dec 2001
Higher Education and Graduate Employment in Europe (funded by European Commission)	Dec 1997 - Dec 2001

	Dates
Targeted Initiative on Access for Mature Students (Higher Education Authority, Ireland)	Nov 2000 – May 2001
Evaluation of the Open Society Institute's Summer Schools (Soros : Open Society Institute)	June 2000 – April 2001
Nature and Extent of Undergraduates' Work Experience (funded by HEFCE)	Jan 2001 – March 2001
The European Dimension of Institutional Quality Management (funded by EC Phare)	July 1999 – June 2000
Part-time students and employment (funded by the then DfEE)	June 1998 – Oct 1999
Strategic Study on Legislation, Recognition and Quality Assurance Methods in the Field of Open and Distance Learning in Central and Eastern Europe (funded by EC Phare)	Jan 1999 – Oct 1999
Quality Assurance Systems for Higher Education in Macedonia (funded by EC Tempus Phare)	Sept 1998 – March 1999
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Evaluation of OUVS (commissioned by the Open University Validation Services)	1998
Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Central and Eastern Europe (funded by EC Phare)	June 1997 – Oct 1998
Key Skills (funded by the Council for Industry and Higher Education)	Sept 1997 – June 1998
Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions in Bulgaria (funded by EC Phare)	Oct 1996 – July 1997
The Impact of Teaching Quality Assessment in England (funded by HEFCE)	1997
An Evaluation of the Flexibility in Teaching and Learning Scheme in Scotland (funded by SHEFC)	March 1996 – Jan 1997
Work Based Learning (funded by the then DfEE)	1997
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