



HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN THE UK

occupy a privileged place in world higher education, as they are overrepresented among the top-ranked institutions far in excess of what might be expected from an island of 65 million citizens. UK higher education executives have successfully marketed their prowess both in UK institutions and through satellite universities elsewhere to the point where the higher education sector is seen as a major export and economic driver of the overall economy. Higher education in the UK seemed to avoid some of the larger budget cuts institutions throughout the European continent and in the United States—until December 2009 when the government announced that £915 million is to be slashed from the sector over three years.



Making Adjust



ments

The United Kingdom is an iconic powerhouse in higher education, but one that faces new and continuing challenges both domestic and international.

BY DAVID TOBENKIN

Oxford
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AND UK EDUCATORS say challenges still abound:

■ The effects of two major governmental reforms over the past six years are still being assessed. A dramatic increase in student fees for UK and EU students at UK universities and the consequences of a government-funded student lending mechanism to support the same has some concerned that access to UK higher education will be compromised and some questioning whether the appropriate incentives have been set.¹ Some educators likewise question whether curricula with practical applications should be favored over liberal arts, as is the case under the current reforms.

■ Current and possible visa requirements for foreign national university students and graduates are seen by some as a threat to the sector's health. UK students and some institutions are not aggressively integrating with natural partners on the European continent.

■ The possible impact on funding of a general European economic downturn adds further angst.

■ Higher education competition is growing, too. With growing English language higher education on the European continent and vigorous efforts to grow general higher education in current higher education export target markets for students such as China and India, UK educators know they cannot afford to rest on their laurels.

■ And while part of the United Kingdom, the approach toward higher education in the countries of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland diverge in some respects in both challenges and approaches.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MARTIN DAVIDSON



Martin Davidson, chief executive of the British Council

A VIGOROUS SUCCESS STORY

The Nature of UK Higher Education

UK higher education is a powerhouse. World university rankings by the *Times Higher Education* magazine show that UK institutions represent three of the top ten institutions (University of Oxford, University of Cambridge, and Imperial College London) and 32 of the top 200 institutions for 2011-12.

Further confirmation of UK higher education achievement comes from a 2012 Universitas 21 university network report, which ranked the UK tenth in overall higher education system quality among 48 top systems studied, including a second place finish among countries in research input, and a ranking of sixth as measured by connectivity, which is a measure of how well connected the higher education sector is with the rest of the nation's society and how well it is linked internationally in education and research.

The UK has also vastly expanded access to the system over the past decades, with the percentage of high schools graduates continuing to university rising to about 40 percent in recent years. The government has announced a goal for more than 50 percent of students to enter university.

The higher education sector is diverse, with 134 universities total. At or near the top of the pecking order lie six ancient universities in England and Scotland founded between the eleventh and sixteenth centuries, led by Oxford and Cambridge universities, higher education worlds of their own. They are included among a top group of 24 institutions, often referred to as the Russell Group, which includes institutions renowned for both teaching and research excellence. Also included in this group are many so-called civic universities that are research intensive and often located in industrial cities. Many other universities were founded in the 1960s and later in the 1990s, when more than 60 polytechnic institutes, central institutions, and colleges were upgraded to university status.

Some refer to the group of some 30 to 40 institutions beyond the Russell Group as the "squeezed middle," a term that can be deceptive given some of these institutions would be gladly claimed in many parts of the world. However, many of these universities neither attract the top UK secondary school graduates in every subject nor have the lower fees of the universities below them, and will face vigorous

competition under new rules that tie funding to student university choices.

While most universities are essentially legally private, the role of the government in the university sector remains strong with respect to funding; and the quasi-public good they provide leads many to judge them as quasi-public, if still far from the state-owned-and-run model that dominates throughout much of continental Europe. A singular exception is the relatively small University of Buckingham, a truly independent school much on the form of a U.S. liberal arts college. Some for-profits also are starting to have a niche, such as private, for-profit BPP University College, recently acquired by Apollo Group, which also owns the U.S.-based University of Phoenix.

Faculty and staff are employed by universities, rather than, like much of Europe, by the government, but the majority of institutions are involved in national bargaining arrangements with the unions.

The UK higher education sector is already highly international and highly profitable to the country. A recent government analysis identified the total value of education and training exports to the UK economy as £28 billion and the value of international students at £8.5 billion. International education is the fifth-largest service industry export for the UK.

Some say that there is further room for growth. "We do expect those numbers to continue to grow," says Martin Davidson, chief executive of the British Council, a body that provides higher education research, advisory, and marketing services and that is partially funded by the UK government. "We're looking at four percent year-on-year growth over the next decade." Actual line supervision of UK higher education sector is provided by the UK government's Department for Business, Innovation, and Skills.

UK education is also an increasingly internationalized body, with overseas campuses of UK-based institutions expanding. "In 2011-12, the number of students in UK transnational education for the first time has overtaken international students studying in the UK itself," says Pat Killingley, director of higher education for the British Council. "Our research suggests that will continue to grow."



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Efforts to Reform Fee Funding and Expand Access

The biggest recent developments in the UK educational landscape are higher education financing reforms designed to address higher costs caused by the expansion in the proportion of high school graduates continuing on to higher education and that are designed to inject competition and increase autonomy in UK higher education.

While state funding of higher education is guaranteed through the 2013–14 budget, and thus the higher education sector appears to be secure against the severe educational cuts that have roiled many European higher education systems, the reforms have greatly changed how UK higher education institutions will receive their compensation and how it is distributed across the sector.

The reforms began in 2006, when the Tony Blair Labor government raised maximum tuition fees from £1,000 to £3,000 and introduced a government-subsidized loan regime to cover university fees, averting the need for students to pay upfront charges. Under this system, student numbers continued to grow, including participation by students from poor economic backgrounds.

In 2010 reforms proposed by a study led by Lord Browne of Madingley led to policy changes adopted by the current coalition government. These changes raised the maximum tuition fees for UK and other EU students to £9,000, effective beginning in the 2012–13 academic year. While some thought only a few universities would raise their fees accordingly, in fact most did. An exception is that tuition for Scottish and Welsh students attending their own higher education institutions is lower. Tuition for international students studying in the United Kingdom and graduate program tuition and structure continue to be left to the discretion of individual universities.

The governmental reforms also expanded upon a generous lending regime, with the government now offering loans covering the full costs of undergraduate education with a 30-year repayment period. Students in low-earning professions will be able to pay reduced amounts and, if not paid by the end of the 30-year period, the loans will be forgiven altogether.

On the other hand, that loan mechanism was funded through a diversion of funds previously disbursed directly to institutions, leading UK university vice-chancellors (the vice-chancellors are the univer-

Libby Hackett, director of
University Alliance



“There is certainly one major flaw in the new system that many universities are deeply concerned about; namely, that it is putting a strict limit on the number of young people that can access a university education in England.”

sity administrative leads, as the chancellor post is a largely ceremonial one), to have to make due with less. Essentially, the government took 85 percent of direct compensation and used the money to subsidize the heightened student fees through a lending mechanism. Thus, universities would rely upon compensation from students in place of direct government funding.

“Warwick is more self-reliant than many other UK universities—we received just 23 per cent of our budget last year from government,” says University of Warwick Vice-Chancellor Nigel Thrift. “But three years from now that figure will fall even further to the point where we will receive 10 to 12 per cent of our budget directly from government.”

In March 2012, the UK government announced that funding for teaching would be cut by £1.1 billion to £3.2 billion, while money for research would stay constant from the preceding year at £1.6 billion. The £1.1 billion cut in teaching funding is the first of three baseline cuts running to 2014/15 that together total £3 billion off the baseline for teaching. The drop in teaching funding was expected to be made up from increased student fees.

The mechanism was hoped to create competition for students among universities, to contain costs, and to institute student responsibility for the financial costs of their undergraduate educations. In particular, universities with top students with A-level AAB grades or higher—about 85,000 in 2012—were allowed to compete for as many of those students that they could recruit.²

Different higher education vice-chancellors have interpreted the impact of the same developments differently. “There is certainly one major flaw in the new system that many universities are deeply concerned about; namely, that it is putting a strict limit on the number of young people that can access a university education in England,” says Libby Hackett, director of University Alliance, a consortium of 23 UK higher education institutions. “Despite continued demand for university places and promises of increased market forces, the government has had to impose tighter student number controls to reduce its costs in 2012–13 because they’re paying out for student loans. The majority of universities have been subject to cuts in their student number controls—some up to 14 percent of places in just one year—despite high demand and high graduate employment rates in these courses. There will be 15,000 fewer places available for young people to go to university in 2012–13 compared to last year. Despite wide ranging public funding cuts, there is no other OECD country that is reducing the number of university places available to young people. The underlying problem in the UK is that we are choosing to preserve the status quo at the expense of more people being able to access higher education. We’re preserving a gold-standard system that only a few can access.”

On the other hand, Warwick’s Thrift and other educators generally say the reforms have not significantly impaired their operations, unlike a wave of cuts in higher education throughout much of Eu-

rope. "The cuts the government has made so far are not on such a vast scale that the system cannot cope with them," says Thrift. "They have cut our teaching budget by transferring it. Also, the government protected research money on the whole. They have produced a flat cash settlement reduced year-on-year by the value of inflation. There have not been cuts like in Spain, where 25 percent of the research funding was cut. I suspect our profile is not much worse than in the U.S. in terms of research money."

Hackett says that the message of the funding reforms should be clear to UK higher education institutions: "We as a sector have to make sure we take control of our own future. We must reduce our dependency on government and be dependent upon ourselves to position ourselves for the next 20 to 25 years. The economics of funding has brought this to a head but this has been brewing for a long time." She says Alliance's universities now receive less than 50 percent of their funds from the state (including state-funded fee loans). Other sources of funding include international research funding, R&D, business consultancy and training, graduate, international and part-time student fees and philanthropy, she says.

UK vice-chancellors are awaiting the reaction of students. A huge increase in registration in the 2011–12 year was felt as many students tried to get into universities under the lower fees of the older funding system. However, the behavior of students under the new reforms will not begin to register until students make their final choices in September, and some say it will take another full year until solid conclusions can be derived from such trends.

A Higher Education Funding Council report identified 34 universities, many pertaining to the "squeezed middle" group, that it contended would be negatively impacted by the reforms because they neither attract the best students nor have low fees.³ The report said some are expected to suffer drops in attendance of more than 10 percent in fall 2012.

For students from elsewhere in the EU coming to the UK, a rise in fees has a direct impact, says the British Council's Davidson. "At the moment, we don't see significant shift in the numbers, but it is early days. Even anecdotally, we don't see significant shift," says Davidson. "The other aspect of the reforms is that [non-UK] European Union students will become more attractive to UK institutions than they were. Many institutions are doing more marketing in the continent than they were."

The UK and

By David Tobenkin

UK education is a leader in higher education but has a more complicated relationship to implementation of the Bologna Process, a European higher education reform effort designed to implement standardized higher education processes and general European higher education convergence.

A recent Higher Education Academy Report authored by Bologna expert Simon Sweeney, *Responding to the post-2010 Challenge*, concluded that the UK in many ways complied with some of the primary reforms advanced by the Bologna Process.

"It may be argued that the UK complies with key Bologna mechanisms and frameworks since we have already established: the three-cycle framework; quality assurance; awards based on credit accumulation and credits based on learning outcomes; articulation between UK qualification frameworks and the Bologna Qualification Framework of the European Higher Education Area; [and] a commitment to lifelong learning," noted the report.

On the other hand, Sweeney, a lecturer in international political economy and business in the York Management School at the University of York, questioned in the report whether certain UK higher education practices undermine adherence to the spirit of the reforms:

"In important respects there is a tendency in the UK to diverge from the norms and expectations of Bologna. The introduction of fast-track degrees, major increases in fees, differences in master-level provision, reduced contact time, and access to doctoral study directly from a first-cycle qualification raise important questions that may threaten the perceived international competitiveness of UK higher education. Through 'membership' of the Bologna Process the UK is committed to promoting the European dimension and student and staff mobility. However, the UK lags significantly in the number of students engaging in some form of mobility as an accredited part of degree studies, and monolingualism is common."

Other academics agree that the relationship of UK higher education is a complicated one:

"The conclusion I draw is that Bologna sets up a process, but there is a huge divergence in adoption throughout the UK. Bologna is not an issue on agenda of British educators at the moment, and they have a defensive attitude about it," says Anne Corbett, a visiting fellow at the London School of Economics who has studied the relationship of UK higher education to EU and European continental norms.

the Bologna Process

The UK has approached some areas of Bologna with ambivalence in part because it has viewed its own systems as superior, and the introduction of Bologna reforms as creating a possible competitor, Corbett says. "Britain sees the education system as highly competitive. They were early into active recruitment from Asia and many institutions have increasing collaboration with institutions in China and India," Corbett says. "And, of course, Britain gets income from overseas student fees."

Bologna, first signed in 1999 and now boasting 47 signatories, most in the European Union, sets up measures designed to encourage higher education convergence and best practices by making systems compatible and understandable across borders and through adoption of common best practices. "The other thing it was supposed to give European universities is a sense of European identity and encourage collaboration and encourage mobility of students," notes Corbett.

United Kingdom higher education adherence to Bologna Process principles is in part hindered by the structure of British higher education. In particular, unlike many countries in which the state government has a decisive role in most policies choices, and can mandate university adherence to the Bologna Process, British institutions are far more autonomous, including the extent to which they adopt reforms called for in the Bologna Process.

There are some variances of the UK system varies from others with respect to Bologna educational standards. An example is that in the UK graduates with a bachelor's (honours) degree can undertake doctoral studies without first having to obtain a master's degree.

Corbett says some institutions have been more positive in implementing Bologna for specific reasons.

"Imperial College is a leading scientific institution that has made itself Bologna compatible by structuring its

courses in terms of the European credit system, a fact that largely reflects the importance of collaboration with the continent given its scientific orientation," Corbett says.

In some cases, proximity to the European continent also plays a role in encouraging aggressive compliance, Corbett notes. She notes that the University of Kent, located in the southeast England, has also been an aggressive adopter of Bologna reforms its location close to the rest of Europe. "It's seen access to Europe as a niche to exploit." The university's Web site, in fact, loudly identifies the institution as the "University of Kent: the UK's European University."

Another university with strong Bologna processes adherence, she says, is the University of Bath, founded in 1966 with a keen interest in establishing strong European relationships.

There are also general trends toward greater adherence by higher education institutions in some areas. "Many British universities continue

to use British grades in favor of the Bologna-sanctioned ECTS system, but the newer UK universities, many former top technical colleges that were known as polytechnics and used to a system of external evaluation, are applying the ECTS system," Corbett says.

Still, Corbett says she thinks there is much more that could be done to implement the Bologna Process and much to be gained for UK higher education by doing so. "I think the British ought to be active in Bologna for what they can learn and give," Corbett says. "I'm one of the minority in the UK who thinks that the more we are in Europe the better and that there is no better arena than higher education to take advantage of our European cultural opportunities."

King's College

The reforms create pressure for universities to modify their offerings to accommodate student demand. “We must now simultaneously meet rising student expectations and retain sufficient resources for capital expansion,” says Edward Acton, vice-chancellor of the University of East Anglia. “Making sure we get admissions right, with no overrecruitment, is important. The stakes are higher and the board planning needs to be more careful and like a business. Within our university, half our programs are attracting more and more students and some are having more difficulty responding. That will force us to expand those attracting students and shrink those that are not. In our university, programs with strong recruitment include the arts, humanities, social sciences, and some sciences. Chemistry is very challenging and there is some challenge in computer science. We have decided to cease admissions to one of our smallest departments—music—because it was not attracting enough AAB students and because the research was not up to our high standards.”

Some wonder whether the reforms will create a system that is unsustainable.

“The difficulty is that students will leave with substantial debt,” says Sir Christopher Snowden, vice-chancellor of the University of Surrey. “Eventually, they could be forgiven debt, but the bigger deal is those in the middle

who have a job for which they need a degree but are marginally paid, though even for them, it is not hugely punitive. The bigger problem is whether this is a sustainable way of funding student loans. Many won’t pay the loans off, possibly 30 percent [of loan recipients]. That will have an impact on the future loan model.”

Among critics of the financial reforms is the University and College Union, an association of university educators and academic staff: “The number of students applying to university has gone down under the new regime,” says Dan Ashley, head of press for the university. “The great fear is that students start to choose their course based on its cost. We need our brightest minds following their potential and their dreams. Can we really afford a brilliant scientist to switch to IT because he or she doesn’t want to get in so much debt?”

Also critical are some students’ groups. “The changes the Coalition have pushed through are piecemeal, picking the worst bits of the Browne report, dropping an HE bill which could have given students more power and forcing stratification of price that

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Christopher Snowden, vice-chancellor of the University of Surrey

benefits neither students nor creates a market,” says Liam Burns, president of the UK’s National Union of Students. “Support funding is so haphazard and desultory that it more than destroys any progressive elements of the loan repayment options.”

Burns, like Hackett, says that government investment in higher education is insufficient. “The UK is one of only a handful of countries too short-sighted to respond to the financial crisis by increasing investment in education,” Burns says. “The government is pressuring some universities, mainly those that cater more for students from poorer backgrounds, to lower fees and thus lower investment in those poorer students. By removing virtually all of the central teaching grant, the government has created huge instability in the sector forcing course cancellations, department closures, and jobs cuts. None of this is good for students.”

Large protests occurred in 2010, when the fee increases were first announced. However, the financing mechanism and the possibility of eventual loan forgiveness has muted opposition to the fee cap increase that has led to continuing protests throughout Europe, there have not been any significant protests in Ireland since last November.

There has been relatively less attention to postgraduate education, which some term troubling.

"Grad students fees are completely up to the universities," says Angela Turton, head of international mobility at the University of Birmingham. "It's interesting because undergraduate fees are going up and now postgraduate fees are lower than fees for undergraduates, with the exception of MBAs. A lot of universities are hesitant to increase postgraduate fees, as they don't want to cause students to go further into debt."

"There is an extremely underpowered approach by Britain to postgraduate funding," says the University of East Anglia's Acton. "The state is not providing a supplement to encourage Britains to be more educated with higher degrees. It is harder for potential students to borrow now and the difficulty of self-funding their masters or doctoral educations is becoming more intense. And that is now, before the first set of students with new, higher undergraduate debt emerge from universities in 2015. So much energy has been expended on undergraduate education that postgrad-

uate education has been treated as an afterthought that everyone has been too busy to consider. There are suggestions that universities seek alliances with banks to make special terms available for loans for postgraduate education, but that is at an early stage."

Some say the reforms are a mixed bag. "The Browne review was set up in 2010 to address several outstanding areas from the 2006 reforms that had not been addressed," says Nicholas Barr, a London School of Economics professor of public economics. "Had Browne been treated sensibly, we would have had a genuine strategy to build on in 2006. But the government let politics compromise the reforms so badly that it's very much a backwards step from the 2006 reforms. The 2012 reforms moved us backwards, they will not be sustainable, and there will be another white paper in 2016 [to address their shortcomings]."

Among the positive aspects of the reforms, Barr says, were raising the fees cap and interest rates for student loans to make the system more sustainable, extending loans to part-time students, and increasing information regarding the quality of education.



The advertisement features a large image of three students (two women and one man) smiling and looking at a laptop. In the background, the Big Ben clock tower is visible. The text is arranged around the image, with the UEA logo in the top right corner. A large orange circle contains a call to action about early bird rates. A list of benefits is on the right, and contact information is at the bottom right.

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Barr says the unhelpful areas of the reforms include abolishing all taxpayer funding in the arts, humanities, and social sciences, which he says underestimates these areas' benefits to society and that should, therefore, be supported by society. Barr also says that the 2012 reform raised the threshold for loan repayment from £15,000 to £21,000 per year and indexed to earning, thereby establishing a threshold that is too high, and that, when combined with the promise of forgiveness after 30 years, will reduce the student contributions to loan repayment. Further caps on government payments to the students will further deter sufficient admissions, he says. Barr says the result may be insufficient numbers of students being admitted to higher education because it is too fiscally costly for the government.

Barr says that the worst aspect of the legislation, and one that will dampen future UK higher education participation, is that the 2012 reforms abolished programs for primary and secondary students, which he will contends will harm the future supply of qualified students.

"We are spending paying taxpayer money on the wrong things," Barr says. "University graduates are relatively better off, and we should get them to pay more and use the money saved to invest where it produces more impact, in early education."

Others are more sanguine:

"British higher education is in a fantastic position—in fact I think it will overtake the U.S. system in 20 years," says University of Buckingham Vice-Chancellor Terence Kealey. "There is relative decline in the U.S., and the reason is that there is more of a genuine market in Britain than America. What we effectively have right now is an enormous endowment where the government gives £6,000 or £9,000 pounds per student every year. Every university is independent but effectively has access to an endowment, and financial security is largely guaranteed yet every government is quasi-privatized. That will yield tremendous growth in the next 20 years."

Driving Employment

Another key part of the reforms has been efforts to tie higher education to economic and employment policy by emphasizing linkages with industry



Terence Kealey,
University of
Buckingham
vice-chancellor

and academic subjects that will help students find careers.

The UK higher education sector is already recognized as a significant contributor to the bottom line. Education services are valued at £14.1 billion in 2008–09 and that year constituted the fifth largest service export from the UK, representing an estimated one percent of the total GDP in 2008/09, according to the British Council.

University vice-chancellors say a careful balance must be struck between economic policy, on the one hand, and university autonomy and their classical academic mission, on the other.

"We are in the middle of one of the world's most difficult recessions, so it's difficult to say that universities shouldn't be contributing to economic growth if they can," says the University of Warwick's Thrift. "But that's different than skewing the whole mission to produce economic growth. We have a large center here that produces applied research on the auto industry. It quite clearly produces substantial opportunities for economic growth and can sit comfortably aside humanities teaching and research. It doesn't strike me as a massive problem and in some ways is a big opportunity. But we must keep an eye out for some fairly strong values that universities should and do espouse and those should not be compromised."

Snowden says with more funding coming from students, institutions will be more accountable to

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them and cater to their desires, particularly future career prospects.

"In my own view, there has been a wind of change for some time. There has been more strategic subjects support," says Snowden. "Last year, the advent of higher fees in 2012 led to a boom year at every university. Now there is a boom in STEM students while some areas are expected to decrease. We are also taking more international students. If students pay from their pockets for higher education, we must invest in better facilities for students. We've tried to be more efficient, brought change to some areas of administration, and added new software. We invested about 15 million [pounds] in a new library and learning center that has become very popular with students. A couple years ago, we invested £36 million in a new sports park. Students want to see that in a leading university."

"We thought fees would increase around 2012 and in 2005 planned a massive investment that we are now finishing of £378 million and are now starting another £100 million investment," says Sir Steven

Smith, vice-chancellor of the University of Exeter and former president of Universities UK (UUK), an association representing all 134 UK universities. "The key building is a forum that will be the center of campus—a learning center, a social center and will have a massive auditorium. A group formed by the president of the student union, the registrar, and deputy chief executive look at how each penny is spent and tell us what students want. They said they wanted three things: more contact with staff, to be taught by professors, not TAs, and more investments in sports facilities for personal use, like a fitness center. We have responded to all three."

Some question whether the priority on sciences and more practice subjects threatens classical liberal arts education. It was widely reported in 2010 when King's College London abolished the UK's only chair in paleography, the study of ancient handwriting.

Under the new reforms, government will give no money for arts and humanities programs as part of fees areas, whereas STEM subjects will receive roughly 20 percent per student, notes Snowden.

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The Visa Challenge

A significant concern of many educators is immigration policy. In April 2012, the UK abolished the Tier 1 post-study work visa, limiting the availability of post-study work visas for graduates of UK institutions. That has been seen by many educators as generating a competitive disadvantage in the race for international students.

“We know international students are looking not just for highly portable, well-recognized degrees. They are also looking for unique experiences. That experience in the UK is a combination of the reputation of the UK institutions, which are historic and respected worldwide for greater innovation, innovation of teaching methods, and the creative arts factors.”

“Right now, Canada and Australia have increased the ability of graduates to stay and work after graduation, while the UK is putting more restrictions on them staying,” says Hackett. “We are encouraging our government to turn this around.”

“I’m very concerned,” says the University of Exeter’s Smith. “The international student market is growing though the growth is slowing down. It’s a major export earner for us and we worry the government’s commitment to cutting net migration from 250,000 to 100,000 means the only way to do that is cut down on international student immigration. The UUK has written to the prime minister in the last three weeks [in

June 2012] suggesting that they take student figures out of net migration figures by counting them as net migration only if they stay, not if they depart. The UN definition of net migration is those living in country for more than a year, which would include student on a three-year course. Our competitors omit them from the net immigration figure. It’s a political problem because the opposition parties say we are trying to fiddle the figures. The government has said [there are] no plans to make changes.”

While legislation has not yet been enacted, some say strong language in the media regarding the possibility of such legislation has already done harm to recruitment efforts by creating a less receptive image. Many note, however, that some controls are necessary to prevent out-and-out enrollment fraud.

“With respect to the changes in the visa structure that have taken place, we will see the full impact of those in the September intake,” Davidson says. “I think that the biggest problem is less the actual changes in the regulations, which on the whole have a relatively



minor impact on bona fide students. The significant problem is the rhetoric often designed for a domestic audience that is picked up and amplified overseas. There is no question that the message that is picked up in other countries is that students are not welcome. We have taken actions to counteract that. We continue to have conversations with the government both in terms of the language we use around the visa issues and the administration of these issues. There is also more weakness in India at the moment driven by the post-study work visa issue. That is the area they are most concerned about.”

Recruiting at Home, Expanding Abroad

Expansion of UK higher education abroad continues but is shifting form.

Well over one million students experience a UK education each year, including more than 480,000 international students who are attracted to study in its higher education system, plus another 90,000 in independent schools, colleges, and the further education sector, according to a British Council report. In addition, more than a half-million students undertake UK degrees off-shore.

In economic terms, these students make a very significant contribution to the education institutions’ finances—over 10 percent of UK higher education institutions’ income is from international students’ fees, with, for some universities, international students’ contributions constituting as much as 36 percent of their total income.

“We are unique in that we have the largest international education network of its type in the world and occupy a large area in international education and marketing,” says Killingley. “We are seeing that is shifting considerably. Whereas probably over the last couple decades, recruitment of international students has been paramount, what’s increasingly important are transnational partnerships and research partner-

ships. That is key to the position of the UK in the global higher education marketplace.”

The Prime Minister’s Initiative for International Education, funded by the government, universities, and the British Council, ran 10 years from 1999, and was largely centered around international students and their recruitment, development of an education UK brand, a Web site, and big global marketing campaign. “We developed a database of more than 200,000 students considering international education, including what programs they were looking at and which countries they were looking at,” says Killingley.

“What we see and what our research tells us is that in the second phase of the initiative, which began in 2006, the global market is shifting and international student recruiting is becoming very sophisticated,” says Killingley. “We are beginning to see translational partnerships, not just flows of international students. It’s about the formation of strategic partnerships overseas and developing international students’ experiences in the UK. We know international students are looking not just for highly portable, well-recognized degrees.

They are also looking for unique experiences. That experience in the UK is a combination of the reputation of the UK institutions, which are historic and respected worldwide for greater innovation, innovation of teaching methods, and the creative arts factors.”

“Our emphasis now is really to shift and support universities in building long-term transnational teaching and international research partnerships,” Killingley says. “We have huge expertise in them, with respect to how partnerships work, what makes them successful, and who the partners are. We can help shape that.”

We expect further growth of transnational and similar relationships, shared research, and joint research degrees,” says Davidson. “Certainly British and U.S. universities are collaborating in countries like China and India and are moving toward a more global approach. There is a significant variety along the way campuses are structured over seas. [The universities of] Liverpool’s and Nottingham’s approaches of campuses abroad are limited. There will be less researcher-to-researcher relationships and more in-

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stitution-to-institution relationships. That shift began ten to 15 years ago.”

On the other hand, some see limits. “These arrangements don’t have to give away quality, but institutions like Oxford and Cambridge are very nervous about [these types of arrangements],” says Thrift. “So much of the experience there is associated with the place itself. They are teaching in small colleges that are not easily scalable. It’s hard to go from that to a vast campus.”



Cambridge University

The UK government’s Quality Assurance Agency in policing such institutions is seen to have allowed UK institutions to successfully set up arrangements without missteps.

“The quality in overseas campuses is something that we continue to keep close eye on,” Davidson says. “We work with the institutions if we do hear of problems or concerns, which does happen from time to time. We are all extremely conscious of the dangers of damage to the reputation of UK institutions if standards are allowed to fall.”

In 2006 the University of Surrey expanded into China by launching the Surrey International Institute with Dongbei University of Finance and Economics.

“We have 1,500 students there [in China],” says the University of Surrey’s Snowden. “The primary purpose is to allow us to expand our offerings internationally. It’s like having a little bit of the university there and it helps spread our influence. We do send professors from the UK there, partly to make sure that we are offering the same programs. It’s also a place to allow our UK-based students to spend a semester. Right now there is a larger flow from Dongbei who

want to come to England. But the other direction will grow as the university’s institute takes off. We like our students to go to transnational programs, and some Chinese students don’t want to come to the UK or can’t afford it. We didn’t do it to make money—in China, you can cover costs but not export profits.”

A More Competitive World

Many educators recognize that UK higher education is facing increased competition. Net exporters of students like China, Malaysia, and Singapore are increasingly investing to improve their national systems and serve as educational hubs for East Asia. Closer to home, English language instruction is increasing in Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Scandinavia, many of which have strong English language penetration among the general populace, as well as educators, and now offer fees that are relatively less than at UK higher education institutions.

“British universities have to show that they are up to that market,” says Anne Corbett, a visiting fellow at the London School of Economics. “Public policy in Britain is highly favorable to the elite universities. We are hearing more expressions of concern regarding the squeezed middle. The new funding mechanisms are making it harder for universities with long and honored traditions that don’t get targeted science funding or regional help. They also must compete with more and more vocational schools.”

A Diversity of Approaches

Key aspects of higher education differ in Scotland and Wales. In Scotland, the most obvious and significant differentiation is the introduction of fees of up to £9,000 for home students in England from the new academic year in September and October, whereas in Scotland higher education will remain free for home students. However, UK students outside of Scotland will pay fees comparable to what they would pay elsewhere in the UK to attend Scottish institutions.

The ability to forestall fee increases for Scottish students reflects a heavy Scottish higher education lobbying effort.

“When we saw the fee hike in England, we said to government in Scotland, ‘We have something so special in Scotland [with its universities] and so important to social inclusion that you have to make a choice to invest money to keep us competitive with English universities,’” says Alastair Sim, director of Universities Scotland, a representative body of Scot-

land's 19 universities. "They responded by increasing recurring cash funding by 15 percent over three years. We've used public money wisely in terms of what we invested in and what we prioritized."

The structure of higher education in Scotland differs as well. "We are more akin to the U.S. and most of the [European] continental in that the normal term for undergraduate degrees is four years, which allows for a more diverse range of studies. Often students do a range of courses before specializing in final years," Sim says.

The other key factor facing Scotland's universities, as distinct from elsewhere in the United Kingdom, is the prospect of constitutional change and the creation of an independent Scotland—an ambition that the current Scottish government wants to see realized.

"What will happen to higher education with independence would be a matter of political choices and funding choices for whatever administration we would have," says Sim. "They would have the power to make things better or worse. One of the concerns under the UK is they have tightened up immigration

for international students. And there are concerns that that environment might lead to more difficulties recruiting international staff. So there may be opportunities to build on our traditions of openness. It's not a binary question. Whoever governs Scotland would have to make sure to sustain our universities, including five universities in the top 200 in the world, which is astonishing in a country of five million. Any government knows that's incredibly important to maintain and make prosper."

In Wales, institutions are largely following the English funding reforms in some respects, but with differences. "[This] is a time of considerable change for our universities, with a significant shift to predominantly fees-based funding from 2012–2013," says Lisa Newberry, acting deputy director of Higher Education Wales, which represents the interest of Welsh higher education institutions. "This alteration to the current student number allocations reflects how the Welsh higher education sector has responded to the challenges of the new fees system to strengthen and sustain the future of our universities. Under the new

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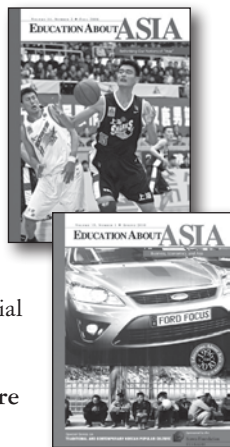


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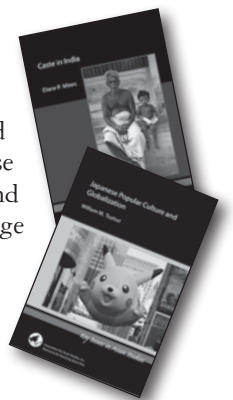
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model, it is anticipated that in 2013–14 every university in Wales will receive more funding than in the current structure. This is not the same as the ‘core and margin’ system being introduced in England, but a Wales-specific model to redistribute the allocated funding to help achieve the objectives set out in the Welsh government’s For Our Future strategy. We are still evaluating the impact of the strategic reallocation of student numbers and resources alongside other changes to funding, to clarify the full impact on universities in Wales. We believe that the funding of universities remains a priority for future economic growth and individual opportunity in Wales.”

The issue of preservation of the native language through higher education is a larger issue in Wales than in Scotland. In 2011, a new “virtual” medium college was created dedicated solely to the teaching of higher education through the medium of Welsh, says Newberry. “The Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol’s main aim is to increase, develop, and broaden the range of Welsh medium study opportunities at universities in Wales,” Newberry says. “The Coleg places the Welsh

language, Welsh culture, and scholarship in Welsh at the heart of its operations while planning, developing, and implementing its strategy.” **IE**

DAVID TOBENKIN is a freelance reporter based in Chevy Chase, Maryland. His last article for *IE* was “Weathering the Storm: The Impact of the Financial Crisis on Europe’s Higher Education Sector,” which appeared in the May/June 2012 issue.

ENDNOTES

¹ The lending mechanism essentially finances the fees so the students don’t have to pay them immediately, which is standard in the United States but relatively new for much of Europe

² For more information, visit www.ucas.ac.uk/documents/sncengland.pdf.

³ The raw data is included in “Recurrent Grants and Student Number Controls for 2012–13,” Higher Education Funding Council for England, Reference Number: 2012/08, Publication Data: March 2012. Available online at http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/hefce/content/pubs/2012/201208/12_08_1123.pdf The Guardian provides an analysis of this data and cites the 34 universities at www.guardian.co.uk/education/2012/mar/29/squeezed-middle-universities-lack-of-students

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