

admissions. One would expect the specific national framing of diversity, whether in terms of race or class origin, to have an impact on the actual profile of admitted students.

WHO IS ACTUALLY ADMITTED?

Policies do not always equal practices, so in 2002 the University of Oxford conducted a research project on its selection process to see whether it was living up to its promise to select fairly—based on ability and potential, regardless of class origin and private or public schooling. Ethnicity and gender, with regard to admission, were also studied but were of lesser interest to the commissioning team.

The study found that the profile of individuals who applied to Oxford was skewed with a drop in representation of those from working-class origins and from public schools, compared with the population of school leavers. The gap in representation was decreased when taking into account that working-class and public-school students were underrepresented among high-achieving school leavers. Minority students are usually overrepresented in higher education but were neither over- nor underrepresented among applicants to Oxford. There was almost gender parity in applications.

With regard to success in obtaining admission *conditional on having applied*, the study compared applicants on a like-for-like basis—that is, matched on their prior attainment. Here, the researchers found that selectors for Oxford favored public-school applicants over private-school applicants with the same attainment records. This preference had remained largely hidden from the public eye because private school students often apply with slightly higher attainment records than their publicly educated peers. When comparing applicants with the same attainment record by ethnicity, there was a disadvantage for being nonwhite.

CHANGING ENROLLMENT

Policymakers will find some good and bad news in this research. The good news is the possibility of changing enrollment patterns at universities. A few decades ago, Oxford was perceived as a bastion of privilege, but internal and external forces have created a meritocratic revolution whereby now prior attainment is the most important factor in selection. With the Office for Fair Access providing targets for public-school intake, Oxford selectors are trained to increase the share of public school applicants gaining admission to Oxford and have succeeded. In actual admissions decisions, public-school applicants with the same prior attainment as applicants from private schools are judged to be of greater potential. This trend seems in line with the desired policy outcome to increase the representation of students from the public-school system in the most prestigious British universities.

The bad news, however, is that individuals who suffer social inequality and do not enjoy the same public salience might go unnoticed. In the Oxford context, selectors are neither trained nor monitored to ensure that minorities are admitted in line

with the strength of their academic profile in the application pool. Possibly, the face-to-face admissions process at Oxford could have some self-reproductive tendencies. Thus, predominantly white selectors might, possibly inadvertently, select according to their own stereotypes. Such self-reproductive processes have been well documented in the psychological literature and in the context of employment hiring.

If policymakers sought to increase the representation of minority students at leading British universities, they might thus wish to start this process by raising selectors' awareness. In the United States, the salience of race in public debates has certainly contributed to the comparatively high percentage of minority students enrolled at the nation's leading universities. But again, this particular policy success may have allowed other sources of inequality, such as differences in schooling, to influence educational outcomes.

The case of Oxford illustrates that universities are responsive to the social climate in which they operate. The undergraduate selection process can take into account the perceived wishes of government and society: achieving more inclusiveness in enrollment at selective universities is possible. However, deciding which groups are targeted for further inclusion—public school students, minorities, and others—might be relative to the national consensus on who is thought to be deserving of a place at the nation's most-selective universities. ■

Private Providers of Higher Education in the United Kingdom

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A recent research report from Universities UK has analyzed the growth of private providers of higher education in the United Kingdom and questioned whether they are a threat to the publicly funded sector (*The Growth of Private and For-Profit Higher Education Providers in the UK*, <<http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/Publications/Pages/Privateandforprofitproviders>

aspx>). The answer is complex, rather like the sector itself. For a start, private providers form a mixed group, and it is impossible to generalize about them, except to say that their numbers are increasing.

TYPES OF PROVIDERS

First, some foreign universities have established campuses in the United Kingdom. Their exact numbers are unknown, but most likely at least 70 offshoots of American universities exist, principally taking US students from their home campus and offering their own awards. However, a few—such as Schiller International University or Richmond American International University—do recruit the occasional UK and European Union students. This category is growing, and, as well as the large US contingent, universities from countries as diverse as Malaysia, Poland, India, and Iran have recently all established branches in the United Kingdom.

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Second, five organizations have gained degree-awarding powers in the United Kingdom: the University of Buckingham, BPP Ltd (now owned by the Apollo Group in the United States), the College of Law, Ashridge Business School, and the *ifs* School of Finance. Again, these are quite different types of entity. Only one, BPP, is for-profit, and most of these institutions principally serve UK students in postgraduate law and finance courses. However, the University of Buckingham, the oldest and smallest in the group, enrolls only 1,000 students—over 50 percent of them international.

Third, the biggest category involves the private colleges that offer the awards of UK universities or professional bodies, which are based predominantly in London. It is currently unknown how many such colleges exist, or how many students they have. Once the current UK Border Agency's regulatory regime (centered on policing a visa control and immigration system) settles down, some statistics should become available. The British Accreditation Council, one of the two bodies that accredit private higher education providers, has approved 117 UK and foreign organizations with over 30,000 current-degree students. In addition to the colleges accredited by the other body, Accreditation Service for International Colleges, about 50,000 students study in these colleges for awards of UK universities. Most of these students are international, but slowly some of the colleges are starting to market their programs to UK and European Union students. For example, one private college delivers a bachelor of science honors degree over two years for a total tuition cost of £8,400, and the UK students

who take up this offer are entitled to access the national student-loan scheme. This total can be compared with the full tuition fees of £9,700 that a UK student would currently have to pay on a traditional three-year degree program.

The final group of providers constitutes the companies that contract with traditional publicly funded universities to deliver English, foundation, year-one, and premasters programs for them. There are five such companies with 33 university clients at present. Their main attraction to the host universities is that they recruit the international students (coordinating this effort with the university's own international marketing) and then bring them up to a suitable linguistic and academic standard to enter the first or second year of a university program. In most cases the students are housed in purpose-built accommodation on campus where they study programs, the syllabus for which has been agreed with the faculty to which they will move, if successful in an examination marked by those same faculty. Three of these companies are foreign owned and are for-profit.

The private sector has grown rapidly in recent years, and many of the private colleges are expanding dramatically with almost all international students. The largest is the London School of Commerce, with about 5,500 students; along with several other private colleges it plans to acquire degree-awarding powers. The sector's expansion has been largely motivated by the fact that their annual tuition fees for international students are often well below those of the publicly funded sector; most range from £4,000 to £7,000 per annum for an undergraduate program and from £5,000 to £10,000 for a one-year master of business administration. Another reason (put forward by the colleges) is that the better ones provide a high quality of student support and care, leading to high scores of student satisfaction.

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IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Is this a threat or an opportunity for publicly funded institutions? Why are public universities validating private-college programs for which international students will pay about half the fees they would pay at the validating university for the same qualification? Is this not taking away their market share and building up private competitors who will in time acquire degree-awarding powers and create a challenge in the domestic market? If, as is likely, the present national cap on tuition fees charged by publicly funded institutions is raised, will this not give the private sector a huge boost?

The public institutions say that they are not alarmed by these questions; almost all of those that are validating the private-college programs generate useful income from the exercise and are based outside London. They are thus enabling their own degrees to be offered by the colleges in the London market to a range of students who would probably never come to their own campus. From the national perspective the emergence of this private-sector alternative is broadening the United Kingdom's offer to international students; more of them will come to the United Kingdom as a result.

The report makes several policy recommendations that the new UK government will be considering. Some of these relate to tidying up the regulatory framework, which is confused and incomplete; others suggest that it is time for the private sector to be brought into policy discussions and for it to provide comprehensive information on its activities. Some big questions and opportunities remain. A cash-strapped government might well be tempted to make a contract with private colleges to teach UK students for a price below what they currently pay for the publicly funded institutions; it is also possible that other US providers could follow the Apollo Group and enter the UK market. In any event the coming years are sure to see a continuing growth in private provision for both domestic and international students. ■

India's Open Door to Foreign Universities: Less Than Meets the Eye

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India may finally open its doors to foreign higher education institutions and investment. The cabinet has approved human resource development minister Kapil Sibal's proposed law, and it will be voted in Parliament in the near future. Indian comment has been largely favorable. What will an open door mean for Indian higher education—and to foreign institutions that may be interested in setting up shop in India? Basically, the result is likely less than is currently being envisaged, and there will be problems of implementation and of result as well.

THE POLITICAL AND EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

Everyone recognizes that India has a serious higher education problem. Although India's higher education system, with more than 13 million students, is the world's third largest, it only educates around 12 percent of the age group, well under China's 27 percent and half or more in middle-income countries. Thus, it is a challenge of providing access to India's expanding population of young people and rapidly growing

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middle class. India also faces a serious quality problem—given that only a tiny proportion of the higher education sector can meet international standards. The justly famous Indian Institutes of Technology and the Institutes of Management constitute a tiny elite, as well as a few specialized schools such as the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, one or two private institutions such as the Birla Institute of Technology and Science, and perhaps 100 top-rated undergraduate colleges. Almost all of India's 480 public universities and more than 25,000 undergraduate colleges are, by international standards, mediocre at best. India's complex legal arrangements for reserving places in higher education to members of various disadvantaged population groups, often setting aside up to half of the seats for such groups, places further stress on the system.

A CAPACITY PROBLEM

India faces severe problems of capacity in its entire educational system in part because of underinvestment over many decades. More than a third of Indians remain illiterate after more than a half century of independence. On April 1, a new law took effect that makes primary education free and compulsory. While admirable, it takes place in a context of scarcity of trained teachers, inadequate budgets, and shoddy supervision. Minister Sibal has been shaking up the higher education establishment as well. The University Grants Commission and the All-India Council for Technical Education, responsible respectively for supervising the universities and the technical institutions, are being abolished and replaced with a new combined entity. But no one knows just how the new organization will work or who will staff it. India's higher education accrediting and quality assurance organization, the National Assessment and Accreditation Council, which was well-known for its slow movement, is being shaken up. But, again, it is unclear what will take its place or how it might be changed.

Current plans include the establishing of new national "world-class" universities in each of India's states, opening new IITs, and other initiatives. These plans, given the inadequate funds that have been announced and the shortage of qualified professors, are unlikely to succeed. The fact is that