

# Autonomy and diversity in higher education

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IN a recent publication, we attempted to analyse the place of academic autonomy in the provision of higher education, and some threats to its future.<sup>1</sup> The comment, controversy and even surprise which our views occasioned prompt us to restate them in response to criticism.

There are four elements in our argument. First it is necessary to look at the various functions of higher education, both traditional functions and ones of more recent origin. Second, we examine various kinds of pressures which are today impinging on universities, tending to alter the emphasis placed on various functions, and often to reduce the extent of academic autonomy. Third, we consider the justification for that autonomy and the forces resisting change; we conclude that autonomy rests on little more than 'beliefs and sentiments' which, unless shared by governments, will not provide any strong defence in the long term. Lastly, in the light of our analysis, we examine the potential consequences, often unintended, of various proposals for the reform of the universities.

## Functions of higher education

(1) Education serves to legitimize its graduates as occupants of high status or élite positions.<sup>2</sup> It is important to realize that for this to happen does not require that the student acquire skills or knowledge with any specific relevance to future employment. A general education, particularly in the humanities, was in Britain traditionally considered to shape both the mind and the character in *diffuse* ways for exercising authority and taking decisions. While the universities provided a route of upward social mobility for a few, they also had their place in maintaining the social position of the already well-placed. As many writers have noted, from Max Weber to Michael Young, the legitimizing function of educational institutions is a strategic one in a society which places increasing emphasis on the value of paper qualifications.

(2) The mass graduate employment market cannot, however, now be identified with recruitment only to an élite. The student now often undertakes higher education in order to acquire techniques and expertise with direct relevance to his chosen vocation. Broadly speaking, this form of training has in Britain been conducted in such separate institutions as the Inns of Court, teacher training colleges, teaching hospitals and a range of technical institutes. But of course, the universities had a hand in the teaching of many lawyers, doctors, schoolteachers and others before they embarked on more specialized vocational studies. And more directly vocational studies have spread to the universities, as for example in social work and education diploma courses. As occupations become increasingly specialized and demanding of technical expertise, demand for this kind of education may well increase while that for general education in the humanities declines relatively.

(3) Education may be regarded as of intrinsic value, something to be enjoyed for its own sake and for the development of the individual's capabilities. There is some evidence that many students do take this idealistic view, for in spite of the rapid expansion of applied science courses and excellent employment prospects for applied scientists, they have tended still to steer towards the social sciences, humanities and pure science.<sup>3</sup>

(4) Moving on from the purely educational tasks of higher education to those concerned with the cultivation and advancement of knowledge, there is first the traditional function of the preservation of 'high culture'. Historically important as this was, it might be argued to be in rapid decline as a result of the fragmentation of culture itself. The specialized disciplines of the modern academy do not recognizably relate to one another to form a coherent cultural whole, as did the higher learning of earlier centuries. As Comte observed, just as the social division of labour is a response to technological progress, so the academic division of labour is an inevitable result of the cumulative growth of knowledge.<sup>4</sup>

(5) Perhaps the function of higher education most important to the majority of British academics is the advancement of pure knowledge. Most of them see research, not necessarily with any 'practical' aim in view, as an inseparable part of their occupational role.<sup>5</sup> Not that 'pure' or 'curiosity-orientated' research does not often have widespread applications eventually. What is distinctive is that the applications are not in view, and cannot well be foreseen, at the out-

set of the research. If this fifth function is to be fulfilled, the academic has within quite wide limits to be allowed to decide how to spend his time and to determine his own priorities.

(6) Next, there is research undertaken for outside agencies, whether industry, government or other bodies. In the U.S.A. money from industry, government and the foundations has greatly assisted the massive growth of higher education and research since the war. Defence departments have played no small part. Many projects of 'pure' research were sponsored, but more recently financial hard times have not only generated demand mainly for narrow projects on specific 'applied' problems, but also made the universities as vulnerable to economic recession as manufacturing industry.

(7) Finally, and similarly challenged by the growth of sponsorship, is what we have called the 'monastic' role of the university. This has been widely misunderstood. We have in mind the 'retreatist' orientation which Halsey and Trow discovered among a minority of academics.<sup>6</sup> In suggesting that this orientation has an important place in the university, we do not suggest that academics should avoid studying things which happen in the real world, and instead concentrate on subjects like Latin or pure mathematics. The monastic form of academic enquiry is distinguished, not by the kind of subject that it studies, but rather by the way in which it defines the *problematics* of a discipline. Work which is carried out either directly or indirectly for a particular group in the wider society will define a 'problem' in the terms that the group in question encounters a 'problem' in the pursuit of its interests. The monastic approach, by contrast, defines a question as worthy of study if intellectually it presents a 'problem' of explanation or interpretation. It can readily be seen that the structure of a discipline which will emerge from these different approaches will be very distinct. We prefer the designation 'monastic' to 'retreatist' in order to recognize that this perspective on knowledge does not represent the pursuit of individual quirks, but is supported and facilitated by the *social* organization of the university. Work carried out under 'monastic' auspices submits itself to evaluation and criticism by peers in the community of scholars; it may not, however, necessarily regard as relevant the reception given to it by external agencies which do not have as their main concern the establishment of a coherent and comprehensive body of knowledge.

If the notion of the 'pure researcher' fits the natural scientist best.

here we have in mind particularly the academic in the social sciences and humanities. We are thinking of the academic as licensed heretic—the man who wishes, in return usually for some restrictions on his own power, to be intellectually free from the mundane pressures of the wider society. This too may be despised by those who constantly ask of the academic ‘what use is it?’ But the dangers of neglecting this kind of intellectual activity are plain to anyone who has ever been sceptical of the ‘conventional wisdom’.

Others may wish to improve our list of functions, but we hope we have covered the main points. It is obvious that conflict can exist at several points between the various functions of higher education. As Robbins observed:

There is no single aim which, if pursued to the exclusion of all others would not leave out essential elements. Eclecticism in this sphere is not something to be despised: it is imposed by the circumstances of the case.<sup>7</sup>

So far our higher education system has managed to contain such conflicts successfully. The balance between them may not have been optimal—it is hard to see by what criterion perfection would be judged—but co-existence has been possible. Rapid expansion is likely to alter the previously existing balance of functions; strain has been apparent in the last decade of growth and seems likely to increase in the next.

From what sources do the pressures come?

### **Pressures on higher education**

*From Students.* British students are allocated to courses in higher education by individual choice constrained by factors including selection procedures and government policy. Central government policy, as mediated and executed by the University Grants Committee, is now the main determinant of the supply of new places in university education. It influences not only the total size of institutions, but also their ‘product mix’—the balance between courses and subjects. The policy is based in a general way on some concept of social priorities, though these are rarely made explicit. Given the scale of resources now poured into higher education, it seems inevitable that any government will seek to exercise such influence.

But what of the demand side of the equation? Given the supply of places on diverse courses, do students accurately choose the one

most satisfying to them? It seems unlikely that they can, for they are operating in a grossly imperfect market. Not only is the range of options enormous, but information about them (and about consequent future employment prospects) is inadequate. In particular, sixth-formers may perceive the differing prestige of courses more accurately than course contents; Lord Todd has spoken of the prevalence of 'degree fixation'.<sup>8</sup> A result is widespread misallocation, and it is a tribute to human adaptability (and lack of awareness of alternatives) that students are not even more discontented with the courses on which they find themselves. One of the main appeals of the 'Comprehensive University' idea is that it would make it possible for students to transfer during their higher education between a much wider variety of courses.

What we have just said could in principle be true even if the higher education system were not expanding. Expansion may be another cause of student discontent and be reflected in the demands students make of their academic institutions. The increasing proportion of 18-year-olds successfully taking 'A'-levels indicates that there is a very large pool of talent. However, it may be that people of a *given ability* who would not previously have gone into higher education will now do so. Entry, and because of their prestige, entry into the universities especially, may become routine for students of a given level of ability. This is likely to mean the admission of students who are less motivated to undergo an academic education, people who might otherwise have chosen to apply their talents in other spheres. Even though average IQ or GCE attainment of entrants may rise, there may yet be a rise in the proportion of students seeking extrinsic rather than intrinsic rewards from their education. We make the point with some diffidence, for we are aware that it is even more difficult to test empirically than the old 'pool of ability' thesis. To the extent that students are able to bring their preferences to bear, they may be expected to shift the balance of the universities' functions away from research (especially the purer kinds) and towards teaching (especially the more vocationally relevant kinds).

Yet not all the evidence points this way. While some students resent the abstract, 'irrelevant' nature of their education, others regard any stress on vocational preparation as a betrayal of the ideal of liberal education.<sup>9</sup> The university as a 'knowledge factory' producing middle managers has been attacked bitterly by the student left. This division of opinion among students may be taken to reflect

the changing role of higher education within the wider society. Unfortunately, while the revolutionary left do not threaten pure research, they do threaten what we have called the 'monastic' function, for they seek an involvement in the world of a different kind. They seek the political engagement of the university, forgetting that the price of the university's freedom is its abstention from a collective political role as an institution. In Britain this is not at present a serious threat, but in America it has tended to undermine the position in society of, for instance, the University of California at Berkeley.<sup>10</sup>

*From finance.* With the growth in student numbers, the cost of higher education has come to bulk large in the national budget. Government, press and public have therefore become more interested in how the universities spend their money. Among the symptoms of this change have been: the transfer of the UGC from the aegis of the Treasury to that of the DES, with concomitant decline of its traditional role as a buffer between Governments and the universities;<sup>11</sup> the authority given the Public Accounts Committee in 1967 to enquire into the universities' accounts; and the National Board for Prices and Incomes' attempt to apply criteria of productivity to the remuneration of university teachers.

But more seriously, there has been an enormous increase in the *proportion* of university income which comes from the public purse. In Halsey and Trow's words:

the expansion of university studies . . . has almost completely eroded the financial basis of autonomy, converting the universities to this extent into state dependencies and thus placing the burden of maintaining academic freedom on the beliefs and sentiments of those who wield power in the modern system of government and administration.<sup>12</sup>

Financial pressures seem likely to act in the direction of applied, immediately 'relevant' work, and towards teaching, again particularly to vocationally relevant teaching. That the threat has not yet materialized is testimony to the power, at present, of the ostensibly fragile protection of 'beliefs and sentiments'.

*From industrial needs.* In Britain, unlike the U.S.A. private industry has had few opportunities to lay its hands directly on the work of the universities.<sup>13</sup> The one conspicuous example of direct interference, at the University of Warwick, caused national outrage.<sup>14</sup> More usually, industry in Britain depends for its influence on the

commitment of all British governments to the cause of science-based economic growth, facilitated by adequate supplies of skilled manpower—a central part of Robbins's case for expansion.

The UGC has continued to walk the tightrope between university autonomy and the government's assessments of national needs, appearing to totter more frequently towards the latter consideration.<sup>15</sup> The Science Research Council has begun to support more applied projects with industrial potential, though the majority of its work remains pure.<sup>16</sup> Most recently, the Government's Green Paper *The Framework of Government Research and Development*<sup>17</sup> seems to presage a further sharp turn against autonomy. One of the two constituent reports, by Lord Rothschild, conceives of the relationship between government department and researcher as that between customer and contractor. The balance of power is clearly intended to rest with the customer, and the Government seems likely to accept this principle. Already academics can no longer really claim that decisions about the work they are pursuing are taken solely on academic grounds.

All the main contemporary pressures on the universities operate in a consistent direction. An increased concern for teaching may be expected, especially for teaching with at least vaguely vocational objectives in mind, and the stress on applied rather than pure research will grow. The pressures mentioned are at least comprehensible and probably inevitable; furthermore, we are prepared to judge them in part as legitimate. Yet they undoubtedly threaten the fourth, fifth and seventh of the functions we listed above. The fourth may not be considered valuable. The other two certainly are. If 'beliefs and sentiments' are their only protection, we must now look at these defences.

### **Defences of autonomy**

*The academic as professional.* The academic's role is a professional one. The academic is a member of one of the longest established of the learned professions, along with doctors, lawyers and clergymen. Like them, the academic profession seeks to maintain its standards of talent and erudition by controlling admission to the profession. Admission is gained by submitting to evaluation by the professional association and faculty; and their scrutiny of an academic's output is a continuing one. Like the other professions, the academic community seeks to avoid direct lay interference by convincing the

public that the profession itself protects the public interest. As to maintaining standards of teaching, the necessity is clearest in faculties such as medicine, engineering, architecture and law, where the public's welfare and safety are potentially threatened by incompetence. Academics in other subjects, however, feel no less a sense of responsibility for the quality of their product, even if it does not directly threaten the public safety. A little knowledge is a dangerous thing, and second-rate knowledge pollutes the social environment.

On these grounds, the more extreme demands of the student power movement should be resisted. Of course, students should have the opportunity to express their views on all issues. Yet no matter what rights of self-government in non-academic matters they are given, they should not have, and should be seen not to have, power or voting rights over course content and syllabus.<sup>18</sup> A number of British universities have, however, already conceded this right to students.

Professionalism, then, is a pattern of social control which may be used to justify academic autonomy. Occasionally it may also be used to justify a range of material privileges; but the dissolution of the monasteries seems less of an outrage if the monks can be shown to be more concerned about their silver plate than their devotions.

*The autonomy of knowledge.* Academic pursuits are extremely vulnerable to people who ask 'what use is it?' One form in which the question arises is in the demand for 'problem-orientated' teaching and research. The easy phrase 'problem-orientated' is systematically ambiguous. The 'problem' to which orientation is urged may be one which is regarded as a problem to and by society at large, outside the university. But problems also exist purely in relation to theories and the current state of knowledge. As Max Weber argued,

an academic discipline . . . presupposes that what is yielded by academic work is important in the sense that it is 'worth being known' . . . No discipline . . . can prove its fundamental value to the man who rejects these propositions.<sup>19</sup>

Most university courses are designed to equip the graduate for solving non-routine problems from first principles. Some have argued that we are equipping too many of them to be under-utilized misfits.<sup>20</sup> Be that as it may, concerning research we have already remarked that the future value of work which now appears to have no wider relevance cannot be predicted. Therefore it is well worthwhile per-

mitting the academic to root around in his own corner without being made too responsive to current interpretations of social need.<sup>21</sup>

*Retreatism or monastic autonomy*

... the essential feature of the polytechnic as an urban community university, as a people's university, must be its responsibility and responsive to democracy rather than its insulation from it.

So writes Eric Robinson, prophesying the eventual triumph of the polytechnic as the dominant model in British higher education.<sup>22</sup> Quite apart from his facile identification of the demands of the State with those of democracy, Robinson ignores one function of the universities which it is easy to take for granted. That which the mass believes at any time to be necessary or useful or worthwhile is not the main criterion which should guide the activities of academics. Unconventional views, research into areas which many people would sooner not uncover, the exploration of issues which public opinion will consider either irrelevant or inopportune—all these are activities which must flourish if both intellectual progress and articulate criticism of the *status quo* are to thrive. A degree of insulation is therefore necessary. The University of California for one has been made 'responsive to democracy'; the dismissal of its distinguished President, Clark Kerr, as well as of Herbert Marcuse, were two such responses.<sup>23</sup> It is not only the radical critic of society who is protected by this kind of academic autonomy. As Laurie Sapper, commenting on the Rothschild Report, asked:

Where will be the real freedom to investigate matters of public health, safety and welfare, the results of which may prove embarrassing to the government of the day?<sup>24</sup>

**Critique of alternatives<sup>25</sup>**

We have already conceded that many of the pressures on higher education today are inevitable and legitimate. We would also contend that the policy-makers must recognize the validity of the case for academic autonomy; if they do not share the 'beliefs and sentiments' concerning this, then the universities will not have very much power to resist changes which may well be undesirable from their own and from a broader national point of view. The task as we see it is to find a set of institutional arrangements which allow both an adequate degree of academic autonomy and an adequate response to

economic, social and individual needs. We do not underestimate the difficulties of finding such a solution. Quite the contrary, for we shall now argue that some solutions recently popular are not without potential adverse consequences unforeseen and unintended, wholly or in part, by their advocates.

*The binary policy.* The binary policy, enunciated by Anthony Crosland when he was Secretary of State for Education and Science, was a conscious response to the considerations we have noted.<sup>26</sup> First, said Crosland, the expansion of higher education could not be continued at the level of cost normally associated with the universities. Second, the Government sought a sector of higher education which would be more responsive to public control than the traditions of the universities allowed. Third, if the Government was to sponsor future educational expansion, it would need to ensure that it took place in a sector more directly linked to the production of people qualified for skilled roles in industry and administration.

It fell to the polytechnics to provide education at lower *per capita* costs, to be responsive to public control, and to provide a whole range of courses leading to more practically applicable (if no less 'advanced') qualifications, as well as 'sandwich-courses' and sub-degree courses not widely found in the universities. The binary division was first said to demarcate institutions involved in vocationally-orientated courses and those not. It was soon apparent that this was an oversimplification. The difference between the two halves of the binary system is chiefly one of emphasis. The division has more recently and relevantly been maintained as a means of underpinning diversity of provision in higher education. 'Institutional mobility' has been ruled out, on the ground that it would encourage the polytechnics to ape the universities, trying to follow the former colleges of advanced technology into university status, dropping many of their less prestigious but valuable courses *en route*.

In this, the policy seems to be having some success, though opinion is not unanimous. It may be a little early to be certain, but it appears that the polytechnics are establishing a distinctive character and prestige. They are likely to present a real challenge to the universities in the fields where they directly compete, and to attract students on their own merits, not as university-substitutes.<sup>27</sup> Certainly, in Eric Robinson they have produced their first ideologist; he sees them providing a 'liberal' education, as distinct both from 'vocational' and 'academic' courses.<sup>28</sup>

The main objection to present arrangements, quite clearly, is in the material deprivations endured by the polytechnics.

*The comprehensive university.* One of the greatest advantages of the comprehensive university (though its advocates would hardly say so) would be that embarrassing discrepancies in *per capita* costs on different courses could better be hidden democratically within a single budget. Under the rubric 'Comprehensive University' we subsume a number of suggested schemes of reform. All of them seek to facilitate flexible transfer of students from one kind of course to another, and consider a degree of amalgamation of different institutions to be necessary to achieve this. Beyond that they differ widely. Some seek to include all tertiary and adult education within the one structure, some only higher education. Some envisage radical change of curricula, others not.

Social egalitarianism is a worthy motive for the comprehensive university, though one might reflect that economic and social inequalities might more effectively be tackled directly. Be that as it may, the superficial parallel with comprehensive secondary schools does not hold up. Carter and the NUS<sup>29</sup> do not have in mind unified provision for everyone in the age group, nor even for everyone continuing in further education, but only for higher education. From the broader social view, it involves only the diminution of the comparatively minor distinctions of prestige between graduates of different kinds of institution, with a corresponding enhancement of the more significant cleavage between those who receive higher education and those who do not. Eric Robinson expresses this point vehemently:

... great as the gap is between the two halves of the binary system of higher education, it is small in comparison with the much greater gap between those young people inside higher education and those outside, whether in further education, full-time or part-time, or simply at work in factory, shop or office. A so-called comprehensive reform of higher education to bring together the universities, the polytechnics and the colleges of education within a unitary system ... would consist of the unification only of the post school education of those destined for the professional classes.<sup>30</sup>

All further education is therefore included by Robinson and by Pedley, in order to make their respective plans comprehensive of all groups.

There is another problem, however. Could a comprehensive

university be comprehensive in the other sense: could any institution be 'comprehensive' of even most of the possible courses? We are sceptical. After the age of 18 there is great and genuine diversity of course, and scope for even greater diversity. Some at least of the proposals seem likely to diminish this diversity rather than to facilitate it. Pedley is preoccupied with organizational matters and little concerned with curricula; others give the impression that of the present range of possibilities, one range would be best for everyone. Robinson at times sounds like Khrushchev threatening to bury the rival system:

my thesis is that 'the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake' cannot conceivably be the rationale for a higher education system on the scale we must anticipate; that we possibly deceive ourselves about the extent to which it justifies the higher education system we already have; that it is an unsatisfactory basis for the work of many if not most of our students, and that for the future if it is not completely abandoned it can be preserved for only a tiny fraction of the higher education system, probably much smaller than the present university system. In my view it should, as the basis for work of any institution of higher education, be abandoned completely.<sup>31</sup>

Given his desire for homogeneity of content, Robinson is less concerned than some others with homogeneity of educational organization.

Robinson's view seems to us to be as absurd as its opposite, that a 'pure academic' course is best for every student. We would conclude that there is a case for universities expanding less quickly in future, but with the overall expansion of higher education, do not believe that the number motivated to pure academic degree courses will actually decline. However, Robinson seems to us to have thought out the implications of the comprehensive university more searchingly than other writers; and his views substantiate our pessimistic estimate of the chances of survival of pure academic studies in such an institution.

The tension between the desire for diversity and that for unitary organization has to be confronted by all proposals for the comprehensive university. The resolutions of the tension produced in the different schemes depend on their preference between these two potentially conflicting aims; on this basis the schemes may be arranged in a continuum described in terms of an analogy from political structure. At one end of the continuum are the 'aggressive

imperialists'—those who seek through the comprehensive university to impose an overall unity, putting down any claims to significant autonomy made by 'minority cultures'. As the above quotation indicates, Eric Robinson may be numbered among these. Next come the 'federalists', who want to impose a unified administration, but who also claim to want to maintain a degree of diversity. As may be expected, such 'best of both worlds' solutions tend to be ambiguous over the degree of diversity they would be prepared to foster in practice. They are also likely to overlook that diversity cannot always be created by wishing it; it is dependent on institutional structure and autonomy. A good example of this is the plan for a comprehensive university prepared by the National Union of Teachers as part of its evidence to the James Committee. The NUT describes its plan as a federal one and comes down in favour of diversity by saying: 'the comprehensive university should be a synthesis of all that is best in the present separate sectors of higher education.'<sup>32</sup> However, five paragraphs later the Union argues ominously:

... perhaps the most fundamental of all the obstacles is the ethos, rather than the fabric, of existing institutions. The universities, the colleges of education, the polytechnics and the well established technical institutions have all developed traditions and an ethos which make it very difficult to perceive a situation in which such institutions cease to exist. Yet we are convinced that the first difficult steps must be taken.<sup>33</sup>

The NUT proposes the replacement of the UGC by a Higher Education Grants Committee.<sup>34</sup> It deals only cursorily with what would be the crucial issue: the relationship of this body to the state, though it speaks in favour of 'independence'. However, it also speaks, several times, of the urgent 'need for a more rationally planned higher education system'<sup>35</sup> which must, presumably, involve interference with many existing freedoms.

A further move along the continuum from unity to diversity produces the 'confederalists', under which we may include Charles Carter's plans for local groupings of universities, polytechnics and colleges of education, designed to facilitate cooperation and transfer. Here an overall administrative bureaucracy would share certain powers with institutions which would continue to maintain most of their identity. The case for such arrangements is that they may

be necessary in order to secure the degree of collaboration among institutions which is vital if a system of diversity is to be truly 'separate but equal'. The problem is that it does involve an undesirable growth of bureaucracy and administration. We should therefore prefer to rely on a series of voluntary 'treaties' between individual institutions in order to secure sharing and cooperation. However, the possibility that such voluntarism will fail must be considered. In this case a moderate form of Carter's proposals may well represent the next best solution.

Were a system of comprehensive universities to be created, there is little doubt that by a typical British compromise, Oxbridge, London and a few major universities would still be able to 'cream' the rest of the country, thus recreating a two-tier system. It was presumably with this threat in mind that Professor Pedley suggested the 'denationalization' of the universities—that students should mainly be drawn from the locality.<sup>36</sup> He does not tell us how their choice would be influenced, and objects to the word 'compelled';<sup>37</sup> presumably they would be financially deterred from moving further afield. Again, localization seems to imply that each grouping of colleges would seek to supply a full range of courses, thus disrupting the rational division of labour between institutions.<sup>38</sup>

The minimum viable scale for a university offering only the present range of courses is usually put at around 5,000 students (many existing ones are below this), and this minimum is rising. So how big would a comprehensive university have to be? Probably about 25,000 and very likely more; and if it were such a size, its internal structure would be a federation of existing colleges, with most of the problems (especially differing prestige) of the previously unfederated ones. Distinctions of prestige are now drawn even between the colleges of London University—how much more would this be true of a comprehensive university with much more salient differences between its courses of instruction?

In common with many other proposals for reform of higher education, the comprehensive university would seem likely to encourage the present trend towards the bureaucratization of the universities.<sup>39</sup> It seems an inevitable characteristic of industrial society that organizations of the scale reached now by universities will be coordinated on bureaucratic principles. Max Weber lugubriously noted that there is a certain equality where all are subject to the same bureaucracy. Yet as critics among the New Left

have pointed out, there is a deep and intrinsic conflict between the traditional academic values and those of the bureaucracy, and this is one motive for their suggesting government by mass meeting.<sup>40</sup> We do not believe academic autonomy would long survive in such a system, but we do consider that universities should be looking for means of delegation rather than of centralization in their internal structures.

*Mobility between institutions.* Among the proposals of Peacock and Culyer<sup>41</sup> is that students should be free to shop around from institution to institution, more or less as they do in Germany and elsewhere on the Continent and so to some extent in America. In many respects, their suggestion must be considered functionally equivalent<sup>42</sup> to the comprehensive university, for its object is to make transfer between a full range of courses possible for the student. Recognizing the extent and necessity of the academic division of labour, they aim:

to create a much wider diversity of educational provision. Students could choose between collegiate type universities, civic universities, specialized institutions with a limited range of disciplines, evening as against day classes, even 'Maoist' universities and so on.

We sympathize with a desire for diversity and flexibility, but see difficulties. Planning ahead would be less easy, and administering student grants more complicated. As mobility would be far from perfect, student discontent would scarcely be completely eliminated. Moreover, it seems to be implied that universities should shape their courses to the tastes of the student; as we have argued above, it is a fundamental characteristic of the academic profession that 'products' are determined by standards other than those of the 'consumer'.<sup>43</sup> We also wonder whether, in an imperfect market, product diversity or homogeneity would be the result. Nevertheless, we see virtues in a greater degree of mobility and flexibility.

*The James Report.* Though the James Committee was not concerned with universities and polytechnics, its recommendations raise numerous matters of policy for higher education as a whole. If implemented, they would constitute a remoulding of the whole system, effectively transforming it from a binary to a tripartite structure.

James was evidently conscious of many of the pressures on higher education to which we have alluded, and also of the consequences

of entirely yielding to them. Diagnosing a gap in the present range of alternative courses, the Committee writes:

It would be naïve to disregard completely the weight of university opinion questioning whether there is sufficient motivation for university courses as at present conceived, on the part of many of the formally qualified students who choose to follow them. If these misgivings are justified, one solution might be to modify entirely the idea of a university. Another would be to offer a different course, equally suitable for able students but so broadened in scope that it would provide a more satisfying educational experience for many of them. The latter solution is the one recommended here.<sup>44</sup>

The gap diagnosed is roughly equivalent to a good American undergraduate degree course, more broadly-based than the specialized honours course of the English university tradition, yet not constructed with vocational ends so much in mind as in some polytechnic courses. It was sensible to suggest that such a gap could be filled using the surplus resources which are probable in the colleges of education.

We cannot, however, support the means by which the James Report proposes to achieve this objective. The centrepiece of the Report, at least in its implications for the rest of higher education, is the proposal to establish the Diploma in Higher Education.<sup>45</sup> The proposed course curriculum seems well-designed to meet the need identified. No doubt financial considerations dictated that the course should last only two years and therefore lead to a mere diploma. But this will certainly frustrate the major objective, that the new qualification have wide appeal and general currency. The strength of 'degree-fixation' should not be underestimated. A rose by any other name would *not*, in this case, smell as sweet; the DIP.H.E. would be regarded as second-best to a degree. Prestige, again, would distort the market.

James recognizes that if the DIP.H.E. is to have much appeal, it must be accepted as a self-sufficient qualification. Yet equally, to achieve general currency and to appeal to others than firmly intending teachers, the DIP.H.E. would have to be accepted by universities and polytechnics for exemption from at least the first year of degree courses;<sup>46</sup> otherwise, taking a diploma course would be seen by the student as tending to close off rather than open up opportunities for continuing higher education. And there are very real difficulties to it being generally acceptable to universities and polytechnics. They

teach integrated three-year courses, and any DIP.H.E. would not necessarily equip the student to pick up a degree course at the beginning of the second year. Students with a particular combination of subjects in the DIP.H.E. might be accepted on a barter basis for particular degree courses, but barter is not the same thing as legal tender.

It has been further suggested that to give the DIP.H.E. general currency, the universities should themselves teach for it, intramurally. But they are at present fully committed with honours degree courses, so the new general courses would have to be created either out of expansion, or by the contraction of degree courses. If special DIP.H.E. courses were not provided, universities might be prepared to give the Diploma to some students on completing the first two years of an existing degree course. But this would only emphasize the inferior status of the DIP.H.E.; in any case, the Diplomas so awarded in universities would be incommensurate with those from the colleges—they would be very different qualifications under the same name.

What emerges from this is that were the universities and polytechnics to do what is necessary on their part to give the DIP.H.E. general currency, they would have to undertake major reorganization—precisely what the James Committee sought to avoid in proposing the Diploma! Other objections to James concern the proposed B.A. (Ed.), an implausible and essentially dishonest stratagem to create an all-graduate teaching profession. Awarded on the basis of practical experience, preceded by a year of educational studies (less theoretical than at present), it would be a spurious degree which would only debase the currency of degrees in general. (It is really equivalent to qualifications which other professions designate by the title 'Member', 'Fellow', 'Chartered Engineer' and so forth.)

The murky waters of the debate on James have not yet cleared, but a far superior way of reaching the James Committee's fundamental objectives seems to us to be along the lines proposed by two members of the Committee in their Note of Extension. These have particularly been developed by the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET).<sup>47</sup> The main line of development in the colleges should be with three-year degrees, though these could be organized on a unit structure, with Diploma requirements being fulfilled after two years, if a place still remains for that ill-starred credential. The emphasis would not be on traditional British special-

ized honours degrees, but on general degrees ranging across the humanities, science and social sciences. The degrees could include a continuation of the four-year B.ED. with honours, and general degrees of B.A. or B.SC. or possibly B.ED. (without honours). The B.ED. degree would be intended for teachers, the B.A. and B.SC. a part of general higher education.<sup>48</sup>

The signatories of the Note of Extension are also surely right in emphasizing the value of links between colleges and universities. False academicism may indeed occasionally have resulted from these links,<sup>49</sup> but the advantages of contact with the teaching and research of the universities have been widely appreciated by college staff. And from the universities' viewpoint, preparing people for teaching does not involve the challenge to their structure as does specifically vocation-orientated education for non-educational careers. The separate structure of Regional Councils proposed by James would not only break these links but lead to further bureaucratization.<sup>50</sup> It would be simpler if all awards were made either by universities or the CNAA. Some colleges might associate themselves closely with universities, others with the CNAA or individual polytechnics. The planning and coordinating functions could then be conducted by reorganized Regional Area Training Organizations, in which the colleges, LEA's, universities and polytechnics would all be represented.

## Conclusion

To maintain two sectors of higher education institutions, organized and financed differently, seems to us to be sensible—not to fossilize a rigid distinction between academic and vocational courses, but as a guarantee of pluralism. There is now considerable diversity both between and within institutions, and we see the difference between universities and polytechnics as one of emphasis, not an absolute division of labour. As Sir Peter Venables has said:

... while differences between institutions will diminish in certain respects, each as a progressive enterprise will retain its particular orientation and significant characteristics ... If conditions are such that a rich diversity of institutions is fostered within tertiary education, then competitive claims that this or that sector or this or that institution is 'comprehensive' become meaningless.<sup>51</sup>

Diversification within tertiary institutions should take place subject to two provisos. First, specialized departments and courses must attain a certain minimum size or 'critical mass'. Second, diversification should take heed of the need to maintain coherence, for no institution can provide for every speciality, and those which it does provide should bear some intelligible relation to each other, and to the general character of the particular institution.

'Let a hundred flowers bloom' is an appealing slogan. But the phrases 'separate but equal' and 'parity of esteem' spring to mind, redolent of the 1945 Education Act. Is the present system really defensible, given the hard facts of material inequality between universities and polytechnics? Except in terms of financial *Realpolitik*, no. If polytechnic students are following courses comparable to those in universities, whether in content (for there are many courses in music, medieval history and the like) or in standard, is it fair that they should suffer worse staff-student ratios, fewer library books, inferior accommodation, and all the other symptoms of lower *per capita* costs? If the staff are working at a comparable level, teaching courses of similar standard if different construction, why should they not have comparable opportunities for research? Arguments about academic autonomy also apply to them, and some loosening of ties with local authorities seems desirable. Perhaps a Polytechnics Grants Committee is called for, on which the local authorities could be represented.

Yet, of course, the whole rationale for retaining public and 'private' sectors is that the public sector would be more responsive to national needs. Fortunately the polytechnics do not appear to wish to abandon such responsiveness. Nor do we wish to imply that the universities wish to be entirely unresponsive to national needs; they would risk becoming stagnant backwaters starved of finance. Again the difference is one of emphasis. The whole thread of our argument is that there is a need to achieve a balance between responsiveness and autonomy, between courses justifiable in hard utilitarian terms and those not so justifiable. To maintain two sectors organized in different ways seems to us to be the simplest way of underpinning that diversity. Given even-handedness between sectors, we suspect that though it might be impossible to eliminate a prestige ranking or pecking-order of institutions altogether, that ranking would not remain *stratified*—that is, it would soon cease to be correlated in any simple way with sectoral affiliation. One major source

of academic discontent and student misallocation would thus be eliminated. Were this linked with much greater transferability between courses and institutions, most of the objections to the present situation would be met, without the disadvantages attendant on the more root-and-branch alternatives.

# Notes

<sup>1</sup> Colin Crouch and Stephen Mennell, *The Universities: Pressures and Prospects* (London, Fabian Society, 1972). For subsequent discussion, see articles, leaders and letters in *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, January 14th, 21st, 28th, February 4th, 18th, 1972.

<sup>2</sup> We are using the term 'function' in the neutral sociological sense of 'consequence', and do not attach particular value to this function. For a not dissimilar list of functions, see the Robbins Report (Report of the Committee on Higher Education, London, H.M.S.O. 1963, Cmnd. 2154), paras. 22-9.

<sup>3</sup> See Council for Scientific Policy: Enquiry into the Flow of Candidates in Science and Technology into Higher Education, London, H.M.S.O. 1968, Cmnd. 3541 (The Dainton Report).

<sup>4</sup> Auguste Comte, *Cours de philosophie positive* (originally 1830-42), (Paris, Garnier Frères, n.d.), Vol. I, pp. 54-8.

<sup>5</sup> A. H. Halsey and M. A. Trow, *The British Academics* (London, Faber & Faber, 1971), Chs. 12, 13.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95. (We do not imply that this is an aspect of the university often recognized by undergraduates.) For a contrary, but not in the end quite incompatible view, see R. A. Nisbet, *The Degradation of the Academic Dogma* (London, Heinemann, 1971), pp. 127ff.

<sup>7</sup> Robbins Report, *op. cit.* Cmnd. 2154, para. 23.

<sup>8</sup> Lord Todd of Trumpington, FRs, 'A Time to Think', Presidential Address to the British Association, 1970, *The Advancement of Science*, 27 (131), September 1970, p. 1-6.

<sup>9</sup> It is significant that of the many explanations of French student discontent one attributes it to lack of vocational relevance, a second to education being merely career preparation. See respectively P. Bourdieu and J.-C. Passeron, *Les héritiers: les étudiants et la culture* (Paris, Minuit 1966), and A. Touraine, *Le mouvement de mai, ou le communisme utopique* (Paris, Seuil 1969).

<sup>10</sup> In Germany, the academic leaders of the Frankfurt school of 'critical sociology' espouse a type of 'New Left' position on this issue. See J. Habermas, *Toward a Rational Society* (London, Heinemann, 1971).

<sup>11</sup> See University Grants Committee, University Development 1962-7, (London, H.M.S.O., 1968, Cmnd. 3820), Ch. VIII; Halsey and Trow, *op. cit.*, Ch. 4.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Nisbet has traced the damaging effect of 'the higher capitalism' on the balance of teaching and research functions and even on the academic's conception of his vocation. *Op. cit.*, Ch. 5.

<sup>14</sup> E. P. Thomson, ed., *Warwick University Ltd.* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1970).

<sup>15</sup> See UGC *Annual Survey 1965-6* (London, H.M.S.O., 1967, Cmnd. 3192), and *Annual Survey 1966-7* (London, H.M.S.O., 1968, Cmnd. 3510). Appendix C to the 1966-7 survey is particularly illuminating on the reasons for not allowing universities as many postgraduate students as they wished.

<sup>16</sup> Science Research Council, *Report of the Council for the Year 1969-70* (London, H.M.S.O., 1970, HC75), p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> *The Framework of Government Research and Development* (London, H.M.S.O. 1971, Cmnd. 4814). The SRC and SSRC are excluded from consideration but not, it is hinted, for very long. Cf. subsequent White Paper, August 1972.

<sup>18</sup> However, for an amusing account of how students informally influence their teachers in an overseas university (and a suggestion that things may not be so different in Britain) see Hilary Campbell (pseud.): 'Students and University Teachers: A Case Study of Informal Student Pressures', *Sociology*, 5(2), 1971: p. 191-207.

<sup>19</sup> Max Weber, 'Science as a Vocation', in H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, ed., *From Max Weber* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1946) pp. 143-53. The translation has been slightly amended.

<sup>20</sup> Todd, *op. cit.*

<sup>21</sup> See SRC Annual Report 1969-70, *op. cit.*, for a valuable statement of this view. The report gives examples of research which had eventual practical applications which could not have been foreseen at the time they were originally carried out.

<sup>22</sup> E. E. Robinson, *The New Polytechnics* (London, Cornmarket, 1968), p. 39.

<sup>23</sup> See Nisbet, *op. cit.*, pp. 149-55.

<sup>24</sup> *Times Higher Education Supplement*, December 3rd, 1971.

<sup>25</sup> There is insufficient space here to discuss the list of thirteen rather less fundamental kinds of change, aimed at reducing costs, which were mentioned by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors in their statement 'University Development in the 1970s'. For our brief assessment, see Crouch and Mennell, *op. cit.*, pp. 43-6.

<sup>26</sup> *A Plan for Polytechnics and other Colleges* (London, H.M.S.O., 1966, Cmd. 3006).

<sup>27</sup> M. A. Trow, 'Problems for Polytechnics: An American Point of View', *Universities Quarterly*, 23(4), 1969, pp. 381-93.

<sup>28</sup> Robinson, *op. cit.*, Ch. 4.

<sup>29</sup> C. F. Carter, 'Towards Comprehensive Higher Education', in B. MacArthur, ed., *New Horizons for Education* (London Council for Educational Advance, 1970); also pp. 183-6 in G. Brogan, et al., *Patterns and Policies in Higher Education* (Harmondsworth, Penguin 1971 and his comment in *Times Higher Education Supplement*, February 4th, 1972); Jack Straw: article in *Education and Training*, 12(11), November 1970, pp. 416-17.

<sup>30</sup> E. E. Robinson, 'A Comprehensive Reform of Higher Education', *Higher Education Review*, 3(3), 1971: 3-22, at p. 12.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>32</sup> National Union of Teachers: *The Reform of Teacher Education* (London, 1971), para. 8.32.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 8.37.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 8.50.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 8.36.

<sup>36</sup> R. Pedley, *The Comprehensive University* (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1969).

<sup>37</sup> R. Pedley, in *THES*, February 4th, 1972.

<sup>38</sup> This is precisely the opposite to the specialization urged by the James Committee for the Colleges of Education. See *Teacher Education and Training* (James Report), (London, H.M.S.O., 1972), para. 5.36:

'The new system would allow great possibilities of specialization within a framework of diversity. There would be ample scope for individual institutions to develop along their own particular lines.'

<sup>39</sup> See R. B. Eustace, 'The Government of Scholars' in D. A. Martin, ed., *Anarchy and Culture* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969).

<sup>40</sup> T. Poston, 'Irresponsible Government and the University Meeting', in D. Rubinstein and C. Stoneman, eds., *Education for Democracy* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1970).

<sup>41</sup> A. T. Peacock and A. J. Culyer, *Economic Aspects of Student Unrest* (London, Institute of Economic Affairs, 1969). For our fuller comments, see Crouch and Mennell, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-1.

<sup>42</sup> It would be pedantic to explain here the full connotations of this sociological term; see R. K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (enlarged edition, New York, Free Press, 1968), Ch. III.

<sup>43</sup> H. S. Ferns, in *Towards an Independent University* (London, Institute of Economic Affairs 1969) also appears to think it necessary to shape the syllabus to the student. In other respects, his proposed courses seem somewhat to resemble Eric Robinson's conception of 'liberal' education in polytechnics.

<sup>44</sup> James, *op. cit.*, para. 4.19.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 4.

<sup>46</sup> James is clearly in favour of some mobility between institutions but is not too explicit about details. See para. 4.21.

<sup>47</sup> Universities Council on the Education of Teachers, *Alternatives to James* (London, 1972).

<sup>48</sup> For this formulation we are especially indebted to Professor R. D'Aeth of Exeter University.

<sup>49</sup> As alleged in James, *op. cit.*, para. 5.17.

<sup>50</sup> They bear some resemblance to the structure proposed in the Fabian evidence to Robbins (Cmnd. 2154-VII, pp. 518-49), upon which we commented in Crouch and Mennell, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>51</sup> Sir Peter Venables, *Conflicting Patterns and Purposes in Higher Education* (London, Birkbeck College, 1970).