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Project on Access to Higher Education in Europe : working report

Part I - Synthesis and Recommendations

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prepared on behalf of the Project Group

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Foreword

This is the first part of the working report of the Higher Education and Research Committee's project on "Access to higher education in Europe". It has been prepared on behalf of the Project Group by one of its members, Maggie Woodrow, for discussion at the Final Conference of the project in Parma in September 1996. The report is the responsibility of the author and the Project Group. An earlier draft was submitted to the Bureau of the CC-HER, and comments by its members have been taken into consideration.

The document complements:

- the second part of the project's working report, "Activities and results", which is a factual record compiled by the Secretariat (DECS-HE 96/38);
- the detailed reports on specific aspects of the project's work prepared within its working parties.

These materials, together with the conclusions of the Parma Conference, will form the basis of the final recommendations to be formulated by the CC-HER.

The project has sought to bring together the experience of all forty-four countries within the Committee. However, for practical reasons it has not been possible to give equal attention to all countries. Fairly comprehensive material is available in the reports on participation (including gender), on certification, and on admissions. Other reports, on under-represented groups, guidance, financial barriers, and dropout, are based on samples of different sizes. These reports examine in some depth the variety of national situations and experience. It is probable that many valuable examples from other countries have unavoidably been omitted. However, all countries have been invited to contribute their experience in the five thematic workshops held, and in the second Parma Conference.

The purpose of the present report is to identify the most important *shared* issues and problems, and put forward a principled European agenda for action. The examples cited of both good and controversial practice should be judged by their relevance to this aim, and not as an evaluation of the higher education policy of the countries concerned.

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1.1 The Challenge to Higher Education

Four years ago, when the Access Project was launched at the Parma Conference, the opening address drew attention to the problems facing the new Europe -

> *"At one level, we see the progress of democracy, solidarity, co-operation and integration. At another, alas we see disintegration, fragmentation, intolerance, rejection and even warfare"* (1).

What has changed since 1992? At one level, peace (though no victory) has been achieved in the former Yugoslavia, while individual liberty in the former Communist bloc has resulted in more mobility between east and west, and brought greater friendship and understanding. At another, despair, fuelled by depression and dislocation, has stimulated the revival of extremist political parties, with their only too familiar scapegoat theories; in the east fragmentation has created new minorities, wars in the Balkans and the Caucasus, disillusionment with notions of freedom that involve a breakdown of law and order, and a nostalgic yearning for the 'security' of the controlled economy.

Heads of State at the Vienna Summit have expressed their alarm and concern at

> "*the present resurgence of racism, xenophobia and antisemitism, the development of a climate of intolerance, the increase in acts of violence, notably against migrants and people of immigrant origin...*
> *the development of aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism...*
> *the deterioration of the economic situation, which threatens the cohesion of European societies by generating forms of exclusion likely to foster social tensions and manifestations of xenophobia."* (2)

The challenge for higher education is thus how best to contribute, not only to economic revival and greater equity in the distribution of resources, but also to policies which will "*promote human rights and fundamental freedoms, and strengthen pluralistic democracy",* so that the governments and citizens of Europe can learn *"how to live together harmoniously in multicultural societies"* (3).

1.2 Quality and Equality in European Higher Education

To meet this challenge, the apparently conflicting demands of quality and equality in higher education must be reconciled. They are essentials, not alternatives. Yet where they are juxtaposed in higher education debates, it is often to present equality as a threat to quality, rather than to explore any positive relationship between the two. Such a reaction derives from particular interpretations of both 'quality' and 'equality' in higher education. Yet neither is an absolute, and traditional assumptions have for several years been subject to review.

Quality

In respect of quality, the commitment to maintaining standards of excellence remains as strong as ever. Higher education, it can be claimed, is a European idea and the University a European invention. As such, its reputation for academic quality in scholarship and research, established over the centuries, is jealously guarded still. Quality in this sense has traditionally

been measured primarily in *quantitative* terms, for example by the number of students with good examination grades or by the quantity of research publications.

More recently, there has been acceptance of a broader interpretation of quality, of particular relevance to Europe at the present time, which recognises the responsibilities of higher education in respect of its wider community, in contributing to economic prosperity, to social stability, and to political as well as to academic freedom. This involves "*a wide-ranging approach to quality which takes account of social and cultural aspects, including access.....and which cannot be divorced from the highly political issue of resources and the level, sources and methods of funding higher education institutions*" (4).

Quality in this broader sense cannot be measured only *quantitatively* against one or two isolated performance indicators, but requires *qualitative* criteria, which enable institutions to identify their strengths and weaknesses and to enhance their performance over their activities as a whole. For example, in relation to their students, higher education institutions would demonstrate how their needs are being met "*in the widest possible sense, including their personal, academic and learning needs, as well as their long-term need to find fulfilment in contributing to their society....not only in the narrow economic sense, but in the wider sense of society's aspirations for itself*" (5).

The Access Project has worked within this holistic interpretation, investigating current assumptions of what constitutes quality in respect of: the student intake, the curriculum and the student output, and examining the relationship between these three. It has considered the criteria for evaluating quality, whence they are derived, and by whom they are applied; it has discussed the rewards for achieving quality, the penalties for the lack of it, the relationship between quality and resources, and the implications for access.

Equality

Like quality, equality of opportunity is also by common account an unequivocal good, and is one of the classical values for liberal democracy. Governments and universities alike would say that of course there should be equality of opportunity to participate in higher education, and the recent huge expansion in student numbers is often cited as evidence of a shift towards greater equity (6). Yet this new 'mass' system has involved an increase rather than a widening of the student intake, and despite some notable gains, mainly in the participation of women, those that were under-represented before are under-represented still. While equality of opportunity may be one of the professed aims of higher education institutions, in practice they more often reflect and hence reinforce existing social divisions.

This is partly because, like quality, equality in higher education has been narrowly defined, but here too interpretations are changing. For many years the accepted measure of equality of opportunity was the firm application of the same rules to everyone, regardless not only of their political or religious affiliations, but also of their socio-economic or cultural background, and without any recognition that this would exclude from higher education many with the potential to benefit.

Subsequently there was a shift towards a symbolic model of equal opportunity, where limited numbers of "outsiders" were allowed within the system, not by changing the rules, but by making some special arrangements within them for a minority of "non-traditional" participants - a well-intentioned move which however often served to legitimise and perpetuate inequitable systems.

More recently, it has been recognised that neither the application of "equal" rules to those from very different educational, socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, nor their location in a

"special" category outside the "normal" rules, constitutes equality of opportunity. In an equitable system of higher education, the rules themselves must change, and this requires inclusive policies designed to meet the needs of those historically marginalised or excluded, as much as those of dominant groups. Equality of opportunity then becomes systemic, integral to a pluralistic institutional culture, where "special" provision for any group is unnecessary (7). Within the above context, the Project investigates the progress of equality of opportunity in higher education. It considers, for example, whether the student population represents a meritocracy or a plutocracy, discusses the case for a monocultural or a multicultural curriculum, and examines higher education as an instrument of social mobility or social exclusion.

1.3 The Access Dimension

In relation to quality and equality in higher education, access provides a third dimension, representing neither one nor the other, but enabling both to be seen in sharper focus and greater depth.

The word *"access"* also requires interpretation, and is not always used very precisely, often being treated as no more than synonymous with *"entry to",* or *"participation in"* higher education, and excluding any reference to equality of opportunity. The interpretation of *"access"* agreed by the Project Group is a distinctive one which sets the framework for the project. It encompasses both quality and equality, within three inter-related elements:

- *greater participation* in higher education of *good quality*;
- the extension of participation to include currently *under-represented groups*;
- a recognition that participation extends beyond entry to *successful completion*.

Quality in higher education has thus been regarded as an important aspect of the project from the start, and is inextricably associated with an equality of opportunity which is inclusive of under-represented groups, and embraces not only entry, but also successful completion, with all that this implies. From an access perspective, the polarisation created by traditional interpretations of quality and equality is replaced by a commonality of purpose.

The Report of the Parma Conference conceded that "*greater access and quality are not incompatible*". Four years later, we have moved from the cautiously negative to the confidently positive to recognise the complementarity of quality and equality, and to appreciate that far from presenting a threat to standards, equality of opportunity comprises an integral part of quality, both within the institution itself and in respect of its contribution to the wider community outside.

1.4 The Economic Context

The case for access on economic grounds to avoid waste caused by over-restrictive entry systems or high drop-out rates remains crucial. In many countries in central and eastern Europe, the shift to a market economy without the superstructure to support it, continues to cause huge economic, fiscal and social problems, and creates new and wide social divisions. In the west, the common fear is of structural unemployment and here too, the gap between rich and poor widens. The impact on higher education has been mixed.

As in any period of economic crisis, there is a tendency to shift responsibility away from employers and governments, and to attribute failings in the economy to failings in public sector institutions and especially in education systems. While education is not quite a scapegoat here, there is a widespread expectation that it can and should contribute to a solution. In this case, the pressures are for higher education to expand to meet Europe's 'skills shortages' and ensure our competitive edge against the tiger economies of the Pacific rim. The higher

education policies of the OECD and the European Union are primarily targeted towards this end.

Higher education must therefore expand, but in particular directions. Contradictorily it is simultaneously seen as a fairly soft target for public expenditure cuts to balance recession budgets, leaving institutions with the options of a reduction in places, cheaper forms of provision, or alternative sources of funding, the last of which is the most popular and the most difficult to achieve. None of these options is particularly favourable to access.

1.5 The Social and Political Context

Concern for Europe's economic future must not however blind us to the realities of its political past, which has shown so often, not just that economic depression creates political unrest, but also that political conflict brings economic chaos. Higher education thus has two masters to serve, and on social and political grounds the case for widening access to higher education has never been as strong. In the 1990s, the bright future promised by the end of the Cold War has been clouded by the rise of intolerant nationalist movements: political de-stabilisation has shaken long-held beliefs, undermined value-systems and exacerbated tensions between cultural communities to the point of intolerance.

Higher education itself is far from being immune from such influences, and has considerable potential to affect their outcomes. In the present as in the past, universities are often perceived as useful vehicles through which governments can reinforce national identities and dominant cultures by the exclusion of others. At the same time higher education represents an effective channel by which élites in any country can maintain their power and privilege in society by filtering entry to key positions in government, industry and the professions.

Nevertheless, higher education has the capacity to resist such pressures and to take a lead in the preservation of individual rights, not just in the pursuit of academic freedom, but with the broader objectives of challenging prejudice and intolerance through open-minded and critical debate, and of deepening understanding of the problems of society through objective and independent research programmes (8).

Higher education functions

"*as much to provide the individual achievement of academic and technical competence as it does to provide a collective basis for change in communities and in society. As such, individual achievement of academic excellence is not an end in itself but must be tempered with a sense of social responsibility and of social interdependence*" (9).

Wider opportunities to participate in higher education not only represent a widening of individual hopes and aspirations, but also provide the essential safety valve of social mobility at a time when the increasing gap between income groups is polarising European society into the "haves" and the "have-nots".

While both the OECD and the European Union focus their efforts on the contribution of higher education to resolving economic problems (10), the Council of Europe recognises also higher education's role in contributing solutions to their social and political consequences, in strengthening mutual understanding and tolerance across national boundaries, and in extending individual human rights. Its case is made not only on ethical grounds, but in

recognition of the horrific human consequences of future conflicts, whether within or between European states.

(1) Maitland Stobart. Opening Address. Proceedings of the Parma Conference. October 1992.
(2) The Vienna Declaration. October 1993.
(3) Plan of Action against Racism, Xenophobia, Antisemitism and Intolerance.
(4) What Quality in Higher Education ? Report on the Bruges Colloquium on Quality in Higher Education. CSEE/ETUCE. Brussels. September 1995.
(5) Quality in Higher Education. Pauline Perry in "The Future of Higher Education" ed. Tom Schuller. Open University Press. 1991.
(6) Participation in Higher Education. Egbert de Weert. 1995.
(7) Beyond Access. 5th EAN Convention. Paper presented by Monica Armour. Transcultural International. Amsterdam 1996.
(8) Introduction to the Themes. Higher Education for Tolerance in Europe. Ljubljana. 1995.
(9) Gus John in "Education in the Capital" ed. M. Barber. 1992.
(10) Memorandum on Higher Education. EU. 1991.

Chapter 2 Higher Education: a Crisis of Identity

2.1 From Crossroads to Crisis

At the Parma Conference it was noted that *"Higher Education is at a crossroad",* and that access would play an important part in determining its development (11). Since then, doubts about the route to take, have led to conflicts over the future of higher education, with protests among students and staff on a scale not seen since the 60s in the west and probably not in living memory in some eastern European states.

The crisis in both east and west has focussed predictably on resourcing higher education, but this has been the excuse for, rather than the cause of the action. Fuelled by *fin-de-siècle* frustration, it has been not so much a financial crisis, as a crisis of identity. Universities are struggling to establish their identity *vis-à-vis* the state, staff and student organisations, other educational sectors and providers, employers and professional bodies, and minority, national and international interests. In this millenial meltdown of established codes and practices, some fundamental questions are being asked:

- Who owns the universities ?
- Who pays ?
- Who determines the curriculum ?
- What about the technological revolution ?
- What about the quality ?
- Who is higher education for ?
- What is higher education for ?, and lastly
- Who decides and why ?

The Access Project has thus been spared what might have been its initial task, that is. to challenge existing assumptions and values in higher education, since these are already in the process of being shaken up, reviewed, revised and rejected or reformed. Moreover the cathartic effects of the crisis have reduced complacency and cultivated a greater commitment to change, providing the potential for access priorities to be incorporated more easily from the start into new systems, structures and funding arrangements. For the project to exploit this situation to the full, an informed awareness of the following issues has been essential:

2.2 Who owns the universities ?

Institutional autonomy and state control

Despite dependence on state subsidies, universities in the west have largely preserved their autonomy as self-governing bodies with their own rights, rules and charters, and would guard this as essential to the maintenance of academic freedom: in the former Communist bloc, new Education Acts have legislated in favour of greater university autonomy (12).

Yet in both east and west, despite wide variation in the extent of centralisation, the state is still often the main determinant of overall student numbers, admissions routes, quality recognition, staff salaries, course length, and the language of delivery: in most countries it also exerts a strong influence over the curriculum, though no longer demanding allegiance to specific political norms. Even among the so-called 'private' higher education institutions, state subsidies and the need for state recognition often significantly restrict independence. In general the trend is towards increasing the responsiveness of higher education to government

priorities, often through the use of formula-funding - a *"system of earmarked funding which leaves effectively very little room for institutions to manage their finances or to plan their own development"* (13).

Overall then, university autonomy is legitimised, but constrained to operate within national educational policies. This requires a fairly delicate balancing act, not always making for harmonious relationships between ministries and institutions.

Regional devolution

In countries (for example Germany) where authority in education is partially devolved to regional bodies or local government, universities' allegiance is often as much regional as national, with greater emphasis on service to their local communities. Even where there is no such devolution, higher education institutions are increasingly recognising the potential of their role in regional revival and regeneration, and several (for example the University of Barcelona) are realising the opportunity to help preserve local cultural and linguistic traditions (14).

Internationalism

At the same time, a greater awareness of the international character of higher education is flooding through Europe's universities. They have always recognised not only local and national interests, but universalist obligations, encompassing their contribution to world science, their service to an increasingly interdependent economy and their role in the development of greater international understanding (15). New exchanges between eastern and western Europe have been encouraged by the Council of Europe and - with significant resources - by the European Union, not to mention the needs of international business. They have stimulated a greater mobility not only of students and staff, but of ideas, research and academic activity, facilitated to a wholly unprecedented degree by the technological revolution.

This internationalism is important from an access perspective since it encourages alternatives to a monocultural, state-serving model of higher education. Yet most student mobility itself is hardly access-oriented, and primarily provides additional opportunities for those already well within the system.

2.3 Who pays ?

Almost inseparable from the question of ownership of higher education is of course the question of funding. Even the most disinterested of those who pay the piper, will expect to call some of the tunes. In terms of both quality and equality, funding is a prime indicator of priorities, not only in respect of the share awarded to higher education as against that for other sectors of education, and for other public and privately funded services, but also in respect of priorities in the allocation of available resources within the higher education sector itself.

The Project will only succeed if it can raise the profile of access enough to increase its rating in both these aspects of prioritising. Funding was therefore identified from the start as an essential transverse theme, underpinning all other aspects of the Project.

The arrangements for funding higher education are currently being reviewed and revised in all European countries - an outcome of the shift towards a 'mass' system of higher education, combined with the unwillingness and/or inability of governments to meet the financial implications of this expansion, at a time of serious economic constraints. Given the fluidity of

the situation and the radical nature of current and proposed changes in funding, the first task of the Project was to seek an accurate, up-to-date picture of current developments, and to identify trends which may be more or less beneficial to the promotion of access.

Current developments in funding

It is clear that all countries face severe difficulties in providing high quality higher education for the rapidly expanding pool of qualified applicants, both school-leavers and mature students. In some selective systems, for example Turkey, large numbers are being turned away; in others, for example the UK, demand has more or less been met, at the price of a decline in unit costs, *prima facie* lowering the standard of provision (16); elsewhere, for example Italy, drop-out rates remain stubbornly high (17).

In many countries, including Germany, Bulgaria and the Russian Federation, staff and students have combined in protests about cuts in higher education budgets which would adversely affect them both. In France, the late 1995 student action was pragmatically motivated by poor study conditions and exacerbated by an uneven distribution of state funding among higher education institutions.

Meanwhile reductions in research funding are reviving old disputes about the primacy of teaching or research, and encouraging the growth of two-tier systems, with élite research leagues outclassing teaching 'only' institutions.

Currently, resourcing for higher education is divided primarily between students and their families, and the state. In an overall systems approach to funding, the financial flows between governments, institutions and their families should be analysed together, though this is rarely done. There are also serious problems of measurement, for example identifying household expenditures on subsistence, and the share of teaching costs within higher education institutions. It would appear however that :

- Households contribute in all countries a substantial proportion of the overall costs of higher education, primarily through subsistence, while taxpayers fund the bulk of teaching costs.

- There is a considerable spread between countries in the overall share borne by households. The differences between countries in levels of support for subsistence are magnified by the variation in teaching costs between countries. Presumably the share of households is lowest in northern Europe, with high teaching costs and extensive schemes of loans and grants (perhaps as low as a quarter); highest in southern and eastern Europe, with low teaching costs, limited help for students, and in some countries the prospect of fees (probably a share of over half) (18).

Trends in funding

Despite this evident disparity, and although public funding remains a very high proportion of the income of higher education institutions in all European countries, the general trend is to shift the balance of funding away from the state towards a higher proportion from students and their families. The main mechanisms proposed for this transfer are student payment of fees (already introduced in some countries, for example Bulgaria), and the replacement of student grants by student loans (already underway in the UK). This may represent, and/or may lead to, a more élite model of participation.

This case for an increased financial burden for students is presented reluctantly as an

unavoidable outcome of the expansion of student numbers, but to those formerly excluded from higher education, the impression is that governments were prepared to meet the costs of higher education for privileged groups, but are changing their policies now that participation has become less exclusive. Curiously no parallel financial crisis has arisen in upper secondary education, which has seen equally rapid rises in enrolment.

This reduction in state aid for higher education represents a further departure from the Europe of welfare states and part of a more general trend for "*restricting or reducing public intervention and in enhancing the role of private initiative, not only in those domains where the private sector had traditionally played a role, but also in sectors such as health and .....education, where traditionally it had no or a very restricted place.*" (19) Institutions are in consequence subject to increasing imperatives to find alternative sources of funding.

This pressure has pushed higher education institutions into an entrepreneurial role, where they are not so much providing a service to society, as marketing a commodity to individuals, for which demand is high (although the capacity of the "customer" to pay may often be fairly low). Whether the assumption of this role will actually produce a profit margin is uncertain, but unlikely. What is clear, firstly, is that the notion of the entrepreneurial university is conveniently consistent with a reduction in state funding; secondly, that employers have so far been in no hurry to provide an alternative income.

Overall while there is no evidence of a consensus over future funding arrangements, the debate already seems to have gone beyond the point of whether students should pay fees, and moved on to how much they should pay and how they should pay it. The practice of working your way through college American-style seems to be gaining ground in some European countries, despite the scarcity of jobs, and some evidence, for example from the UK, of its damaging effects on degree performance (20). Also under discussion are a variety of graduate taxes and loan schemes, of which the Australian HECs (Higher Education Contributions) scheme looks a potential model (21). The capacity of the Project to influence this debate will be an important factor in the future for wider access.

2.4 Shaping up to the Secondary Sector

Like other crises of identity, that in higher education is also about relationships - in this case those with three other sectors - secondary, vocational, and adult and continuing education. The blurring of the boundaries between higher education and each of these has contributed to a confusion of roles, which is however not necessarily disadvantageous to the furtherance of access objectives.

The interface between secondary and higher education, described at Parma as a *"leitmotif of the entire conference"*, was one of the project's first areas of study, so that access issues were located from the start, *"in the context of overall trends and policies of participation and structural change in secondary and higher education".*

Expansion and under-representation

What are the implications of changes at secondary level for the higher education sector ? The major expansion achieved by the early 80s in participation at upper secondary level has been followed by a major expansion in higher education, as has the marked increase in the proportion of women participating (22). There is little evidence though that the upper secondary achievement of increasing participation rates among minority ethnic groups has in general been mirrored in the higher education sector (data here are very limited - see Chapter 3).

On the negative side, where significant under-representation still exists in upper secondary

education, i.e. in respect of female participation in stereotyped male disciplines, and particularly in respect of those from low socio-economic backgrounds, there is also significant under-representation in the higher education sector. Arguably, until such under-representation has been addressed at upper secondary level, it will not be addressed in higher education, since students will not have the requisite academic background. Access to higher education for these groups, it would seem, must wait its turn.

And yet upper secondary institutions have already responded by introducing greater diversity in the curriculum, in particular for late achievers who, in the past, would almost automatically have dropped out of the system at the end of the compulsory education period (23). What was in a sense an élite curriculum at 16+ has now become less élite.

The higher education response

Where does this leave higher education? Should there not be a widening of the curriculum here also, to provide continuity? Institutions in several countries have responded positively, distinguishing between performance and potential at 18+ and offering flexible entry criteria, on-course academic support for undergraduates, and a range of preparatory, foundation or bridging courses, sometimes linked with institutions in the 16-18 sector.

Such provision is often associated particularly with the least prestigious higher education institutions: in general the more prestigious universities pride themselves on the exclusivity of their admissions policies, and in this respect institutions such as for example the Grands Ecoles, may have more in common with Oxbridge than with other higher education institutions in their own country. This is the case both in countries with highly selective systems and those with more open systems (which are nevertheless open only to those with the required school-leaving qualifications).

The articulation with secondary education thus raises vital questions about the purpose, function, status, identity, diversification and cohesion of the higher education sector. But isn't there a danger that the importance of this relationship has been exaggerated? It is true that the work of the Project has revealed "*massive evidence of maladjustment, in terms of failure to meet admissions requirements, of massive failure and drop-out from first degree courses, of massive change in the field of study.*" (24) However the problem may not lie with the secondary/higher education relationship, but with the admissions criteria themselves and their development into *"a kind of opportunities regulator for future generations"*, with the use of *"exams, tests and competitions as an adjustable valve which can be opened or closed at will"* (25). In this respect the function for which admissions criteria are being deployed, clearly casts considerable doubt on their validity.

Notwithstanding such doubt, admissions criteria are an established determinant of quality in higher education, a quality recognised not by students' achievement on completing their higher education course, but by their achievement prior to entry. Is this obsession with intake justified? Are we not looking at the wrong end of higher education to evaluate its quality? A smooth transfer between the sectors is important in terms of equity and efficiency, but it is not the main point at which the quality of higher education institutions themselves should be assessed, nor a means of rating their comparative value. To resolve its crisis of identity, higher education must look forward to concentrate on its post-entry provision, rather then backwards to shift responsibility for quality and equality on to the secondary sector.

2.5 How vocational is higher education?

Recession has increased demands for higher education to concentrate on economic recovery - in particular through the development of higher level knowledge and skills to enable graduates to find employment and governments to improve their balance of payments.

The power balance in higher education has thus moved in favour of the employers - now recognised as one of its largest stakeholders, increasingly represented on the governing bodies of universities and brought in to advise on national policy. This is regrettably not because of any significant expansion so far in private enterprise investment in higher education (26) (although employers are one of its greatest beneficiaries), but because the economic crisis has brought greater tolerance of employer intervention in the curriculum. More unemployment among graduates gives employers more selectivity and more power to prescribe specific skills and knowledge in mainstream provision, as well as in the development of new training programmes.

The response of institutions to this vocationalisation of higher education has varied, and has probably been most positive in eastern Europe, where a long-standing emphasis on the sector's service to the state, has led in the past to a focus on defence-oriented disciplines, and in the present to a shift to law, business and management. In the west, where universities have cherished the independence of their curriculum offer and where there is greater scepticism about the accuracy of long-term "manpower" planning, the response has been more muted.

Segregation and status

Segregation between vocational and "academic" institutions at the early secondary stage, for example in Poland and Germany, makes university entrance difficult except for those in schools following academic routes. Even where there is no such institutional segregation,

school vocational programmes have a lower status, and a lower rating as a qualification for entry to higher education.

These divisions are often perpetuated in higher education between institutions which offer vocational and technical programmes, and universities which largely do not, and transfer between the two can be difficult. The formal ending of such distinctions has not necessarily brought equivalence in status, for example in the UK, the ending of the binary divide, and the conversion of the former polytechnics into universities, leaves higher level business and technical diplomas concentrated largely in the 'new' universities, whose status is not the equivalent of the 'old' ones. Vocational education, it seems, is recognised as being a part, but an inferior part of higher education systems.

Recently both at secondary and higher education levels, there has been *"serious questioning of this division of tasks and of the ensuing hierarchisation between general, theoretical and academic knowledge on the one hand and practice-oriented and applicable skills and competences on the other. ...The rapid evolution of the knowledge-based requirements on the labour market for skilled manpower and the questioning that it implies of the legitimacy of the division between theory and practice, between knowledge and skills, have created a climate in which a fundamental revision of the established order..has become possible. Many western European countries have now made it one of their top priorities to reduce the gap between theoretical academic and applied practical knowledge"* (27). Graduates already require, but seldom have, both. One strategy for achieving equivalence between them is to identify broad generic skills to be included in all higher education courses, but the feasibility and desirability of this has been questioned.

The entrepreneurial university

Regrettably there is a danger that this academic versus vocational debate is polarising positions and reinforcing present divisions. Pressures for higher education to conform to employer needs have produced the 'entrepreneurial university', which by taking on board the language, ethos, and raison d'etre of the free market, appears bent on the vocationalisation of the entire higher education curriculum and the 'businessification' of the university itself.

Some institutions in both eastern and western Europe have embraced the new entrepreneurial culture with enthusiasm, and here the mood is managerial, students are clients, marketing budgets multiply, training in transferable skill competes with creativity in the curriculum, and employer perspectives are paramount.

From this creation, those with a less instrumental approach to higher education have recoiled in distress, emphasising instead their professorial detachment from the profit motive, re-iterating the primacy and purity of their research mission, defending their academic territory against economic as well as political conformity, and keeping the Trojan horse of transferable skills well beyond the gates.

In this crisis of identity, considerations of quality and equality can become no more than slogans to defend opposing positions. The problem for the project is whether and how this debate can be mediated in the interests of access.

2.6 How adult is higher education ?

The European White Paper on education and training argues that the economic prosperity, social cohesion and personal development of the peoples of Europe depends on a major commitment to involve everyone in learning throughout their lives. This is the message at the heart of the European Year of Lifelong Learning. But what has this message to do with the universities? What is the relationship between lifelong learning and access to higher education? Given the scarcity of resources, who has the priority in getting what kind of lifelong learning? Where do they get it and who pays for it?

Adults in the mainstream

There is no generally accepted European age at which a student becomes an adult student and this makes comparisons between countries problematic (see 5.2). Yet it is clear that one contribution to lifelong learning that higher education is already making in several countries, is a significant increase in the proportion of adults on first degree or diploma courses.

In the UK, mature students now comprise the majority of full-time first year undergraduates (28), but this is unusual and in Spain relatively few adults enter higher education full-time. Here, as in Germany and in most central and eastern European countries, their normal attendance pattern is part-time. In several countries, including Belgium, Spain and the UK, Open or Distance Universities have had a major impact, all the more effective for being designed to meet the learning needs of adults.

Alternative entry routes for adults

The increase in the number of mature students has been facilitated by the development of alternative entry routes, many of them initiated by higher education institutions. These include

special entrance examinations such as the *Diplômes d'Accès aux Etudes Universitaires* (DAEU) in France and in the Netherlands, the *colloquium dictum*; short preparatory, foundation, or access courses, for example in the UK, Spain and the Russian Federation; and in several countries, including France, APEL, the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning. While there is thus no shortage of good examples, these entry routes for adults remain on the fringes of systems still dedicated almost exclusively to school leaver participation.

An adult élite

Although the increased number of mature students on mainstream courses represents a success for second chance education, and especially for women, there is a disappointing tendency for these students to be drawn from backgrounds similar to those of 18+ entrants. It appears that even the alternative routes by which many adults enter higher education are more useful for integrating into the system those who are most similar to traditional entrants, than for encouraging participation by new groups of students from different socio-economic or cultural backgrounds (29). The likelihood of adults from more diverse backgrounds ever participating in any post-school education, let alone lifelong learning, seems remote, unless their needs can be prioritised.

Financial constraints

Financial barriers to participation for those from low-income groups need to be overcome if 'lifelong learning' is to be anything more than a slogan. In Germany and the Netherlands, adults are not eligible for student grants; elsewhere grants do not take account of the additional financial commitments of mature students, many of whom give up paid work to return to study and/or have dependents to support. In western Europe, fees are generally charged for part-time and evening courses, Open University courses are expensive, and there is some evidence linking non-completion rates in higher education to financial hardship among mature students (30).

A juvenile learning environment

In general, higher education institutions have been slow to provide appropriate measures of organisation, guidance, and counselling for adult entrants, and except in some eastern European countries, creche facilities for students with young children are still only optional extras. Curriculum delivery methods designed for 18 year olds frequently fail to take into account the wider experience, greater motivation and maturity of adults, requiring them to undergo a juvenilisation process to conform to norms of learning behaviour. Open or Distance University learning methods are generally a notable exception and demonstrate the particular potential for adults of computer-based learning. Elsewhere, a grown-up learning environment in higher education to meet the needs of adult students would be one of the best access outcomes of the European Year of Lifelong Learning.

Professional updating

Postgraduate and professional updating covers an enormous variety of provision and represents quite a different approach to adult learning in higher education, not least because it is perceived as part of the income-generating strategy of institutions. Fees are high, with courses often being tailored to meet the requirements of particular employers, and sometimes run jointly with them. The curriculum is often dynamic, giving a high priority to meeting the specific learning needs of adult 'clients', who are predominantly male, white, well-educated, in

full employment of a skilled or professional nature. They are also at present the group most likely to experience the advantages of lifelong learning.

"Non-vocational" adult education

This is the Cinderella of higher education for adults, although it is part of the old extra-mural tradition of European universities and provides one of the main means by which they involve their local communities. Despite the wide curriculum range, which includes extensive foreign language provision, arts education and many practical subjects (in the UK for example, a fifth of all students aged over 65 are learning about computers), non-vocational courses are not well-subsidised by the state, particularly when they resist pressures for accreditation. In consequence their high fees contribute to the perpetuation of a largely middle-class student body, despite potential for wider participation as leisure time increases.

There is an acute shortsightedness in this failure to recognise that higher education has a responsibility, not only to educate for leisure but to re-define and re-structure it; to rescue it from the banalities of the media; to counteract the moronic, manipulative influence of much of the entertainment industry; to ensure that "*delinquency and crime are not seen as a natural concomitant of it";* to *"give back some purpose to those millions of people who are unemployed, especially those who have not known what it is like to have a job",* and to *"ensure that self worth and self-esteem are not so defined and determined by regimentation through work that in a condition of worklessness an overwhelming anomic and ontological displacement occurs, with suicidal consequences for some*" (31). Nevertheless education for leisure comes at the bottom of the pile. Labelled as "non-vocational" adult education, it is de-prioritised by a negative categorisation which not only de-values, disparages and downgrades it, but ignores the outcomes of such neglect.

Overall, the verdict on universities' offer to adults must be 'could try harder'. Except where income generation potential is high, as with professional updating, the assumption is that adults must adapt to meet the norms of higher education, rather than the other way around. Such attitudes, together with high fees, ensure that those adults who have experienced early educational disadvantage, are likely to find that the European Year of Lifelong Learning has not been designed with them in mind either. If this is to be avoided, priorities need to be allocated to those still outside the system, rather than to those to whom it has so far been dedicated.

2.7 Towards the "Virtual University" ?

The virtual university perhaps represents the ultimate in terms of identity crises in higher education. It is a prospect viewed both as the most golden opportunity for learning of the millenium, and as the death of all that makes higher education worthwhile. Between these two extremes, academics, administrators and policy-makers are torn between Luddite reaction and starry-eyed enthusiasm. What are the perceived drawbacks and how real are they?

Fears and forebodings

Firstly institutions fear a loss of control and a reduction in the university role as the gatekeeper of academic knowledge. The shift from the concept of teaching to the notion of learning already appears to have reduced the staff status from academic authorities to little more than facilitators of a learning process controlled increasingly by the students themselves.

Secondly there are fears that the virtual university represents a very limited form of higher

education, whose function is primarily the transmission of knowledge - a process easily delegated to a distance learning mode of delivery - as distinct from its prime purpose which is the creation and development of knowledge within the academic environment of the university. "Surfing the net" is thus synonymous with superficiality - skimming the surface in ignorance of the depths below.

Thirdly the virtual university presents an apparent threat to universities as communities of scholars where the personal interaction between teachers, researchers and students will be reduced to no more than an online facility.

Fourthly, the virtual university appears to offer no substitute for the hidden curriculum beyond the confines of the course programme, i.e. the impact of the social, political and cultural learning environment of higher education institutions, which is where arguably the real learning takes place. Lastly, the university as a physical environment, which is outside and separate from the domestic environment, and the importance of this physical presence in relation to the local community, would both be lost in its substitution by a virtual reality.

Confidence and control

Some of these fears indicate a limited awareness of the capacity of the new technology, for example, its ability to create new communities of scholars, and its facility to explore and extend, not simply to transmit fields of knowledge; others tend to exaggerate its potential to destroy, rather than to resolve the problems of, the present system.

With no foreseeable let-up on present pressures for places and the present shortage of resources, the virtual university appears to offer a cost-effective alternative to the current system, where an increasing and diverse student body is required to commit itself to learning at a specified time, in a specified place, and for a specified period.

Moreover, in a confident higher education, greater student control over the learning process is not to be feared but celebrated as a means of liberating not only students, but also academic staff who are released from the tedium of chalk-and-talk teaching and the sheer drudgery of primitive pre-computer research methods. For students and staff the virtual university creates an international identity for higher education at the press of a switch, giving local communities, however isolated, access to global resources. It is not therefore for the academic community to seek fruitlessly to stem the tide of technological change, nor to be swamped by it: but to channel and exploit its capacity to the full.

A hybrid model

The solution is to take advantage of the technologies of the future without discarding the best qualities of the past. The outcome for the 21st century will look *"more like a hybrid, combining the local and the distant, the real and the virtual, open learning and conventional diplomas, the strengths of the old and the resources of the new, than it will look like the present ageing system or the ethereal system some envisage"* (32).

From an access perspective

Here the potential looks promising. The World Wide Web and the "Information Superhighway" are "*set to re-define the very concept of neighbourhood, to encompass a group of 6 billion, or 500,000, or 50,000, depending on the topic being explored.*" The concept of higher education*, "hooked into international libraries and programmes, must surely rank as a key development in*

"second chance" education," whether for those immobilised by physical, geographical or economic circumstances, or for those "*low achieving school leavers who increasingly swell the ranks of the unemployed.*" (32)

Yet there is a short-term danger that access to any form of higher education will be easier for those with their own access to the latest technology, and a longer-term threat of a two-tier system - where those with the resources can attend university, while the rest can afford only a virtual experience of higher education.

At present, except for some remarkable progress for students with disabilities, access is not in the forefront of discussions about the use of the new technology, and it is already reinforcing conventional gender stereotypes - wordprocessing for women, computer science for men. Yet the programming is in our own hands and future developments can be harnessed to meet the learning needs of those who remain disadvantaged in the present system. It is for higher education to ensure that

"*the liberating potential of the new technology is structurally exploited not in order to make the rich richer, but to serve the needs of whole communities and nations*" (33).

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Chapter 3 Restrictive Policies as Barriers to Access

3.1 The Data of Discrimination

Higher education is awash with statistics at institutional, local, national, European and sometimes global levels. This sheer quantity of data has a smokescreen effect, obscuring its selectivity, its restricted usage and the incompatibility of its format.

While the purpose of seeking information is presumably to help determine priorities, it is nevertheless clear that priorities have already determined the nature of the information that is to be sought. As measured by the availability of relevant data, the priority given to access issues is generally minimal. The data are not there.

At Parma there was:

> *"a strong view that the first step to rectifying the situation of the under-representation of certain groups such as ethnic minorities and lower socio-economic status groups is for governments and educational institutions to recognise that the problems exist."* (33)

Such recognition is not only an outcome of monitoring, but also a pre-requisite to it. One of the most important tasks of the Project has been to reveal the absence of data essential to the formulation and implementation of any serious policy for equal opportunity (34). Monitoring is part of the normal cycle of rational planning in any field and the exclusion of access data not only looks discriminatory in itself, but also inhibits the identification and elimination of other inequitable policies. If as an outcome of the Project, monitoring of access issues becomes the routine rather than the exception, it will have achieved a great deal.

The missing data

Information on the following aspects of higher education is unavailable from many European countries: (35)

- student participation by socio-economic status;
- student participation for those with disabilities;
- student participation by ethnic group;
- participation of mature students;
- student participation in relation to parental educational background;
- the progress and performance in higher education of each of the above;
- student performance in higher education in relation to entry qualifications;
- non-retention rates overall and in relation to particular students and courses;
- reasons for non-retention;
- graduate employment in relation to age, gender, and each of the above student categories;
- graduate employment in relation to discipline;
- staff roles by gender, age, ethnic origin, disability.

These are the data that many countries have chosen not to collect. Yet public statements which cannot be substantiated without such evidence abound, and ministries and institutions (all committed to equality of opportunity) are confidently planning policies about student numbers, admissions, affirmative action, funding, and labour market needs, to all of which such

information is directly relevant. In view of its sensitivity, concerns about discretion in data collection, anonymity, and the importance of proper data protection is essential if the process is not to be counter-productive, but the need for such sensitivity is no excuse for not embarking on the exercise.

Minimal usage

Although monitoring is normally understood to comprise the three activities of data collection, data analysis, and input into policy, the process often ends at the first or second stage - either data are simply collected and stored, or analysis is not interpreted into policy. The process thus becomes an end in itself, often justifiably criticised as being no more than another time-consuming exercise in an already over-bureaucratised system.

Incompatibility

This makes national and international comparisons problematic. Data compatibility is perhaps feared as the first step towards conformity in policies, a Europeanisation of higher education. However, comparisons are already being made and sought by many countries, although hampered and delayed by the need for clumsy conversion formulae.

To take one very simple example - the term "mature student" is applied in some countries to those over the age of 25, and in others only to those over 30 (36). National sensibilities would surely not be too damaged by agreements over such an issue. Others which are more complex, for example the definition of student non-retention and the possible reasons for this, would benefit from early discussion and agreement, before each country agrees its own interpretation and criteria (37).

3.2 Admissions: the Policies of Selectivity

Entry criteria

Entry criteria are broadly the same throughout Europe, being based largely on performance in national 18+ examinations, whether in "open" or in "closed" entry systems (38). Neither in fact is "open" in the sense of being non-selective, since both exclude (with some exceptions) those without an appropriate 18+ qualification. In practice it may be easier for such applicants to gain entry to highly selective systems, than to theoretically "open" ones.

Dependence on these criteria makes the process of admissions a fairly mechanical one, though institutions vary this marginally, some to achieve wider participation, others greater selectivity, for example, 96 of 111 applicants to colleges of Oxford University from one school - Eton - gained admission in 1993 (39). In some countries there are additional or alternative single university entrance examinations, which may prove geographically problematic where candidates are required to travel long distances.

Entry and equity

Overall however, admission by examination grade is widely perceived as fair and sometimes even cited as evidence of the implementation of access policies. It is strongly upheld as a more equitable system than those which give preference to applicants who can pay, or who have particular political contacts or affiliations, and this is indisputable. Such systems, which represented unequal rules for entry, have largely been replaced by rules which are apparently equal (i.e. in that they make the same requirement from everyone), but which systematically

produce unequal effects, because they take no account of differing circumstances.

These effects are most evident in western Europe, where social class determines opportunities for higher education. A common pattern is for 70 to 80% of students to be drawn from social classes 1 and 2, professional and managerial groups, and less than 10% from families of unskilled workers. In the east, the widening of socio-economic divisions accompanying the shift to a market economy presages the emergence of a similar pattern, particularly as here, even more so than in the west, the fiction persists that tests of excellence are neutral and merit is an objective assessment.

The failure of expansion to effect any significant change in the relationship between educational opportunity and socio-economic status is viewed as evidence of *"maximally maintained inequality"*, i.e. that those of low socio-economic status will only benefit when the enrolment of advantaged groups is already so high that further expansion is only possible by bringing in students from disadvantaged groups - an optimum point evidently not yet reached (40).

Is this the fault of entry requirements? They must be judged to some extent by their outcomes. Even if it is seen as inevitable that higher education reflects general inequalities, it is surely a proper demand that it refrain from worsening them by procedures under its own control. The general practice of admission on the basis of the school-leaving qualification alone claims to deliver equal treatment for equal *performance,* but fails to ensure equal treatment of students of equal *potential* (41).

Cultural reproduction

One of the most significant variables determining performance and hence entry to higher education is parental educational experience, and in particular parental (especially father's) experience of higher education. This also affects progress at earlier stages in the education system, having a cumulative effect at later levels (42).

Higher education thus tends towards a self-perpetuating élite, preserved through its measurement of achievement at 18+, and postponing the process of change. Based on the false premise of equal starting points and conditions, its entry policy ignores both the hothouse effect of privileged circumstances and the late blooming effect of more exposed conditions. The illusion then remains that success at 18+ provides neutral evidence of the achievements of a meritocracy un-related to socio-economic status or earlier educational opportunity.

Affirmative action in the sense of the American practice of varying entry criteria for applicants from different social groups is not popular in Europe (43). Here the term is more often used to describe the admission of "non-standard" entrants through alternative routes. Standard entry criteria which incorporated such alternatives would of course make any such "affirmative action" redundant.

"Non-standard" qualifications do not in any case have the same currency value as conventional ones, and are more likely to be recognised as valid for entru to the least prestigious higher education institutions and/or to the least popular courses. Even then, such "second chance" routes to higher education operate at the fringes, where provision is patchy, and often run into funding problems.

In effect, the existence of these routes serves to provide a safety valve for the survival of established entry patterns, the success of students who gain admission through such 'special'

courses casting an unmerited aura of social equity and mobility over the whole conventional entry system, rather than serving as a rationale for changing it (44).

Yet the conviction remains that such affirmative action or positive discrimination is not only inappropriate for higher education, but also unfair, impractical and unnecessary. Such a conviction blinds us to the view that our admissions policies already discriminate positively in favour of those from particular socio-economic and cultural élites. This, however, isn't positive discrimination at all - just a means of enabling the "best" people to enter higher education. The assumption here is that the "best people" - the people most likely to benefit from higher education - can be recognised by their school-leaving qualifications. How far can this view be substantiated?

School-leaving qualifications

What evidence is there that school-leaving qualifications are reliable indicators of degree performance? Where studies exist, they demonstrate a weak correlation between qualifications on entry and class of degree, particularly in arts and social science disciplines.

Nor do school-leaving qualifications have any integral quality as entry criteria, independent of market forces. Engineering and physics courses regularly admit students with performance levels significantly lower than would be accepted in over-subscribed subjects, such as law and sociology, but graduates in engineering are not, in consequence, perceived as being inferior to sociology graduates - rather the reverse. Moreover foreign fee-paying applicants are sometimes accepted with lower grades on entry, their ability to pay clearly rating above their examination performance in institutions' interpretations of quality. In Croatia, it is said, you must be clever **or** you must be rich. Thus double standards are already endemic to entry systems. (45)

However, setting aside their validity and reliability, adherence to conventional entry criteria indicates a peculiarly narrow interpretation of the "best" in terms of higher education entrants. It demonstrates little awareness that applicants may possess distinctive skills, experience and cultural backgrounds, which are of potential benefit to their progress in higher education (and to higher education itself), but which are not evidenced, or not best-evidenced in admissions systems based primarily on entrance examination grades (46).

Current entry policies do however have one over-riding attraction and this is not quality, but administrative convenience. Institutions are cast in a gatekeeper role, which is simple to implement, requires little thought, but imparts a sense of security. Reliance on school-leaving scores provides the automatic ticket entry to higher education - the no ticket: no travel rule absolving academic staff from the need to make difficult decisions about what really constitutes quality in their student intake.

3.3 Through the Revolving Door: the Policies of Non-Completion

Non-completion in higher education appears at first sight to be due less to restrictive policies than to the absence of any policies effective enough to prevent it and this is surprising. It has long been a concern in open-entry systems such as France and Italy, but is now also pre-occupying countries with highly selective systems. It seems that the arrival of "mass" entry into higher education may have been accompanied by mass exit not long afterwards. In Italy for example at the end of the 80s the drop-out rate was just below 64%, while in Germany a recent study indicates a non-retention rate of 27% (47).

The crisis in funding has focussed attention on what seems to be either a waste of resources, or in open-entry systems, a built-in method of saving them, by rejecting large numbers of students after the first year. For individuals, drop-out can look like failure and can pose serious personal problems: for institutions, it looks like an investment gone wrong, and especially where entry is restricted, means the loss of a place that another student could have had.

Lack of evidence

Despite these concerns, data on the extent, distribution and causes of non-retention are hard to find (47). Collection of data on students who have left, successful or not, is notoriously difficult, and those who have withdrawn may be unable, or unwilling to articulate their reasons, which may well be multiple. Nevertheless, such problems argue the case for developing appropriate and effective monitoring systems, not for evading them altogether.

What is non-retention ?

Non-retention comes under a variety of names, but the alternatives - student drop-out, non-completion, student withdrawal - are hardly more positive or more precise: for example, can the term "drop-out" be sensibly applied these days to a student who leaves to take up the offer of a job? In Germany for example, it is often the most promising students who leave (48). And are students who transfer to other courses, or even to other institutions, to be classified as non-completers? And does non-retention also refer to a student who gains several credits and decides to defer the rest to a later date? Isn't this supposed to be one of the intended advantages of credit-based systems? Within what time-scale then do we decide that deferral has become dropout? (49)

The *reasons* for non-retention are thus not simply of secondary interest, but the main determinant of what constitutes non-completion. This situation creates something of a procedural problem, since recording the incidence of patterns of behaviour would normally precede investigation of the reasons for it. Some decisions must inevitably therefore be taken beforehand and somewhat in the dark.

What are the causes?

One organisation which has just taken this ‘leap into the dark’ is the new national Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), which is reporting for the first time on reasons for non-completion in the UK. This year all British higher education institutions were required to send

returns for each kind of course - for example full-time/part-time undergraduate, full-time/part-time postgraduate - under the following main categories:

- academic failure/left in bad standing

- transferred to another institution
- health
- death
- financial
- other personal reasons
- written off after a lapse of time
- exclusion
- gone into employment
- other (50).

The most remarkable aspect of these categories is that they focus exclusively on the responsibility of the student for non-completion, while the higher education institution itself remains unproblematic. By comparison, other recent UK surveys have cast more responsibility on to institutions, attributing non-completion to: reductions in staff-student contact, reductions in tutorial time, lack of affordable student accommodation, and a shortage of creche provision. Reasons of this kind are not among the Valid Entries for non-completion listed in the HESA codes above, and yet where they exist in institutional surveys they have provided helpful feedback for reducing the future incidence of non-completion (51).

Institutions it seems are prepared to play their part, which is after all in keeping with the current drift towards entrepreneurialism in higher education. Where students are ‘clients’, the terminology of non-completion and withdrawal is inappropriate. Clients and customers do not drop-out, they are "lost" and the responsibility for this is indubitably that of the firm. It is then the responsibility of institutions to match the image conveyed by their marketing hype to reality in the form of the student experience, or to pay the price of non-retention.

The fault of the system - the chance to fail

Universities however may well attribute non-completion to the system in which they operate. This point was made by a recent CVCP survey which revealed that a high proportion (40%) of withdrawals were mature students, unable to complete for financial reasons - a significant finding in view of continued state reduction in student support and the recent abolition of the additional allowance for mature students (52).

In "open entry" systems, funding calculations are often premised on extensive non-completion and the proportion of teaching resources allocated to first year students is sometimes very limited. In France, the National Evaluation Committee has called for greater commitment by professors to first-cycle teaching (53). Thus students who have the chance to enter, find that in practice this represents little more than a chance to fail.

Acknowledgement that responsibility for non-completion is systemic would then require as valid survey entries, not only the financial problems, health or death of students as causes (as in the HESA case), but the financial problems, health and decline of European systems of higher education. Before this can happen, we need to recognise that giving different names to "non-completion" contributes to the construction of different political realities. "Student drop-out" makes it the responsibility of the student and puts "academic failure/left in bad standing" high on the list of possible causes. This fits well with the view that mass higher education has lowered the quality of student intakes, a problem to be remedied by increasing barriers to access and returning to more selective systems.

On the other hand, where "non-completion" is viewed as ‘losing clients’ the responsibility becomes that of higher education institutions and of the higher education system itself. The

remedy here would of course be quite different and would require from both, a greater commitment to understanding and meeting the different needs of an increasingly diverse student body.

3.4 The Information Barrier

A major barrier both to entry to and successful completion of higher education is the absence of adequate, appropriate and objective information, guidance and counselling, whether prior to entry, on-course or in preparation for exit. In the Sheffield Survey 54% of students who had withdrawn, reported that higher education had differed markedly from their expectations and 44% gave "course unsuitable" as their reason for leaving. This is also the main cause of the high drop-out rate in Slovenia, where students failing to gain entry to their chosen subject because of *numerus clausus* restrictions, often find the alternatives unsatisfactory.

The access implications

This information barrier is significant in re-inforcing the culturally reproductive nature of higher education (see 3.4). Applicants and students with parental experience of higher education find themselves at a massive advantage, while those from families, schools or communities where post-school education is a rarity, must educate themselves and their families in the complexities of an alien system, while at the same time trying to promote their future within it.

It is largely because the population of higher education represents a self-perpetuating élite that there is a general assumption that very limited information and guidance services will suffice, and even here it is clear that "guidance is more easily accessible by those who need it least" (54). Moreover the services that are available, often fail to take into account the different requirements and backgrounds of different social groups, for example, mature applicants, or those from minority ethnic groups, or from low-income backgrounds, while in the case of those with disabilities, the absence of information and guidance serves in many cases to conceal the absence of any appropriate provision.

Misleading marketing

In parts of western Europe at least, overblown marketing budgets are now an accepted feature of higher education institutions and if only these could be exchanged for the very limited resources invested in guidance and counselling, the information barrier would soon be overcome. The purpose of marketing, as an element of the new entrepreneurial university, is not to inform but to impress; not to provide a service, but to sell a product; not to expose the reality, but to conceal it. Impartial and objective services for information, guidance and counselling are thus made all the more vital, as an antidote to problem-free promotional literature. The success of marketing strategies is generally measured by an increase in demand, whether for Mars bars or students: a better measure in this case would be a reduction in student withdrawals.

A denial of choice

Inadequate or non-existent information and guidance denies applicants and students the right to make informed and wise choices about their future study and their future careers, and denies universities, employers and society the benefits of such choices. In the west, the inadequacy of resourcing for student services is indicative of the low priority they are allocated, and sometimes of funding systems in which student drop-out is inbuilt . Where the first year experience is designed to ensure the survival only of the fittest, resources are unlikely to be heavily committed to on-course guidance and counselling.

In the east, the general lack of student services is more indicative of a lingering attachment to

a philosophy of higher education which seeks control rather than choice, and direction rather than guidance. Here the acute lack of resources makes it all the more important to keep wastage rates down, and yet even where counselling is available in higher education, for example in Slovenia, the resources for it have recently been reduced (55) .

A matter of investment

An effective strategy for achieving a higher priority for information, guidance and counselling (and one which those directly involved have by no means fully exploited) is to play on the investment implications. Applicants and students who are ignorant of the opportunities available to them, who are uncertain, ill-advised, misguided and hence susceptible to marketing hype and to subsequent disillusionment, represent a poor investment whatever the resources expended in ensuring the quality of their course.

If we must seek commercial analogies for higher education performance indicators let us look for long-term customer satisfaction rather than for the immediate gratification to be found in increased take-up, which may do for Mars bars what it cannot for education.

3.5 Ethnicity: Exclusion or Integration ?

For the Council of Europe, the most urgent political issue facing the Project is fair and sensitive treatment of ethnic minorities and other cultural communities. The situation varies enormously between countries and even more between universities. The background level of tension may range from a faint memory of historical grievances to armed conflict (56). Within this diversity, two questions are of concern to the Project, two sides of the same coin. Firstly, do higher education systems themselves offer equality of opportunity to those from minority ethnic groups? Secondly, in respect of society in general, is higher education encouraging their social integration or their social exclusion?

Three things which make these questions particularly difficult to answer are:

- the lack of a common understanding of the meaning of the term "ethnicity";
- its political sensitivity, and in particular its relationship with nationality;
- the scarcity and incompatibility of statistical data on participation in higher education by ethnic group.

What is ethnicity ?

In some respects the term has remained true to its early usage. Derived from the Greek "ethnikos", it was originally applied to *"heathens, cultural strangers and outsiders".* Today, "ethnic groups" are still generally used to denote "others" while the dominant group seems somehow to transcend ethnicity.

The difficult questions are how this ‘otherness’ is to be recognised and for what purpose. More recent explanations of ethnicity focus on the importance of a common history and tradition, and culture, which includes shared activities such as religion, language and lifestyle, so that *"the basic distinctive attribute of an ethnic group is not physical appearance, but cultural values"* (57).

But what about the ethnicity of those who reject this culture and its shared activities, including

its language, religion and lifestyle? Cultural affiliation may be a matter of choice: ethnicity arguably is not. Rightly or wrongly, perceptions play a major part in attributing ethnic origin, whether the perceptions are of those inside or outside a particular ethnic group.

Nationality and ethnicity

It is its relationship with nationality and hence with nationalism that make ethnicity so problematic. For higher education this at once involves another relationship - the interaction between higher education institutions and the state. Where governments seek to utilise higher education as a cultural tool to strengthen national identities, the interests of minority ethnic groups are threatened and tensions increase, whether between state and university, or between different ethnic groups seeking participation in higher education.

In the 1990s, "ethnic cleansing", the new euphemism for genocide, has added a sinister association to the very vocabulary of ethnicity, while the break-up of the former Yugoslavia has presented an example of the potential consequences of a clash between ethnicity and nationality, extreme enough to make other states recoil in horror. Yet the effect has been to increase rather than to reduce tension. It is clear that "*the stability of Europe as a whole as well as the pursuit of the process of unification and democratisation are at stake*" and that "*the question of national minorities constitutes one of the key problems*" (58).

In eastern Europe, instability resulting from the break-up of the Russian empire and the re-drawing of boundaries, has increased friction between populations already ethnically mixed for centuries, as new and insecure dominant ethnic groups assert their national identity by disadvantaging those who are in a minority. In the midst of this confusion, attitudes are hardened by the proximity of religious fundamentalisms which loom as rival allegiances, transcending national frontiers.

In the west, conditioned not by changing boundaries, but by the inheritance of a colonial white supremacist past, it is the more easily identifiable ethnic groups of Asian and African origin that are the most vulnerable. Familiar scapegoat theories, revived by the long recession, contribute to support for stricter immigration laws, the revival of extremist parties and an increase in racial violence.

There is no neutral position for higher education here. Its mission is both to demonstrate its own detachment from intolerance and discrimination, and to assume a role in the peaceful protection of cultural diversity in European society.

Ethnic monitoring

This would seem to be the first step towards implementing such a mission. Yet most Higher Education Institutions would claim, with no academic qualms about inconsistency, both that they are ethnically neutral and that they have no statistics to prove it. In the west, monitoring on a national scale is undertaken only in the Netherlands and the UK, and both systems are new.

Elsewhere there is no ethnic monitoring, and the nationality status of minority groups often complicates the situation. In Belgium and France, where the term ethnicity is not recognised, second generation immigrants are eligible to become nationals and are subsequently invisible in national data; while in Switzerland, the large migrant population, approximately one sixth of the total, is ineligible for recognition, and there is no ethnic monitoring, although Swiss university records are otherwise detailed and sophisticated.

In the east, only the Russian Federation can provide statistical data. Elsewhere even the process of gathering such information, is seen as a potential threat to social peace and security, and the very notion of monitoring is firmly rejected on the grounds of political divisiveness. Classification by ethnicity was seldom in the past undertaken for the benefit of minority groups. Yet *"the ghost of ethnic labelling **for** discrimination must be put to rest"* (59) if patterns of disadvantage and under-representation perpetuated from former regimes are to be eradicated.

Legislation and discrimination

The absence of monitoring makes the concealment of discrimination easier. The extent to which it is exposed or legitimised varies otherwise according to national legislation relating to racial discrimination. In higher education there has been evidence of direct discrimination against both staff and student applicants from minority ethnic groups. In the UK, several legal cases have been won with the support of the CRE (Commission for Racial Equality), including that against St George's Medical School, where computers were programmed to subtract admission points from applicants with non-European sounding names.

In many countries there is no CRE and no race relations legislation to outlaw discrimination. In Switzerland, legislation has recently been introduced, but here as in Germany, the laws on citizenship might themselves be regarded as discriminatory. This is also the case in countries seeking to reverse former russification policies, where Russians are no longer the dominant cultural group, for example in Estonia, the new law on citizenship *"does not discriminate against anyone on formal ethnic grounds, but it has a real political effect, in that it excludes nearly one third of the residents from state-wide political decision making and can certainly be interpreted in ethnic terms. The Law on Aliens (1993) defines most of the Soviet period immigrants and their descendants as aliens who have to apply for residents and job permits"* (60).

In these circumstances, the scope of higher education institutions themselves to reduce barriers to participation is limited and depends largely on the extent of their autonomy from the state. The Project has highlighted the need for a study of the impact of citizenship and race relations laws on higher education opportunities for minority groups, which would not only reveal the extent of disadvantage, but also provide some examples of good practice, both at institutional and at national levels.

Language barriers

Given the importance of language as a factor determining social exclusion, language policies are a key aspect of the higher education's response to minority ethnic groups. Whereas in the case of foreign students, language barriers may be seen to be the responsibility of the individual, in the case of home students, the responsibility is that of the education system, the policies of which can both create and overcome such barriers.

The range of language disadvantage is in a continuum including those who do not speak the main state language, those for whom it is a second language and who speak it with varying degrees of perfection, and those for whom it is their first language, but not that of their families. In each case, higher education has a responsibility, but its response, if it is to be effective, will vary.

A fundamental question is whether higher education systems or institutions will stay/become

monolingual, bi-lingual or multi-lingual. The determining factors here are the political use to which language is put by governments to reinforce national identities, the size and geographic concentration of minority groups, and language policy at secondary education level. In Belgium for example the solution has been the establishment of two distinct education systems.

In eastern Europe new language barriers are being created, for example in Romania, where the Education Law of 1994 made Romanian the compulsory language for all levels of education and for all citizens, irrespective of their ethnic origin - a policy which disadvantages the large Hungarian minority (61). In other countries, for example Estonia, where there is more of a will to offer bi-lingual higher education, the financial implications can prove a major deterrent.

Some countries which have sought to reduce barriers through bi-lateral intergovernment agreements on mother tongue education, report that *"this problem would be less difficult if only all the populations concerned knew about the principles of democracy and human rights"* (62). Moreover, mother tongue teaching in schools provides no solution to access where higher education is delivered only in the national language.

Where there is a second language for individuals or their parents, limitations or variations in language usage may be interpreted as being indicative of a generally inferior academic performance and potential, and thus associated with lowering standards in higher education.

Such a view penalises those from minority ethnic groups, while absolving higher education systems of any responsibility for meeting their learning needs. In addition to "horizontal" under-representation, i.e. the concentration (leading to ghetto-isation?) of minority ethnic students in the least prestigious higher education institutions.

The Ethnocentric Curriculum

Closely linked to language barriers are those created by cultural conformity in the curriculum, both at secondary and at higher education levels. Here there is a tension between the university as a means of reinforcing or sometimes reviving the national cultural identity, and higher education's universalist obligations including "*access to world science, service to an increasingly interdependent economy and to international understanding"* (63).

Where there is no understanding that *"the true university is multicultural by vocation*", students are exposed to an ethnocentric curriculum, which is a narrowing of the academic experience for all, but particularly for those from minority ethnic backgrounds, who in the process of trying to adapt, may find themselves isolated both from their fellow students and from their own family backgrounds.

Barriers to participation: a summary

The barriers are multiple and cumulative. They include:

- ***The absence of ethnic monitoring***, which prevents the formulation and implementation of a serious policy for equal opportunity.

- ***Non-eligibility for national status*** for even second or third generation immigrants, which may disqualify them from being treated as internal students.

- ***Low socio-economic status*** caused by and contributory to ethnic disadvantage.
- ***The increased cost to the student*** of higher education and the absence of adequate

financial support from the state.

- ***Earlier educational disadvantage*** and school segregation, which inhibits entry and achievement at 18+, and limits educational aspirations.

- ***Lack of appropriate information*** at the pre-entry stage.

- ***The inflexibility of entry criteria*** which focus on performance, not potential, and penalise those with no family background in higher education.

- ***Direct discrimination,*** against both staff and students, and the lack of effective race relations legislation to outlaw discrimination.

- ***Interpretations of quality*** in higher education, which associate ethnic diversity with lower standards.

- ***Language policies*** which restrict the language of higher education to that of the dominant group, even in regions where minority groups predominate.

- ***An ethnocentric curriculum*** in secondary and higher education, which requires minority groups to conform to cultural norms, and fails to celebrate the merits of diversity.

3.6 De-marginalising Disability

The challenge to higher education

Those with disabilities are easily marginalised and this very circumstance, combined with their evident disadvantage, should put them "top of the access agenda" (64). The diverse nature of disability, its lack of political weight, and the difficulties the disabled may face in campaigning for themselves, make this minority group an exceptionally vulnerable one. Disabled students face difficulties with academic work, extra-curricular and social activities as well as accommodation and travel (65). Nor are they immune from the kind of social prejudice and isolation that other minority groups encounter.

A government responsibility

However, even where there are no statistics, it is widely accepted not only that disabled people are under-represented in higher education, but that regrettably, very little can be done about it. Yet disability is socially constructed and the disabled disadvantaged, not by their medical impairment, but by a contemporary social organisation which, taking little account of their condition, excludes them from mainstream activities, such as higher education. New policies at national level are needed to reduce barriers for those with disabilities, whether in employment, the environment, transport, or education.

Such policies are effectively implemented in Australia and the USA, but seldom in Europe. In both Germany and Iceland, there is legislation to ensure rights for people with disabilities in higher education, but this is not the norm. Recent British legislation (1995) refused to go so far, taking only a timid step forward by giving the Higher Education Funding Councils (government quangos) oversight of universities' provision for the disabled.

Elsewhere disability is often perceived as falling within the sphere of social services or health departments and so the distinctive needs of students are ignored. Where there is no recognition of any state responsibility for disability in higher education, as in Spain, Switzerland and most eastern European countries, no statistics are available of the participation of those

with disabilities, and they are marginalised to the point of invisibility (66).

The responsibility of higher education institutions

Where national policies are non-existent or ineffectual, some higher education institutions take positive steps to involve and support disabled students; others accept that disability means exclusion. Sometimes in eastern Europe, institutions' capacity to act is restricted by state intervention, for example requiring applicants to produce medical certificates, and occasionally excluding those with disabilities from particular courses, or from entry to higher education in general, apparently on the grounds that they are a poor investment for the state in terms of career potential. Yet educational opportunities to increase their independence and their earning potential would make them less of a burden on the state.

The situation of those with disabilities in higher education can be worse in several respects than for those in employment or in compulsory school education. Building regulations are often easily evaded, suitable accommodation is not always provided and the particular learning needs of, for example blind students are not always understood. Lack of training of academic staff in responding to such needs encourages a reluctance, or even fear of accepting such students on to courses.

By a process of avoidance and neglect, universities sometimes resolve disability issues by creating an academic and social environment which makes it problematic for disabled students to participate. The low presence of disabled students and staff means that internal pressures for change are low and policies of exclusion are thus self-perpetuating.(67) Yet action taken by some universities, for example in the Netherlands, demonstrates how much can be achieved if only the commitment is there (68).

Shifting responsibility

The reluctance of governments and higher education institutions to take action is sometimes excused by the view that responsibility is properly located elsewhere. In Spain for example, it is with charitable organisations, some of which, particularly ONCE (*Organisación Nacional de Ciegos Espanoles*), representing the visually impaired, are very influential, but others, such as the organisation for the deaf, much less so. In eastern Europe disability is generally perceived as being a private, not a public ‘problem’, for example in Poland, where some provision is made for disabled students, there is little take-up, disability being generally regarded as the responsibility of the family and one to be concealed, for fear of stigmatisation.

A low resource priority

The effective resolution of disability issues is hampered by the assumption that lack of resources is the main barrier. A conviction that this is the case imbues staff in both ministries and universities with a sense of well-intentioned helplessness - an indication that in the west as in the east, disability has a low priority in higher education (69) .

Certainly in central and eastern Europe, the problem is exacerbated by the inheritance of a decayed physical environment, never at any stage influenced by the needs of people with disabilities. Not just in the buildings but also on the streets, physical access is difficult, delays in the introduction of new technology have impeded progress, and in some countries wheelchairs are a luxury. Yet it is always possible to prioritise those with disabilities, if the will is there, for example in Croatia resources are provided to enable only those disabled by the war to participate in higher education - a policy established not in recognition of the needs of those with disabilities, but as a reward for service to the state.

Elsewhere it is notable that, although inadequacy of resources is always presented as the reason for inaction, it is often the wealthiest countries, for example Switzerland, which are the least prepared to take action. The barriers are thus created by low priorities, rather than by limitations on the resources available.

3.7 The gender pyramid

Data on participation by gender are available in all countries, both at institutional and at national level and demonstrates that at undergraduate level, barriers have largely been overcome, with women sometimes being in a majority. This marks *"the greatest advance in equity in higher education of the last decades."* (70) In some countries, for example, Portugal, progress has been dramatic. The danger however is that this achievement may create a climate of complacency, distracting attention from inequalities demonstrated by the data.

In all European countries, a gender breakdown of the university system would logically by represented as a pyramid. At the base, undergraduate level, women hold the balance; at postgraduate level it is against them; at senior lecturer and management level they are severely under-represented; women professors are a rarity and women rectors so rare as to have curiosity value. In education systems as a whole, women are most heavily represented on the staff of primary schools and most under-represented in universities - this sector of course carrying the greatest status, remuneration and influence.

Reinforcing conventional gender roles

Gender disadvantage in higher education is generally diagnosed as being caused by societal factors and earlier educational experience, rather than by attitudes within higher education itself. In consequence, universities accept the situation as not being of their making and hence not their responsibility. By adopting an ostensibly neutral position, they not only fail to redress gender disadvantage, but inevitably replicate and thus reinforce it. Thus the absence of women among the senior staff of universities serves both to endorse and to perpetuate an inequitable system of employment. Higher education is failing to provide the role models that could raise career expectations, influence employer perceptions and help to stimulate change. In Spain, as a typical example, only 12.7% of managerial posts are held by women: in the UK only 9% of Members of Parliament are female, but only 5% of professors (71).

Legislation against discrimination

Gender discrimination is illegal in several countries, including Iceland and the UK. Here case histories evidence the barriers that staff and students face in higher education, and act as something of a deterrent to discrimination. Following new equal opportunities legislation in Switzerland, for example, the recent appointment of a female Chair in French at the University of Geneva provoked petitions from the all-male department and threats of industrial action from a normally passive professorial corps - hardly a demonstration of moral leadership from an institution of higher education. In several countries however there is still no such legislation, and where it exists, it is not proof against the insidious, persistent portrayal of gender stereotypes in the media, nor against the ingrained masculine culture of institutional management systems.

Just a matter of time?

Whenever the question of women in senior positions is raised, the inevitable response is that it

is only a matter of time - "*like fish growing feet, women are apparently evolving into suitable candidates and will get there in the end but the process should not be forced....the pool of women from which to select is still too shallow*" (72). This is a useful argument to demonstrate the inadvisability of any efforts to speed up the process, but it has several flaws.

Time is an expensive commodity and the process is taking up too much of it, for example in the UK there have been women in Parliament for over 75 years, but there are none at present in the cabinet. As this example also shows, there is no steady march towards greater female participation at the top - where there are signs of a shift, progress often falters and, especially in countries where religious fundamentalism gains sway, regresses. As the McRae Report demonstrates, the barriers that are stopping the advancement of women into senior positions are working practices, structures, tradition and, above all, attitudes (73). The problem can be concealed and exacerbated by "equal opportunities" policies which claim to ensure that appointments are made only on "merit", as though this was some kind of absolute, and was not defined, interpreted and applied by those already in positions of power. The reason that women are failing to gain inclusion into management positions, is that "*they are being judged in systems set up by men which reflect male standards and criteria. The undervaluing of women's skill is what is central to their absence from the highest echelons*" (74).

The effect on facilities

One consequence of the gender imbalance at the top is that facilities which might increase participation and study opportunities for women are seldom prioritised, particularly in times of scarce resources. Crêche places, despite the increase in mature students in several countries, are often limited, expensive, and frequently resourced or subsidised by voluntary fund-raising activities rather than through mainstream budgets - an indication that (unlike sports facilities) they are regarded not as an integral aspect of university life, but as optional extras. In eastern European universities however, family accommodation and childcare facilities are still the rule rather than the exception - further evidence of access determined by prioritising rather than by affluence.

Differentiation by discipline

There is consistent and persistent gender differentiation by subject in all countries, although it is most marked in the west. Here less than a quarter of engineering students are female and there is similar under-representation in the physical sciences, mathematics and computer science, where the micro-chip revolution has, it seems, simply reproduced traditional inequalities. Staffing also reflects this gender pattern, thus providing few role models for students and reinforcing male domination of academic leadership, because of the disproportionate weight of these disciplines in research. Disciplines in which women predominate are those leading to professions, for example teaching and social work, which are undervalued, both in financial and status terms.

There is a similar pattern in "male" subjects such as medicine, for example in Iceland women are concentrated in those specialisms which are held in lower esteem. Clearly there is need for a cultural re-construction of gender roles, which higher education is well-placed, though apparently reluctant, to lead.

Overall the message of the (not too well) hidden curriculum of European higher education is one of continued male power and control, both in terms of its hierarchical structure and the

gender divisions between academic disciplines.

3.8 The Cash Barrier

A barrier for whom?

Two things are indisputable here - the first is that barriers only exist for those without adequate resources, private or public; the second is that there is a close correlation between higher income level and participation in higher education (see 3.2). In this respect, the system of funding both students and higher education institutions through taxation has, especially in the west, been regressive, in that is it has always rewarded higher income groups, the primary effect of which has been to enable them to sustain, if not to increase, their earning power, by up to 85% above that of non-graduates with 18+ qualifications.

However if we accept the view that the main purpose of higher education is not to improve the mind, but to line the pocket, an even better investment would be in the higher education of lower income groups, whose income without a degree would be substantially less than that of middle-class non-graduates (75).

The importance of financial considerations

How far is under-representation attributable to financial barriers? While recent studies have identified parental experience of higher education as the main determinant of participation, such experience is closely related to income, while minority ethnic groups are often among the lowest earners. These factors are thus mutually reinforcing. Well before the point of higher education entry, those from low-income groups are disadvantaged by attending a less well-resourced, less-challenging school, with a less supportive peer group, with lower aspirations and a paucity of role models - circumstances deriving from their family income, and exacerbated by higher education entry criteria which ignore their effect on performance at 18+.

The deterrent of student funding

At the point of entry, local and national variations in student loans, grants and subsidies make student subsistence something of a gamble, but always with far more snakes than ladders for those without additional parental support. Although "*the ability to pay is not ethically relevant to admission*" (76), in practice there are few incentives for those from low income groups and lack of an adequate income is a strong deterrent. The practice, fairly common in eastern Europe, of giving additional financial awards to those with the highest grades on entry, can waste scarce resources by providing an additional bonus to those already coming from more privileged homes, who are less in need of such support (77).

The replacement of grants by loans and the more widespread introduction of fees (see 2.3) will increase the size of the financial barrier. In the USA, where in the mid-90s, the balance of grants to loans was reversed, so that now 26% of Federal student aid is in grants and 74% in loans, studies show that grants are "*more effective than loans in encouraging access to higher education by low-income and minority students. It seems to be particularly important that low-income and minority students receive more grants than loans for their first year, when they are making the decision to enter higher education...otherwise they are more likely than non-minority and upper-income students to choose not to attend*" (78). The introduction of fees must significantly increase the size of loan required, without any guarantees that higher education, rather than treasury budgets, will benefit.(79)

Financial barriers to successful completion

There is some evidence on the impact of financial hardship on student performance (80), for example in Scotland, where concern about debts is affecting students' academic work, impairing their health and forcing some to postpone or abandon their studies (81). Unemployment has reduced opportunities for students to find part-time work, and even where they do, it is at a cost to the quality of their studies (82). Low pay for unskilled work requires long hours for little financial reward, with an adverse effect on time for study, for example in Italy, there is evidence that incompatibility between work and study is the main factor in the 30% first year drop-out rate (83).

Reductions in state funding to institutions also impacts on successful completion, particularly for "non-traditional" students, who are often accorded a low priority as solutions are sought in the form of larger classes, less tutorial support, reductions in advice and counselling support, and cuts in equipment and library budgets.

3.9 Ostrich Policies

Chapter 3 is entitled "Restrictive Policies as Barriers to Access" and this is perhaps something of a misnomer. The policies discussed here are often not so much consciously restrictive as non-interventionist, unresponsive, backward-looking in their conventionality and ostrich-like in their reluctance to acknowledge and investigate change. Their obsession, if a word associated with strong emotions is not wholly inappropriate here, is to preserve established patterns of participation despite radically changing circumstances, to perpetuate cultural conformity, and to adopt a "hands-off" approach to issues of inequity in society under the illusion that inactivity signals neutrality.

If it could only be found, commitment rather than complacency, a leadership confident of the capacity of higher education as a change agent, and determined to deploy this to the benefit of disadvantaged as well as more privileged groups in society, could resolve many access issues even before the millenium.

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Chapter 4 Principles, Policies and Practice

4.1 Moving forward

This chapter moves from diagnosis to remedies, building on illustrations of current policies and practice and making recommendations for future developments, based on the more detailed proposals of the Project. Starting from first principles, the key issues are selected and prioritised, to avoid the diffusion and de-fusion of the Project's impact. Recommendations are made to the Council of Europe itself, to member states, higher education institutions and other interested governmental and non-governmental bodies. The examples here provide encouraging evidence of what is possible: their limitation is that in no country do they represent part of a coherent and comprehensive pattern, originating from a basic premise. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate how this can be achieved.

Circumstances of course are dissimilar and what works well in Paris may not work so well in Prague, but as it has been possible to identify common barriers to access, so common objectives may be achieved. Moreover higher education systems, in whatever country, are united by their central purpose of teaching and research, linked by their dependence on and contribution to international scholarship, and confronted inevitably with the same age-old issue of relationships between universities, society and the state. It is this commonality which has enabled many different higher education systems in Europe to inform, advise and influence the work of the access project, and to learn from each other in the process. Its future success depends largely on the commitment of individual states to take the work forward. For some the distance may seem too far to travel; for others not far enough, but no university is "an island unto itself" and a general momentum can be compelling.

4.2 First Principles

Agreement on the access mission of higher education is the starting point and a guiding principle for all that follows, but it is not an *alternative* to action. In the UK for example, it is fashionable nowadays for higher education institutions to advertise themselves as 'Equal Opportunity' organisations, with no requirement to prove that they are anything of the kind. Such paper promises prevent rather than represent progress. The mission is not about being *"magnanimous, or being morally or politically correct",* (84) it is about changing *policy* in order to achieve different outcomes.

Recognition of the project goal

The goal has been to widen participation to higher education of good quality **-** an ambitious objective requiring a synthesis of the two characteristics of quality and equity, conventionally viewed as being incompatible. The first step has therefore been to explore the relationship between access, quality and equality in higher education; to challenge traditional notions and measures of quality; and to gain recognition for the legitimacy and desirability of the Project's objective.

Acceptance of this as a legitimate goal requires a shift in thinking from perceiving equity to be a threat to quality, to viewing it as an essential component of it. The relationship is a symbiotic one. Where equity is recognised as an important criterion for identifying the quality of higher education, an inequitable system loses its claim to quality. The converse is also true: equity

requires participation in a higher education of good quality, if it is genuinely widening opportunity. There is nothing very equitable about participation in an inferior system. This is not to say that a more equitable system of higher education will not require change, but that the change will enhance rather than dilute the quality.

The furtherance of this goal has been the basis of each aspect of the Project.

A Fair Chance for All

The Australian example is useful here as demonstrating the feasibility of this goal as developed over a number of years. "A Fair Chance for All", launched in 1990 in response to perceived national needs and priorities in both economic and social terms, focussed initially on widening entry. Its overall objective was

"to ensure that Australians from all groups in society have the opportunity to participate successfully in higher education. This will be achieved by changing the balance of the student population to reflect more closely the composition of society as a whole" (85).

Its main strategies were the development of a range of entry routes and it succeeded in achieving a much more diverse student population. Equity targets for admissions became an integral part of the quality assurance process. Over the last three years, there has been greater emphasis on quality in output, providing incentives for higher education to focus on the successful performance and career potential of this new student profile.

The European approach however must differ from this to recognise from the start that access encompasses, not just participation but also the higher education experience itself, in a continuum of opportunity which recognises the interdependence of equity and quality.

Recommendation 1: Policy

In support of the project goal, member states and higher education institutions are recommended:

- *to make progess towards equity a main performance indicator for evaluating quality in higher education institutions, and to include it as a main criterion for resource allocation;*

- *to improve the quality of higher education by changing the balance of the student population to reflect more closely the composition of society as a whole;*

- *to provide a learning environment in higher education which gives equal opportunities to all students in the pursuit of academic excellence.*

4.3 Monitoring

Monitoring provides the hard evidence needed to plan strategies, set targets and calculate progress towards them, and is fundamental to the success of the recommendations above. The inclusion of access issues in institutions' quality assurance processes makes comprehensive data on participation the more essential, not least in sensitive areas like disability and ethnicity, where prejudice thrives on ignorance (see 3.1).

Here *"arguments based on sentiment, on perceived need, on pleas for mercy or similar do not*

get a hearing against sound documentation" and this is what is needed in the future.(86) Higher education in particular, with its claim to academic objectivity and detachment, should not be associated with a preference for not finding out the facts.

Monitoring as a transverse theme

The data, once available, provide a measure for evaluating the take-up and implementation of all other aspects of the Project. Thus, although monitoring has emerged from the work on under-represented groups, it constitutes with funding, a tranverse theme. The earliest findings were the huge gaps in data (Chapter 3), making comparative studies and statistical surveys difficult. To avoid such problems in the future, a pilot scheme was set up to explore the practical problems in a constructive way, by trials between a number of co-operating higher education institutions in different countries.

The Monitoring Pilot

This project provides an example of co-operation in data collecting and involves institutions in seven European countries exchanging experience on *methods*, and investigating the implications for the collection of comparative data. Using 1995-96 enrolment data over a limited number of fields, pilot institutions are reporting on:

- their results in each data field and any difficulties encountered;
- the possible causes of any demonstrated under-representation;
- proposals for amending, abandoning, or retaining the model for wider use.

Recommendation 2: Monitoring

Member states and higher education institutions are recommended:

- *to establish state-wide (or internally compatible) monitoring systems of student profiles, entry qualifications, performance, progression and retention rates (including reasons for non-retention), and staff profiles and positions by age, gender, disability, ethnic or cultural identity & socio-economic status;*

- *to develop monitoring systems which will facilitate the exchange of data between European states.*

The Council of Europe is recommended:

- *to complete and extend its Monitoring Pilot to produce a model for circulation to member states;*

- *to invite member states to contribute their annual data;*

- *to produce a follow-up report for the year 2000*;

- *to involve and gain support for this work from the EU, Unesco, the German Studentenwerk, the EAN, and other international, European and national organisations.*

Strategy for implementation

Monitoring systems are not always easy to introduce and can be difficult to implement. Access monitoring should therefore:

- be part of a good faith policy for equal opportunities, and introduced by consent, involving those with a legitimate interest, including representatives of the different groups to be monitored, in the planning process;
- comprise an integral part of the normal national monitoring process;
- have regard to legitimate concerns over data protection and privacy;
- comprise a three-stage process, involving data collection, analysis, and implementing change;
- avoid the creation of cumbersome and complex systems which staff will be reluctant to implement, and which will arouse proper concerns about cost and feasibility;
- produce annual summary statistics relating these data to local and national data as appropriate, as the basis for future planning and research;
- note the outcomes of and contribute to the Monitoring Pilot.

4.4 Legislating against discrimination

In respect of this legislation, European countries fall into four categories:

- those with comprehensive and enforceable legislation against discrimination, where higher education is protected;
- those with limited legislation against discrimination, which does not apply to all social groups, or which does not apply to higher education, or which is not effectively enforced;
- those with no legislation, which thereby legitimise discrimination;
- those with legislation which actively discriminates against particular social groups for example by permanently excluding certain groups from eligibility for citizenship by reason of their ethnic identity (see 3.4).

The work of the Project has built on earlier Council of Europe initiatives, including the Vienna Declaration (1993) which urged member states to *"reinforce guarantees against all forms of discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin or on religion"*, and the work of the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (1995), which includes a survey of anti-discriminatory measures in member states.

The Final Statement of the CC-HER 1996 Forum Role Conference 'Higher Education for Tolerance in Europe' drew attention to the importance of anti-discrimination legislation "*to empower members of minorities and other disadvantaged groups to make the fullest use of the educational opportunities open to them.*" Other work of the Council which relates specifically to

discrimination against women and against those with disabilities, is also of direct relevance.

The British example

The UK provides an interesting illustration of a country falling within the second category above, (i.e. its legislation does not yet apply to all social groups), and which also monitors participation in higher education nationally by age, gender, ethnic origin, disability and socio-economic background.

British legislation provides against discrimination on grounds of gender and race and is backed by two statutory bodies, the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) and the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) respectively. Each of these bodies has won cases proving discrimination against staff and students in higher education, although their limited funding enables them to pursue only a few selected cases. Moreover the police and the judiciary (both overwhelmingly white and male) are often accused of a lukewarm attitude in the enforcement of anti-discrimination laws. Nevertheless the impact of successful cases and the publicity given them by the two statutory bodies operates to discourage discrimination.

Within this legislative framework, the higher education system shows non-white minority ethnic groups "to be well-represented". Despite the overall picture, however, under-representation remains among certain groups, such as Pakistani women. Moreover, women and minority ethnic groups are under-represented among academic staff, and among both staff and students in the most prestigious higher education institutions (87).

On the other hand, it is a major omission that discrimination against those with disabilities is not subject to similar legislation, nor has it an equivalent statutory body, and disabled people have no rights in respect of participation in higher education. Regulations about disabled access to buildings are regularly and easily evaded by higher education institutions, and public transport remains inaccessible to those with mobility difficulties. In this respect, the UK clearly provides evidence of bad practice, although in some other respects, as has been seen, it may be seen as offering relatively good examples of legislating against discrimination.

The German example

In contrast to the UK, educational rights for the disabled in higher education in Germany were established in the mid-1970s and have since been extended, committing higher education institutions to:

- the provision of advice, pre-course, on-course and for employment;
- the modification of examination and study regulations;
- accessibility of buildings and technical equipment in higher education institutions;
- measures for the social integration of those with disabilities;
- sports provision for those with disabilities;
- the appointment of co-ordinators for students with disabilities;
- the involvement of people with disabilities in planning these measures;
- the improvement of information services by setting up a Central Advice Bureau.

However, the response to minority groups in Germany is by no means as positive. For example, members of the large Turkish community may still fall into the under-privileged category of "guest worker", despite many years' residence and although they may be second or third generation immigrants. The problem here is that, unlike the UK, there is no recognition of dual citizenship. Thus Germany is in the same category as Britain, of having anti-discrimination laws which do not protect all social groups.

Recommendation 3: Legislating against discrimination

Member states are recommended:

- *to establish legislation to outlaw discrimination in higher education and employment on grounds of gender, age, ethnic origin, religion, & disability;*

- *to amend citizenship laws to ensure that second generation immigrants have the status of nationals in entry to higher education;*

- *to give people with disabilities equal rights to participate in higher education for study, research and employment, and to remove physical and systemic barriers to their participation.*

The Council of Europe is recommended:

- *to take forward its work on access as an important component of its work on discrimination, including that on gender, ethnicity and disability.*

4.5 New Admissions Policies

Judged on their outcomes, current admissions policies (whether in selective or 'open' entry systems) traditionally discriminate in favour of those from advantaged backgrounds, by depending on performance at 18+ as their major criterion for entry. Higher education thus remains the province of self-perpetuating groups, legitimised by the illusion of equitable entrance criteria (see 3.2).

The recommendations on Mission, Monitoring and Discrimination above, set the framework for the formulation of new admissions policies, incorporating both equity and quality. Meeting the new goals for changing the student profile requires the transition from rigid admissions criteria based on past performance towards flexible criteria based on assessment of potential, which recognise the different starting points and diverse cultural backgrounds of applicants.

A Systemic Approach

Examples of flexible admissions practices including access routes and the Accreditation of Prior Learning (APEL) can be found in several countries but operating at the fringes and viewed as special *alternative* approaches to entry, if not some form of affirmative action, rather than as normal entry criteria within comprehensive and flexible admissions systems.

At present higher education institutions demonstrate a curiously inconsistent approach, over-rating the importance of admissions as a measure of their institution's quality and status, while often reducing the actual intake process to a clerical operation, performed by low-paid staff. Time spent on admissions is a profitable investment, and better outcomes would be achieved by upgrading the status of the admissions process, and downgrading the importance of students' academic qualifications on entry (see 3.2).

Developing local entry routes

Closer links with local secondary, vocational and adult education, and with organisations representing minority groups have proved an effective means of expanding the participation of

under-represented groups. The upper secondary level is already *"focussing on preparatory courses for further study and training, and its "final qualification" function is becoming less and less relevant."* Institutions are *"providing more individual choice and enlarging the programme offer",* in particular to include more technical/vocational programmes, often of *"a level of abstraction and theorising"* that puts them on a par with academic general education.

Closer upper secondary links allow higher education to take into account *"the regional and local specificity of secondary school programme choice and the specific regional and local needs and expectations as to the services and products of higher education."* (88) The local dimension is also important for widening adult entry. A case has been made (89), particularly on grounds of efficiency, for central co-ordination of admissions systems, but there is a need to retain enough flexibility in entry policies to respond to local needs.

Pre-entry guidance and counselling

Guidance and couselling has an increasing role to play if students from more diverse backgrounds are to negotiate their way successfully through the greater diversity of courses on offer. In eastern Europe, where these services are still rare, their development requires a commitment to choice and student control of the agenda, for which both staff and students may need preparation. The access potential of guidance and counselling is extensive, going *"beyond work with individuals, to changing systems",* a role requiring *"skills of advocacy, feedback, follow-up and systems change"* (90).

Where they are based within education systems (as in Ireland, Slovenia and Sweden), these services are more likely to relate to the realisation of individual potential, and so may increase aspirations towards higher education entry in a wider section of the population. Admissions programmes cannot however be effectively manipulated to meet the demands of the labour market - the lead time is too long, but they can be *"influential in monitoring supply and demand, enabling industry and commerce to prepare and update their employment strategies"* (91).

Recommendation 4: Admissions

Member states and higher education institutions are recommended:

- *to extend admissions criteria based on 18+ qualifications into inclusive criteria which recognise the different starting points and cultural backgrounds of applicants;*
- *to recognise high-level vocational qualifications as appropriate preparation for higher education;*
- *to give appropriate credit to experiential learning;*
- *to make entry criteria transparent;*
- *to direct recruitment strategies to applicants from diverse social backgrounds;*
- *to develop, together with secondary education, adequate and objective pre-entry information, guidance and counselling services, appropriate for a diverse student intake.*

4.6 Post-entry: access on course

Access is as much about output as about entry. Neither quality nor equality has been achieved where students fail their courses or fail to complete them, nor where they are offered an inferior higher education. Post-entry, both quality and equality are dependent on the university's ability to offer a 'value-added' curriculum, which provides a learning environment within which all individuals are able to develop their skills, knowledge and experience to achieve academic excellence.

Student retention

Concern about non-retention is understandable - it is not that higher education is rejecting the students but that they are rejecting higher education: not that the students are unsatisfactory, but that the system is. Once this is recognised, concern can be translated into policies, guided by the evidence of monitoring data to indicate: the overall extent of non-retention, its incidence among students with different characteristics and backgrounds in different universities studying different disciplines, and, most important of all, the reasons for it. Some of these, including funding, (see 4.7), must be addressed at national level, but many will be within the scope of individual institutions to resolve, and are factors affecting not only student retention, but also student performance.

The value-added curriculum

The idea of the value-added curriculum has been around for some time and is associated with attempts to assess the relative quality of the institutional input to student performance. In access terms it has a particular relevance in assessing the contribution of institutions to meeting the academic needs of a more diverse student body.

Value-added represents a shift away from the view that students should accommodate themselves to the university and towards the idea that perhaps the university should accommodate itself to meet students' academic needs (as in some cases, for example on fee-paying professional updating courses, it always has done). Its general application is evidence of some increase in the status of the teaching function of the university, as distinct from its research activity.

At the same time the emphasis is now on learning rather than on teaching, associated with the idea of higher education as the place for the development of higher level skills and understanding, as distinct from the acquisition of knowledge. This is a view more pervasive in the west than in the east, but here too it is becoming more common, in reaction against the practice of former regimes, in which it is now felt, students played too passive a role in the higher education process. In this sense the delivery of the curriculum is as important a part of the educational process as its content.

These trends, together with the technological revolution, tend to favour learning in an environment designed to facilitate it, by responding to students at individual stages of development. In these circumstances, there is no expectation that all students will arrive at the same jump-off point for starting their higher education, nor that they will all progress at similar rates. Such a climate is favourable for access. Within it students can pick and mix individual timetables from a range of modular programmes; opt for additional language, or mathematical or study support; and work at their own pace through the appropriate software. In this model, the place and time constraints on learning are less rigid, and can be adapted to meet the situation of students with different disabilities, or who are isolated in rural areas, or those whose period of study is temporarily interrupted.

From a resource angle, and particularly seen at present from eastern Europe, the value-added model looks ambitious, but staff/student ratios here can be higher than in the west, and freeing staff from their mechanical role of imparters of information, can provide more space for them to meet a diversity of learning needs. We are not after all at the point of a sudden switch over to this routine - in some countries it is already well underway, while in others it is still in the preliminary stages. To move towards it in either case is a gradual process, requiring annual performance targets to set and review priorities and to assess the value-added contribution.

The multi-cultural curriculum

This starts from the same premise, i.e. the enrichment that students with variety rather than conformity in their social and cultural backgrounds can bring to the university, if it is only prepared to appreciate it. Diversity has the *"capacity to contribute powerfully to the process of learning and to the creation of an effective educational environment."* (92)

The ethno-centric curriculum is not only a narrowing of the student experience, but a denial of the idea of the university as a place where different cultures, whether ancient or modern, are valued and studied.

In several countries higher education is acting to revive cultures suppressed for many years, as in Estonia, or to perpetuate those in danger of extinction, as in Wales. Elsewhere if the university is seen as a place for reinforcing cultural norms, it is the young and vulnerable who are most affected:

> *"one culture is imploring them to remain true to their roots; the other urging them to participate and succeed on its terms - the resultant disenchantment is grimly documented in a raft of social statistics"* (93).

To be effective, the multi-cultural university must involve minority groups in the ownership of their own policy objectives and educational opportunities. There is some recognition of this in initiatives at the University of Bucharest, as well as in Hungary and the Czech Republic, to involve the Romany population in the design of programmes to make higher education more relevant to their cultural background, but at present such work is still on the fringes (94).

The language of delivery

Language in higher education is often inextricably linked with cultural identity. While some countries are taking a hard line on this, for example Romania where Romanian is the mandatory language for all levels of instruction, despite the existence of a large ethnic Hungarian population, in other countries higher education institutions are using their autonomy to take a softer approach. In the Slovak Republic, some universities offer courses in Hungarian, and in Estonia, Tallinn Technical University is exploring the feasibility of a bilingual (Estonian/Russian) approach (95).

The Spanish example

In Spain, since 1985, Catalan has been the official language of the University of Barcelona, with Catalan and Spanish together considered the working languages of university life. The political significance of the language of higher education is demonstrated here:

> *"A concept of centralist and unitarist Spain, with uniform structures of the State, and with aspirations to cultural homogeneity, prevailed for centuries until the end of Franco's era.*

This is the model of Spain associated with the Inquisition, intolerance and also anti-Europeanism...The model of modern Spain is a very different one: a plurilinguistic, pluricultural, plurinational Spain" (96).

A Eurocentric curriculum

While Spain has moved from an ethnocentric to a European understanding of higher education, other states cling to European cultural traditions to the exclusion and down- grading of those of "non-white" ethnic groups, many of which form sizeable national minorities. While there are some exceptions, for example London University's School of African and Oriental Studies, arts and literature degrees in general in western Europe are often culturally white. Greater diversity would increase mutual understanding and tolerance (97).

Student services

Particularly for those with no family background of higher education, student services can provide a safety net, firstly at the point of entry. Most students who leave higher education do so in their first year if not their first term, when as indicated in the Sheffield survey (98), the difference between expectation and reality can have a devastating effect, often exacerbated by the increasing tendency of higher education institutions to squander shrinking budgets on marketing a glamourised illusion of the student experience.

The shock of entry can be reduced by the kind of close school/university entry processes discussed above (4.5), while pre-course guidance and counselling can significantly reduce dissatisfaction with choice of course, another major cause of non-completion. At enrolment, an effective induction and orientation process can improve students' first and often irreparable view of university life, and help to ensure their survival, particularly where it includes advice on accommodation and finance, and relates directly to their particular circumstances.

On-course and pre-exit guidance, careers and counselling services are generally well-established in the west, but are not common to eastern Europe. Here especially,*"governments need to be reminded of the social and economic benefits of a comprehensive, integrated and professional guidance and counselling service"* (99), offering objective support to students of different ages and cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, as well as to those with disabilities.

Recommendation 5: Access On-Course

Member states and higher education institutions are recommended:

- *to implement policies to eliminate the causes of non-retention as identified by monitoring data;*
- *to set performance indicators for a value-added curriculum to achieve equity and academic excellence among a diverse student intake;*
- *to employ new technology to facilitate learning for students from different backgrounds, disabled students and those whose circumstances inhibit regular attendance;*
- *to recognise the multi-cultural character of higher education and widen curriculum content to avoid monocultural or Eurocentric exclusivity, involving those from minority cultures in curriculum design and delivery;*

- *to employ 'soft' language policies in the delivery of the curriculum, where there are large national or regional linguistic minorities;*

- *to develop professional guidance, counselling and careers services to provide pre-entry, on-course and pre-exit support relevant to students' age, social and cultural background, and to those with disabilities.*

4.7 Staffing and Staff Development

Staffing is both part of the university's external image and internally, part of the hidden curriculum which does much to shape students' aspirations and choices. Little credibility can be attached to the equal opportunities policies of institutions, where senior staff are almost exclusively male, and where staff with disabilities, or staff from minority ethnic groups are conspicuous only by their absence.

The Belfast example

In a few countries, fair employment legislation is revealing the discriminatory effects of university employment policies. In Belfast, where cases relating to religion and gender have been arriving at Industrial and Fair Employment Tribunals since 1992, the Queen's University has paid out £194,564 to individuals in settlement of their cases, and £183,245 in legal fees. In 1994 at Queen's, 81.7% of academic staff were male, and 98.5% of clerical staff were female (100). Northern Ireland law has not yet however tackled discrimination through maternity leave, where Austria still takes the lead, with a requirement that for the latter part of paid leave to be claimed, it must be taken by the *other* parent.

In countries where there is as yet no such legislation, higher education systems themselves must enforce better practice, in particular to change the composition of institutional hierarchies. Inequity in staffing can both reflect and direct policy, for example the priority given to creche facilities or to a multicultural curriculum will be different where more women or more representatives from minority groups have the power to take decisions, and the practice will be different as well.

An access staffing policy requires different access priorities, for example at Tallinn Technical University, where over 90% of the staff are fluent in both the Estonian and Russian languages (98); or in French and German universities, where trained staff are appointed as Disability Co-ordinators to provide advice and support for students in academic work, examinations, accommodation, job preparation, sports facilities and social life. Staffing will also demonstrate the significance attached to the access mission, for example in Australia, the 'Fair Chance for All' programme led to the appointment of Pro-Vice-Chancellors and Deans with an equity brief, and in Belfast, Queen's University now has an Equal Opportunities Unit with three academic staff and two secretaries.

Staff development

The involvement of staff in formulating and implementing access strategies is probably the best form of staff development. There is also a need for updating in specific skills including: languages, information technology, the preparation of learning materials and interviewing techniques. Areas for extending understanding are equally wide and could include, for example the learning process among blind or deaf students; the cultural conventions of minority groups; and access issues and developments in other countries. In this last respect, the Project has already had a significant effect and its follow-up activities, including the monitoring project, and links with organisations such as FEDORA (European Forum of Academic Guidance and the EAN (European Access Network) will sustain an ongoing staff development role.

Recommendation 6: Staffing and Staff Development

Member states and higher education institutions are recommended:

- *to implement policy to achieve a more even gender balance among staff, particularly at senior levels;*

- *to implement policies to increase the number of staff from minority ethnic groups;*

- *to increase the number of staff with disabilities and to appoint Disability Co-ordinators;*

- *to involve staff at all levels in the design and delivery of access strategies and undertake staff development programmes to support access policies.*

The Council of Europe is recommended:

- *to follow up and disseminate the work of the project in co-operation with member states and non-governmental organisations*;

- *to disseminate the progress made in implementing the project recommendations at a European conference in four years' time.*

4.8 Funding

Funding the Access Model

The most direct way to approach funding the access model is by a reversal of the present distribution of resources. At present, whatever the source of higher education funding, the main beneficiaries, taking Europe as a whole are:

Group A:
- those from medium to high income groups;
- those whose parents have had experience of higher education;
- those from dominant ethnic groups;
- those without disabilities;
- those (mainly in eastern Europe) who receive an additional merit award for good qualifications at 18+.

Those in this group will of course be contributing something to their higher education study from their family income, and subsequently can expect to contribute taxation at a higher rate by virtue of their superior earning power (providing that they are not unemployed).

Those who benefit least at present from higher education funding are:

Group B:
- those from low income groups;
- those whose parents have no experience of higher education;
- those from minority ethnic groups;
- those with disabilities;
- those whose 18+ qualifications do not entitle them to any extra award.

Those in Group B will of course be contributing something to higher education (though not in most cases to their own) through the taxes that they will be paying from the age of 18+ or 16+ for the rest of their working life (providing that they are not unemployed). As lower earners, their tax contribution will however be lower.

Those from Group B who do enter higher education are more likely to drop out for financial reasons than those from Group A, and their performance is more likely to be affected by the

need to earn an income while studying. However, graduates from Group B would be a better investment than those from Group A because their earning power without a degree would be so much less than that of non-graduates from Group A (101). Graduates from Group B would be more likely to attend the least prestigious universities, which are often less generously funded - their degree in consequence would cost less.

The current system of funding is thus not only regressive, widening the gap between income groups, reinforcing social class divisions, and giving Group B little return on its contribution, but also wasteful of scarce state resources, which are allocated primarily to those who could afford to pay more for their higher education experience, and who would be prepared, though reluctant to do so, to the exclusion of those whose income makes payment impossible. In economic terms, Group B represents the most profitable investment.

There is likely to be a stronger correlation among the five categories in each group than with those in the other group. (It should be emphasised here that this debate has nothing to do with *entry* to higher education, which should be for those with the potential to benefit, whether from Group A or B - see 4.5).

An Access model would then simply reverse the two groups, so that those in Group B would become the main beneficiaries of higher education funding and those in Group A wishing to participate would pay a higher proportion of the costs themselves. How would this work ?

Funding student subsistence

Student funding, whether through grants or loans, would be in inverse proportion to student/parental ability to pay, taking into account any additional financial requirements, for example for those with disabilities, or those with dependents. (This assumes of course an effective method of establishing income, but that is a problem for the tax system rather than for higher education). There would be no additional benefit for those with high grades in 18+ examinations, whose likely reward would be a place at a highly prestigious university.

Fees

In western Europe fees have been introduced in some countries, such as Spain, for full-time students, and elsewhere are generally charged for part-time courses; in the east, fees are seldom charged at present either for full-time or part-time study. In an Access model, any fees would be for those from higher income backgrounds only, whether for full-time or part-time provision, with the income committed in full to additional investment in higher education.

Funding the social infrastructure (102)

Subsidies towards the social environment of higher education would benefit all students as at present, but with priorities being allocated along equity lines, for example to creche provision for those with children, or to improve physical access for those with mobility difficulties.

Funding higher education institutions

Financial incentives would be distributed here along the lines of the Australian "Fair Chance for

All" programme, with weightings for institutions making progress towards quality and equity in the form of a more diverse student intake and a value-added curriculum.

Recommendation 7: Funding

Member states are recommended:

- *to distribute support for student subsistence to benefit those from lower income groups, taking into account the cost of dependants;*
- *to provide an additional allowance to meet the needs of disabled students;*
- *to end additional grants to students with higher grades on entry;*
- *to restrict any fees, whether for full-time or part-time courses, to students from higher income groups;*
- *to commit any fee income fully to additional investment in higher education;*
- *to give priority in funding the social infrastructure of higher education to measures to benefit disabled students, and those with small children;*
- *to weight mainstream budgets for higher education to reward quality for institutions meeting access targets in terms of a wider student intake and a value-added curriculum.*

(84) Initiatives in Addressing More Equitable Participation in Higher Education: the Australian Experience. Allen Barlow. Paper for the Cambridge Workshop. 1995.
(85) A Fair Chance for All: National and Institutional Planning for Equity in Higher Education. DEET. Canberra. 1990.
(86) Barlow. 1995. op.cit.
(87) HESA. 1995. op.cit.
(88) Kallen. 1995. op.cit.
(89) Scott. 1995. op.cit.
(90) Bimrose. 1995. op.cit.
(91) Wolanin. 1996. op.cit.
(92) That a People may pass through the Eye of a Needle. Monte Chia. Te Pou. New Zealand. 1996.
(93) Woodrow & Crosier. 1996. op.cit.
(94) Aarna, 1995, op.cit
(95) Linguistic Policy at the University of Barcelona. Josef M. Pons. Ljubljana. 1995.
(96) Pons. 1995. op.cit.

(97) Sheffield Hallam. 1994. op.cit.
(98) Bimrose. 1995. op.cit.
(99) The Queen's University of Belfast. A Case Study. Robert Cormack. Ljubljana. 1995
(100) Aarna. op.cit. 1995.
(101) OECD 1995 op.cit.

(102) Schäferbarthold. 1996. op.cit

Chapter 5 An Access Identity

The current crisis of identity in European higher education (see Chapter 2) stems from lack of a central purpose: in this vacuum, systems become reactive and sometimes reactionary, responding spasmodically to conflicting pressures for change, and allowing strategies to become substitutes for coherent policies. In the east, where higher education is in a state of rapid westernisation, the mood is one of apprehension, mixed with expectation: in the west, where the model of higher education which is being exported eastwards is increasingly challenged at home, the apprehension is shared, but any sense of a new direction for the twenty-first century is missing.

The adoption of an access identity can provide this sense of direction in a dynamic system of higher education that has confidence in the future because it knows where it is going. Where access provides a central referral point, other issues fall into place and the answers to the questions raised in Chapter 2 become clear and consistent. In brief:

Who owns higher education?

In the access model, higher education belongs to the academic community in its broadest sense, whether international, national or regional. Its function is not to reflect and reproduce inequalities in society, but to provide independent and objective academic leadership based on notions of quality and equality. When the higher education history of the twentieth century is written, future generations will perhaps view with detached curiosity and with the superiority of hindsight, the quaintness of a system that existed so long for the benefit of a privileged and self-perpetuating élite.

Who pays?

Resourcing will no longer be regressive - benefitting most those who have the most. In an access system, payment, not entry, will be determined by ability to pay, while the new financial beneficiaries will be those whose participation is at present made problematic by their financial circumstances.

What about the secondary sector?

Access clarifies the role of higher education institutions here, no longer as gatekeepers, or as ticket-punchers checking examination grades, but as part of an educational continuum dedicated to widening access.

How vocational is higher education?

In the access model of the future, enough to recognise that downgrading the vocational by arbitrarily distinguishing it from the academic is untenable; but not so vocationally driven as to subordinate the higher education curriculum as a whole to the demands of the economy.

How adult is higher education?

In the future, adult enough to prioritise provision for those whose earlier educational disadvantage would give them a first claim in a genuinely lifelong learning system.

The virtual university?

An access system will harness its potential to improve both quality and equality, while avoiding the pitfalls of trivialising or de-personalising the higher education experience.

A professional model

The access perspective is a professional one not only providing answers, but also guiding strategy. Higher education systems are increasingly and justifiably being made more accountable these days. An access university will set precise performance indicators, with progress checked against monitoring data to record changes in: the profile of the student intake, the staffing profile, the value-added components of the curriculum, the reduction in student drop-out, the improvement in student performance, and the university's consequent financial gain from resource incentives to encourage quality which encompasses equity.

The options

This then is the access model for higher education. What are the alternatives? Will the spectre of twentieth century elitism in higher education survive to haunt the new millenium, perhaps taking a more extreme form with the spread of research-only universities, from which all but the most privileged are excluded?

Or will obsession with our competitive edge against the Asian tigers tilt the balance towards the entrepreneurial university, with its pre-occupation with profit and privatisation, where *"the notion of the market displaces the very concept of society itself"*, and the success of higher education is measured by Europe's rating in economic league tables? (101)

Or, in perhaps the most nightmarish of visions, this decade's pressures to deploy higher education to serve nationalist interests will produce the xenophobic university dedicated to "putting our own people first" in the twenty-first century, and in the process pushing other communities to the margins, by the kind of exterminationist policies for which this century has already become notorious.

Thinking about a repetition of the unthinkable must drive our determination to create a higher education that will be of benefit to all, a higher education to which no ethnic group, or nationality, or income group has a greater claim than any other, and which is dominated neither by the crude competitiveness of the market economy, nor by the divisiveness of political or sectional self-interest.

To meet this challenge is an awesome task, but one that commands our commitment. It is now four years since the access project was launched at the first Parma Conference, and four years to the millenium. To be able to measure our progress at the dawn of the twenty-first century we must make our resolutions and start to implement them now.

(101) Gus John. 1995. op.cit.

Statistical appendix

The table of main indicators, prepared by the Secretariat from the report by Egbert de Weert on "Participation in higher education", reproduces data on:

- student numbers in 1990 in all higher education;
- the share of non-university higher education in all enrolments in 1990;
- gross enrolment rates in 1970, 1980, and 1990;
- the proportion of women in higher education enrolments for the same years.

The report draws on OECD and UNESCO publications and databanks, complemented by other sources.

Two charts illustrate the latter two series.

The year 1990 is the most recent one for which data were generally available when the de Weert report was compiled. Indicators on other dimensions of access are very incomplete. Enrolments and participation rates have generally continued to rise since then, except in the CIS countries.

These are not harmonised indicators, as in the OECD publication *Education at a Glance.* They illustrate trends and orders of magnitude, and should not be used for country-to-country comparisons.

Notes

Student numbers
This indicator is sensitive to the definition of higher education, and of full-time versus part-time study. The figure for Russia may be unreliable, as it has been greatly increased in the latest Unesco Statistical Yearbook. The table intends to capture "university-equivalent" programmes. Few countries identify part-time students separately.

The share of non-university higher education
This is sensitive to political decisions about boundaries; for example, the polytechnics in the UK became universities after 1990.

The gross enrolment rate
In this standard indicator of the proportional overall volume of participation, the total full-time enrolment at all ages is divided by the population at a notional typical age for higher education, such as 20-24. It is used here because it is widely available, in preference to the possibly more instructive OECD indicator of all new entrants divided by the population at the theoretical starting age. Both indicators are sensitive to the problem of part-time students, and should not be used for inter-country comparisons; nor do they show the proportion of school-leavers entering higher education - the two purposes for which they are generally cited.

The proportion of women
This may be only indicator that is free of ambiguities. The total length of the bars on the chart corresponds to the 1990 figure. Where there was a reduction (shown to the left of the vertical axis) during one of the periods after 1970, the length of the bar corresponding to the other period has been truncated. For some new members, the data are for 1992.