

tus. Patterns of funding were changed as well. Students in both sectors were affected. The new Labour government of Tony Blair announced the imposition of tuition fees beginning this year. For the first time, British students will have to pay significant fees for their studies, although the amounts will be well below what American students in public universities pay. Student organizations in Britain have strongly opposed the imposition of fees, and there have been a few demonstrations, but no serious unrest as yet.

The current wave of demonstrations has forced governmental authorities to take notice. So far, the only reaction has been finger-pointing.

The student activism of the 1960s was stimulated at first by campus issues in the United States and in Europe. Students reacted to what Europeans call the “massification” of higher education. In the United States, one slogan was “do not fold, spindle, or mutilate”—a reference to the computer punch cards of the time. This was a plea not to be treated as mere statistics in an academic system that was growing rapidly. European students also reacted to dramatic expansion and deteriorating conditions on campus. It is no coincidence that the French student revolt, which came close to toppling the government of Charles deGaulle, started on the campus at Nanterre, a particularly dreary and overcrowded new branch of the University of Paris.

Campus conditions are today deteriorating in Europe as a result of government policy rather than of severe economic crisis or mismanagement by university administrators. Just as in the 1960s, expansion is not being combined with increased funding. Morale throughout academe is low, and it is the students who are increasingly discontented. Student anger has boiled over in Germany, and it is at least possible that other countries will follow.

A long period of campus quiet has lulled policymakers into discounting students as a potential political and social force. Students are directly affected by government policy concerning higher education. They must pay the tuition fees now being imposed in Britain, study in overcrowded lecture halls, and tolerate inadequate libraries and laboratories in much of Europe. Students have so far accepted their fate. Now, their patience seems to be running out.

Policymakers and administrators ignore student views at their peril. Once mobilized, students can be a powerful force. The 1960s taught us that student political activism is difficult to predict and that it rises from unanticipated causes. Whether the recent German demonstrations are a precursor to wider unrest is not yet known. —■

Britain's Quality Support Centre

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The Quality Support Centre (QSC), part of Britain's Open University, is a center for higher education research and information. It specializes in two principal research areas: (1) systems and methods of quality assessment, assurance, and evaluation; and (2) issues of quality arising from the relationship between higher education and the world of work. A large part of QSC's activities are international. In 1997, QSC was engaged in the following international projects:

- quality management, quality assessment, and the decision-making process—a study of the impact of quality assessment on higher education institutions in 15 OECD countries;
- quality assurance in higher education in Central and Eastern Europe—a project to develop higher education quality assurance systems in 11 countries in Central and Eastern Europe;
- accreditation of higher education in Bulgaria—a project to support the creation of a National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency; and
- higher education and graduate employment in Europe—part of a nine-country study of the employment experiences of graduates.

Within Britain, QSC has recently completed projects on work-based learning and the impact of quality assessment upon institutions. It is currently involved with a project on key skills development through work-based learning. Although many of QSC's activities are practical and developmental, they all lead to published reports. Some of these are published by QSC itself, and its Higher Education Reports series includes papers by international scholars, as well as QSC staff members.

QSC also publishes a regular information bulletin, the *Higher Education Digest*. The *Digest* contains around 40 brief information items on recent higher education developments. Items are grouped under general headings such as quality assurance; teaching, learning and assessment; policy and funding; curriculum development; higher education and work; recent statistics; and the contents of recent higher education journals. Although the emphasis is on developments within a British context, many of the items in each issue concern, or would be relevant to, higher education in other countries. The *Higher Education Digest* is available by subscription only and is published three times per year.

QSC also runs conferences and workshops, nationally and internationally. As a self-financing organization, its staff are available for consultancy and collaborative projects with higher education institutions and agencies all over the world. —■