

# CHAPTER 2

## Global Diversity in Higher Education Systems: The Divergent Fortunes of USA, Europe and Asia

*Howard Newby*

### INTRODUCTION

A persistent theme of the Glion Colloquium, almost since inception, has been the impact of globalization on higher education worldwide. Indeed the sixth colloquium, which took place in 2007, was devoted to this topic. (Weber Duderstadt, 2008). It was at that colloquium that Bob Zemsky, quite rightly, reminded us of the distinction between internationalization and globalization (Zemsky, 2008) and cast a sardonic eye over some of the more exaggerated claims that were being made in the United States, based on the popularity of Tom Friedman's book *The World is Flat* (Friedman, 2005), about the potentially transformative impact of globalization on education generally, and higher education in particular.

It is worth reminding ourselves of Zemsky's summary. Two decades into what Friedman has described as the 'global revolution', its list of attributes, Zemsky wrote, could be said 'to apply to few, if any, of the world's leading universities. Most observers outside the academic world would argue, correctly I believe, that universities, both in their operations and their governance, remain opaque, even obtuse, rather than transparent. Few transactions can be said to be instantaneous, while the time necessary to develop new educational

programmes has probably lengthened rather than shortened. Student markets have remained decidedly local. Even less global are the mechanisms by which prices are set for university education. The result is an academic world that has become aggressively more international without it fast becoming much more global. Students travel more; faculty wander more broadly; and leaders of international enterprises find themselves spending more time abroad attending the interests and soliciting the support of their increasingly international alumni... Scientific research is the principal exception... [but] most of what higher education does internationally is not global.' (Zemsky, 2008).

In the same volume I presented an analysis of global trends which drew upon the comprehensive study of 24 countries undertaken by the OECD (Newby, 2008). This analysis attempted to demonstrate the commonality of the challenges facing higher education policy makers around the world, whatever their history and level of development. Stated quite simply:

'There is a common move towards expanding the proportion of the population achieving higher education qualifications. This produces a common desire to shift from an 'elite' to a 'mass' higher education system — known in Europe as 'massification'. This is occurring because governments all around the world accept that higher education is a major driver of the knowledge-based economy... In many countries there are also strong social pressures to expand the opportunity to participate in higher education.

Governments all around the world not only wish to expand the sector, they also wish to achieve this expansion without any dilution of quality. Indeed, they wish to enhance quality at the same time as engage in expansion.

And finally, Governments all around the world wish to expand the sector and enhance quality whilst simultaneously reducing... the burden of resources this requires from public finances'. (Newby, 2008, pp. 56-57)

I went on to argue that these three public policy polarities created a kind of force-field which put higher education systems around the world in a state of some considerable tension. Local — i.e. national- political factors often determined where a particular higher education system came to rest between the competing forces of massification, quality enhancement and fiscal prudence.

In the year following these publications, in 2009, UNESCO held its World Conference On Higher Education, having commissioned a trend report which formed the centrepiece of the conference. (Altbach et al., 2009). This report proclaimed that 'an academic revolution' had taken place in higher education in the past half century, marked by 'transformations unprecedented in scope and diversity'. In particular the report focussed on 'the challenge of massification', whose 'logic' is deemed inevitable: greater social mobility, new patterns of funding, increasingly diversified higher education systems and an overall lowering of academic standards. Globalization, it is suggested, 'has already profoundly influenced higher education'. The report calculated that

between 2000 and 2007, the percentage of the age cohort enrolled in tertiary education grew from 19% to 26%, with the most dramatic gains taking place in the most affluent countries. The report estimated that there were some 150.6 million tertiary students globally, roughly a 53% increase since 2000 alone. In addition, more than 2.5 million students were studying outside their home countries, even though cost remained a major barrier to all but the most affluent (see also IAU, 2014). Two main flows were discerned. The first consisted of students from Asia to North America, Western Europe and Australia, principally — although not exclusively — to Anglophone countries. The second was largely state-sponsored — the growth of student mobility within the European Union, through such programmes as Erasmus, etc.

And then came the global financial crisis, the consequences of which remain with us.

## THE FORTUNES OF HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEMS

So what happened next? The main purpose of this paper is to reflect on what has occurred in higher education systems across the world (viewed inevitably in a very generalized and macro sense) since the above observations were written and to assess how far the global economic crisis has produced a convergence, or a diversity, of response.

Statistics on global trends in higher education are often less than reliable and take a long time to compile. Perhaps the most authoritative recent survey was the report by the British Council, “The Shape of Things to Come, Higher Education, Global Trends and Emerging opportunities to 2020”. (British Council, 2012). It analyses the prevailing trends that are shaping higher education globally, covering both teaching and research.

On the basis of the latest data available global tertiary enrolments (undergraduates and post-graduates) were estimated at 170 million in 2009. It should be noted, however, that a more recent estimate by Euromonitor international (Lennard, 2014) has put the total number at 199 million in 2013 with, significantly, more female than male students now participating (98.6 million females; 95.1 million males). This growth seems primarily to be driven by increasing literacy and participation in schools education. Despite growing demand for science and engineering students globally, the number of arts and non-science students continues to grow. The most popular subjects are social sciences, business and law (33.4%) well ahead of science (8.7%) and engineering (11.8%). Four countries alone — China, India, the USA and Russia — account for 45% of the global total, but there are emerging countries which now contain significant number of tertiary enrolments — Brazil (6.4 million), Indonesia (4.9 million), Iran (3.4 million), South Korea (3.3 million) and Turkey (3.0 million).

International student mobility continues to rise in absolute terms, heading towards 6.5 million by 2020. But proportionately, this is only keeping pace with the growth of higher education students more generally. Outbound mobility ratios vary enormously — from 50% in some African and Caribbean countries to less than 1% in the UK, USA and Australia. As is well known the distribution of destination countries is highly concentrated in the USA, UK, Australia, France, Germany, Russia, Japan and Canada. Together these countries account for 60% of total international students. But there are many countries with significant inbound flows at the regional level — South Africa, Singapore, Hong Kong, Malaysia and South Korea. As the report observes, somewhat laconically, ‘while bilateral flows to China are not yet likely to rival the above in volume terms, they could have profound implications in future for tertiary institutions across the globe’. (p6). Indeed they could.

The report also notes that international student flows are highly correlated with international trade flows (statistically this accounts for 70% of the variance). It also notes the impact of demographic change: by 2020 just four countries — India, China, the USA and Indonesia — will account for over half of the world’s 18-22 year olds, with a further 25% coming from Pakistan, Nigeria, Brazil, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Philippines, Mexico, Egypt and Vietnam. However, it is India and China which dominate global growth in tertiary enrolments, with nearly half of the global growth in these two countries alone. Nevertheless, looking forward, diverging demographic trends mean that while China’s rate of growth is likely to decline, that in India will continue to grow. For this reason, international student flows into the Gulf States are likely to rise considerably, especially given the level of investment in higher education infrastructure taking place there. These trends are summarised in Table 1.

The report also notes that the volume of global research output is dominated by a few large countries including the USA, Germany, Japan, China and the UK. Although smaller niche players such as Switzerland and the Netherlands flourish via extensive collaborations, volume dictates that the majority of future reach collaboration opportunities will continue to come from major players such as the USA and China. As is widely recognized, researchers with international experience create the most widely-cited research articles, but the countries generating the highest average citation impact is somewhat different — Switzerland, the Netherlands, the Nordic Countries, the UK and the USA. So smaller countries which excel in niche technological growth markets can continue to sustain a globally-competitive research base. But overall, as the report concludes, the global tertiary education sector is starting to move east, but at this stage less so south (see Table 2).

Table 1: Summary of future higher education opportunities for global engagement (2020)

International tertiary education opportunity	Future opportunities <sup>4</sup>
<b>International student mobility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Largest outbound mobile student flows by origin (2020):</b> China (585k), India (296k), South Korea (134k), Germany (100k), Turkey (84k), Malaysia (82k), Nigeria (67k)</li> <li>• <b>Fastest growing (absolute) outbound mobile student flows (next decade):</b> India (71k), Nigeria (30k), Malaysia (22k), Nepal (17k), Pakistan (17k), Saudi Arabia (16k), Turkey (13k)</li> <li>• <b>Largest inbound mobile student flows by destination (2020):</b> US (582k), UK (331k), Australia (277k), Canada (176k), Germany (155k) – China and Malaysia are also likely to feature here</li> <li>• <b>Fastest growing (absolute) inbound mobile student flows (next decade):</b> Australia (51k), UK (28k), US (27k), Canada (23k) – again China will surely feature here</li> <li>• <b>Major bilateral mobile student flows (2020):</b> India to US (118k), China to US (101k), China to Australia (93k), South Korea to US (81k), China to Japan (64k), India to UK (59k) – flows to China, and possibly India also</li> <li>• <b>Fastest growing (absolute) bilateral mobile student flows (next decade):</b> India to UK (20k), India to US (19k), China to Australia (17k), Nigeria to UK (14k), India to Australia (11k) – flows to China, and possibly India also</li> <li>• <b>Fastest declining (absolute) bilateral mobile student flows (next decade):</b> China to Japan (-14k), Japan to US (-8k), China to US (-8k), China to UK (-7k), Kazakhstan to Russia (-5k), Greece to UK (-4k) – the impact of China's aggressive pursuit of international students could well lead to some well-established bilateral flows declining</li> </ul>
<b>Size and growth of domestic tertiary education systems</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Largest tertiary enrolment levels (2020):</b> China (37.4m), India (27.8m), US (20.0m), Brazil (9.2m), Indonesia (7.7m), Russia (6.3m), Japan (3.8m), Turkey (3.8m), Iran (3.8m), Nigeria (3.6m)</li> <li>• <b>Fastest growing (absolute) tertiary enrolment growth (next decade):</b> India (7.1m), China (5.1m), Brazil (2.6m), Indonesia (2.3m), Nigeria (1.4m), Philippines (0.7m), Bangladesh (0.7m), Turkey (0.7m), Ethiopia (0.6m) – growth in certain markets could be larger still if ambitious international student recruitment targets are met</li> <li>• <b>Largest falls in outbound mobile students (next decade):</b> Japan (-10k), Greece (-10k), Poland (-8k), Singapore (-6k), Russia (-6k), Germany (-2k) – China is one to watch here given its demographic outlook and ambitious domestic tertiary sector expansion plans</li> </ul>
<b>TNE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Dual and joint degrees:</b> China, US, France, India, Germany</li> <li>• <b>Franchising and validation:</b> Asia, Latin America, possibly Africa (Nigeria)</li> <li>• <b>Branch campuses:</b> Far East, possibly Middle East</li> <li>• <b>Online:</b> Gulf countries, Asia, possibly Scandinavia</li> </ul>
<b>Academic international research collaboration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Largest growth in research output:</b> Volume growth to be driven by collaborations involving US and Chinese institutions</li> <li>• <b>Highest collaboration rates:</b> Research collaboration rates are higher in many smaller countries, such as Switzerland and Belgium (50–70%); they are lower in China (around 15%). Overall opportunity for collaboration depends on both the volume of research and propensity to collaborate</li> <li>• <b>Highest average citation impacts:</b> Switzerland, Netherlands, Denmark and US – collaborating with these countries in theory should help to maintain and increase research average citation impacts</li> <li>• <b>Three core opportunity groups:</b> Specifically for the UK, future growth in collaborations likely to be with (i) the US and other established high volume research leaders (Germany, France, Italy, Canada, Australia); (ii) high average citation impact leaders (also Switzerland, Netherlands, Denmark) and niche opportunities in smaller, technology-intensive countries such as the Nordic countries, Switzerland and Israel; and (iii) a chance to tap into rapid research output growth in key emerging markets, most notably China but also Malaysia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, India and Qatar</li> </ul>
<b>Business international research collaboration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Large companies:</b> Growth in collaboration opportunities with multinationals; large US, European, Chinese, Indian and Latin American companies; niche opportunities in research and technology-intensive countries e.g. Israel, Switzerland, learn from approach in Nordic countries, Netherlands. Opportunities in countries with high tertiary sector-large firm innovation collaboration rates (e.g. Finland, Sweden) and unexploited opportunities in countries with low tertiary sector-large firm innovation collaboration rates (e.g. Brazil, UK, Spain, Italy)</li> <li>• <b>Smaller companies:</b> Further growth opportunities in small and medium enterprises (SME) collaboration rates for research and development (R and D), focused on niche, high-value technology areas and/or links to multinational supply chains. Opportunities in countries with high tertiary sector-SME innovation collaboration rates (e.g. Finland, Belgium, UK) and unexploited opportunities in countries with low tertiary sector-SME innovation collaboration rates (e.g. Brazil, Italy)</li> <li>• <b>Leading countries in internationally-filed patent application:</b> Japan, US, South Korea and in volume terms, China and India</li> <li>• <b>Innovation:</b> Continuing promotion of open innovation models, with fluid collaboration between business and the higher education sector</li> </ul>

Source: The British Council (2012). The Shape of Things to Come: Higher Education Global Trends and Emerging Opportunities to 2020, p. 7.

Table 2: Summary of future higher education opportunities for global engagement — top country listings (2020)

Rank	Domestic tertiary education system		International student mobility – outbound		International student mobility – inbound	
	Size	Growth	Size	Growth	Size	Growth
	2020	Next decade	2020	Next decade	2020	Next decade
1	China	India	China	India	US	Australia
2	India	China	India	Nigeria	UK	UK
3	US	Brazil	South Korea	Malaysia	Australia	US
4	Brazil	Indonesia	Germany	Nepal	Canada	Canada
5	Indonesia	Nigeria	Turkey	Pakistan	Germany	See point b
6	Russia	Philippines	Malaysia	Saudi Arabia	France	
7	Japan	Bangladesh	Nigeria	Turkey	Japan	
8	Turkey	Turkey	Kazakhstan	Iraq	Russia	
9	Iran	Ethiopia	France	Zimbabwe		
10	Nigeria	Mexico	US	Angola	See point a	

**Note: Asian countries shaded in grey**

**a** China, Malaysia and India will be amongst the top ten host countries by 2020. Due to the data issues discussed in this report the exact position of these host countries is difficult to forecast with certainty although China has potential to be one of the top three hosts of international students.

**b** China, Malaysia, Singapore and India will be in the top ten fastest growing hosts of internationally mobile students.

Source: The British Council (2012). *The Shape of Things to Come: Higher Education Global Trends and Emerging Opportunities* p. 9.

## BENEATH THE GLOBAL TRENDS

In Europe it has often been noted that the greatest impact of the global financial crisis has been on inter-generational equity. Rates of youth unemployment, for example, are far greater — alarmingly so in some countries — than the rate for the population of over-25's. The increasing participation of females in the labour force outside the home has also produced a steep decline in birth-rates in most European countries and in high income countries elsewhere, such as Japan. Meanwhile it has been estimated that Asia, Africa and Latin America will contribute 97% of the world's population growth between now and 2030. So the trend is towards higher birth-rates, larger populations, low affordability and a lack of higher education capacity in the world's fastest growing countries; and declining birth rates, stable or even declining populations and hence ample higher education capacity in high income countries, which in turn suffer from chronic graduate-level skills shortages in some sectors. International student flows have bridged these divergent trends. Mobility assists in mitigating the challenges of excess demand in fast-growing countries (notwithstanding the attendant risks of 'brain drain'), whilst international student recruitment and migration are seen as part of the solution to skills shortages in high income countries in relative or absolute demographic decline.

There are, however, two major inherent risks, viewed from a European perspective. The first concerns political trends in Europe. A generally ageing population has, under the impact of recession, increasingly resisted mobility across national boundaries — even within Europe, let alone from outside. Anti-immigration parties have made major electoral gains right across Europe in the last decade and increasing controls on immigration, including student immigration, are on the rise. An ageing population has also put increasing pressure on other public services — most notably health and welfare — which has in turn had implications for the support for increasing public funding for higher education.

The second risk follows on from this. As the public funding of higher education has declined, at least in real terms, in many European countries, so universities have sought to recruit more international students as a lucrative source of fee income (where this exists) and/or to prop up demand in some strategically important subjects with low indigenous demand (principally the physical sciences, mathematics and engineering). A few countries, and several universities, have now become dependent on international students for their short-term sustainability. In Europe the UK is probably the most prominent example of this; elsewhere in the world it is probably Australia. The proportion of non-EU undergraduate students in British universities now approaches 25%. In London it is much higher — closer to 40% — London being a particularly favourite destination for overseas students. For post-graduate students these percentages are higher still (especially for STEM subjects) and the taught postgraduate market (Masters) hugely so, in part due to the impact of the introduction of undergraduate fees for domestic students, who now graduate with significant loan debt. If overseas students feel that the political and social climate is more and more unreceptive to them, they will go elsewhere. Last year the number of students arriving from India to the UK fell for the first time in living memory, following well-publicized visa restrictions on student entrants. The embryonic emergence of China as a destination country, which is likely to grow in significance as its sector matures, may have serious repercussions.

The global financial crisis has had one further impact on European universities. It hardly needs to be stated that the crisis has had a much deeper impact on countries in southern and eastern Europe than in the north and the west (Ireland excepted). Budgetary cuts in countries like Greece, Spain, Portugal and Italy have directly affected university funding, bringing the sector in these countries to the brink of collapse. It has been estimated that 1.5 million Italians with professional qualifications have migrated abroad in the last decade. A diaspora of academic faculty from southern Europe has moved out of their collapsing university systems, mostly to northern Europe, North American and Australia. This illustrates that inter-regional trends across the

world often mask significant intra-regional divergences which have had huge impacts on the present younger generation's accessibility to higher education, the quality of the student experience for those who do enrol and declining employability on graduation. In some European countries, therefore, massification is no longer affordable and teaching quality has suffered. But elsewhere in Europe, enrolments continue to grow and public funds continue to sustain improvements in teaching quality and the overall student experience. The impact of the global financial crisis has thus been greater within Europe than between Europe and the rest of the world.

This is not to say, however, that the sources of university funding have remained unchanged, even in the less-affected countries in Europe. There has been a notable trend for governments to explore, within what is electorally acceptable, the possibility of pushing more of the cost of higher education onto the users (student fees) and institutions (private providers). This has also been accompanied by the widespread adoption of performance management in the higher education sector, both in teaching and research, as governments seek to make universities more efficient as well as more effective.

The classic case of this in Europe has been the UK, with its troubled recent history of placing the bulk of the cost (approximately 85%) of undergraduate tuition on the students (technically, the graduates through a loan scheme) themselves. As a social experiment it has been closely watched in neighbouring countries, following on from their adoption in many cases of an earlier, and equally contentious UK innovation, the Research Assessment Exercise, which related block grant research funding in universities to an evaluation of its quality. The introduction of fees has had some not entirely predictable consequences. Student demand, contrary to most expectations, has increased and the proportion of students from poor socio-economic groups has also risen, assisted by scholarship and bursary schemes funded out of other students' fee income. University finances have been granted a new lease of life ('awash with cash' is a frequently heard phrase), though capital developments now have to be funded almost entirely out of income-generated surpluses. Still, during a period when many public services have suffered considerable cuts, higher education sometimes looks like an oasis of public sector prosperity. It has not, however, saved the government very much money in the short term as it must finance the student loan debt (some of it already sold off to the private sector at a considerable discount) and certainly the government continues to act as if it controls university finances even though in reality government funding now constitutes quite a small proportion with some small specialist teaching-only institutions receiving no government funding at all. Fee-paying students have, however, become much more sensitive to issues of employability and so changes in demand for certain subjects have become very volatile, especially in the arts and humanities subjects.

In the USA, these trends have been apparent for longer. A recent report from the respected Boston Consulting Group, *Five Forces are Re-Shaping Higher Education* (BGC, 2015) painted a challenging picture. Revenue from key sources is continuing to fall across the University sector, 'putting many institutions at severe financial risk'. Enrolment at public universities is flat or in decline. The age cohort, moreover, peaked in 2011 and is predicted to continue falling or stay the same until 2024. State appropriations have been in precipitous decline and now amount as little as 1% at the University of Colorado, Boulder, though the mean contribution is around 18%. More of the cost has been placed on tuition fees and these have escalated to a point where tuition costs are now a political issue in the USA with a real prospect that fees will no longer be affordable for vast swathes of the population. The annual rate of increase is currently 5.2%. The average fee per annum at a four-year public university was \$9,000 in 2013 and more than \$30,000 for a private non-profit institution.

If this were not bad enough absolute unemployment levels have remained stubbornly high for college graduates. And student debt loads have grown 8% annually since the financial crisis began. The debt default rate now stands at 15%, double the rate of 2008. One result of all of this is that greater transparency about student learning outcomes is becoming the norm. In many states the legislatures are relating university funding to completion rates. Some of this is familiar in Europe, but other aspects less so: many colleges are providing detailed report cards to justify the cost of an education and to demonstrate the outcomes of specific programmes and study. A few are even making guarantees of employment after graduation and more are certifying the knowledge and skills of their graduates: shades here of a European-style qualifications framework linked to learning outcomes.

### **The Rise and Rise of Private Provision**

The recent experience of the UK and the USA demonstrates that 'affordable massification' has been a fraught process under the impact of recessionary economic conditions. But this has been in nations where, by comparison with some parts of the world, demand has been rising only modestly. However, in Latin American, Asia and even (from a low base) Africa, the growth in demand for higher education has been exponential and socially unstoppable. Socially to be a university graduate is seen as a badge of modernity and an entry visa to an aspirational lifestyle. Economically it is regarded as a passport to higher-paid employment and career progression. In most emerging economies there is no way that this burgeoning demand can be met solely from public resources. So the choice for students and their parents has been not so much between a public university and a private university, as between a

private university and no university. The private sector has stepped in to fill this gap.

This is where the USA is an exception when viewed internationally. In the USA the elite Universities are predominantly private (they do, of course, receive substantial public funds, especially for research); whereas the public universities provide an alternative for those unable to gain access to the elite colleges. Elsewhere in the world the reverse is usually the case: the elite universities are publically funded and the alternative is a private provider. The latter also focus on what might be termed 'vocational' higher education, often disdained by the elite institutions, but where there is huge, and often unmet, demand. Worldwide it is the private sector which is growing the most rapidly, assisted rather than hindered by the recessionary climate, and it is this part of the sector which has been in the forefront of educational innovation with on-line learning and the use of other technology-led pedagogies a particular focus.

The sales and marketing of the private sector plays to and feeds off an understandable anxiety about the cost and return on investment of enrolling in higher education. This has been exacerbated by the recession and has affected the perceptions of publically-funded higher education, too. As students bear more of the costs they behave more like customers and demand value for money. They increasingly regard higher education as a means to an end — employment in a 'graduate job' — rather than an end in itself. Employability trumps teaching quality. A common critique of private providers, especially for-profit institutions, is that they represent poor quality. And sometimes this is true, especially in countries with weak or non-existent regulatory regimes. But quality sells and behind the accusations of poor quality there is usually a more atavistic fear — that higher education is no longer higher and has become a form of vocational training, a utilitarian activity, a means to an end.

The search for affordable massification shifts the balance between public and private, but it also shifts the balance between vocational and professional provision. It is not as clear as it once was how far higher education is a public or a private good and while we all know that it is both, the balance between public and private funding has not been derived from any assessment of public and private returns. It is a result more of economic necessity produced by political choices.

## The Rise of Asia

The old cliché, that Europe is the past, America is the present and Asia the future, has some resonance in the world of higher education. Education, including higher education, has been regarded across Asia as a *sine qua non* of economic and social development, reflecting in part the high valuation

placed on education in virtually all Asian cultures. While Europe and North America have faltered during the recession, Asia has continued to forge ahead. The position of Asian universities in global (predominantly research-based) rankings continues to improve — and who, a generation ago, would have believed that an invention of a Deputy Dean in a Shanghai University would have such a profound influence in North America, Europe and the rest of the world on the direction of national higher education research policies?

As indicated earlier in this paper, as Asian university systems mature, recently-established patterns of international student mobility are quite likely to change, with severe implications for some older-established systems. In the meantime, the governments of China, Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, South Korea and the Gulf States all have ambitions to be regional hubs for education and research. They also have associated ambitions to create, or increase, a cohort of ‘world-class universities’ which will give these aspirations a degree of credibility. This is clearly a long-term strategy which requires a long-term political commitment and some very deep pockets. But, unlike in the West where the recession has produced a wobble in the public estimation of higher education (see below), there are no significant signs that this long-term commitment is weakening. Asian higher education is on the up and both governments and the wider public know it. A highly aspirational Asian middle class continues to regard participation for their children in higher education as their most important familial objective, one for which they are still prepared to make enormous personal sacrifices.

If the rise of Asian higher education falters, it is unlikely to be a result, then, of either a lack of financial commitment or public support. Other, softer, issues, represent greater risks. The promotion of national and regional ambitions in both research and teaching, has proceeded by building stronger relations with the West, from which they have sought to learn the ingredients of building ‘world class’ university institutions. Initially student mobility was at the centre of this, graduates returning (usually) to their home countries to participate in their embryonic professional activities, including university teaching. Later, these same teacher returned and were supplemented by others to undertake PhDs in the West and thereby raise the quality and standards of their home institutions. The most recent phase has been characterized by a number of Asian countries co-operating with elite foreign universities as part of their regional hub strategy, up to and including the establishment of local campuses by overseas universities. Where these have not been successful it has not usually been due to a lack of resources but to what might be broadly described as cultural issues. These include definitions of academic freedom, civil rights, the treatment of female students and staff and broader quality of life issues which have, from time to time, conspired to make it difficult to recruit and retain top quality international staff and students.

For every success there are several which have left a trail of disappointed expectations. Unfortunately there is no culturally-neutral template for a word-class university and money alone is not the complete answer.

### Is It Worth It?

In the post-war period higher education was regarded in the USA as a key component of equality of opportunity and upward social mobility. 'College' is part of the American Dream. In the more traditional ambience of Europe, opinion was more ambivalent. University education was more of a positional good and therefore access was more selective and socially exclusive. In the words of the English novelist and former academic, Kingsley Amis, as far as higher education was concerned 'more means worse'. Mass higher education would inevitably lead to lower standards as students of lower scholastic ability were able to gain access.

In Britain today, perhaps uniquely in the world, this statement continues to hover in the ether. When the Blair Government set a target of a 50% participation rate, large parts of the press and public met this with incredulity and hostility. Rather than welcoming an expansion in opportunity, the sentiment of many was to echo Amis's nostrum. Ever since, a large part of the British press has waged what amounts to a campaign against the expansion of university education, deploying a toxic mix of promoting status anxiety among affluent parents over universities' admissions policies favouring students from poor backgrounds to questioning the standards of many degree programmes — 'Mickey Mouse' degrees' in the words of a (Labour Higher Education) Minister.

Today this hostility has shifted somewhat. The status anxieties still remain, so that parents continue to pay school fees which are much higher than university fees in order to try to ensure that their children will be admitted to 'good' universities. But contemporary rhetoric questions the value of a university education in terms of a crude cost-benefit analysis — does the lifetime return on earnings from obtaining a degree outweigh the cost in the first place? (The answer, by the way, is resoundingly yes.) A persistent theme is to ask, why bother going to university and pay fees when you could be earning money and/or take sub-degree vocational qualifications, especially those that are based in the workplace, such as apprenticeships.

Unlike 'more means worse' this is not a uniquely British argument. Echoes of it appear elsewhere in Europe and in North America. Clearly this is in part a consequence of students meeting more of the costs: a degree is no longer a 'free good'. But in part it is also a product of the global crisis: graduate starting salaries, terms and conditions of employment and even career prospects are not perceived to be what they once were. Moreover, it is seen as essential

not just to obtain any degree in any subject from any university. As higher education has expanded so the sector has differentiated. To be competitive in the labour market a graduate must now obtain a 'good' degree from an elite university in a subject for which there is high demand. Wellesley and Harvard continue to guarantee success; Apache Creek College, Iowa (a fictional example I must add) less so.

In this sense higher education has become, to repeat a common critique of recent trends, a commodity, to be bought and sold like other expensive items, such as a house or car, and to be appraised accordingly. It is clear to me that the disaffected and somewhat disenfranchised generation which has suffered disproportionately from the effects of the global financial crisis, now assesses higher education in this utilitarian fashion far more than their predecessors. 'Is it worth it?' a recent edition of *The Economist* asked. When the Glion Colloquium was founded this question was unthinkable. But it is now. Anti-intellectualism is on the rise. Perhaps this is the greatest challenge which the global financial crisis has bequeathed to us.

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