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The Universities - Over regulation Transcript

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There are about 1.4million students in the country, so not an insignificant constituency. And these are the people who have decided their fate in recent times: Anthony Crosland, Highgate School and Trinity, Oxford; Shirley Williams, St Paul's School and Somerville, Oxford; Margaret Thatcher, grammar school and Somerville, Oxford; Sir Richard Lambert, Fettes and Balliol, Oxford; Lord Dearing, grammar school and Hull; Tony Blair, Fettes and St John's, Oxford; Lord Browne, King's Ely and Cambridge; David Cameron, Eton and Brasenose; Vince Cable, grammar school and Cambridge; Nick Clegg, Westminster and Cambridge; Professor Les Ebdon, grammar school and Imperial College; David Willetts, King Edward's Birmingham and Christ Church, Oxford. The relevance of this will become clear.

In order to regulate, one must know the purpose of the institutions being regulated. So I start with some definitions of higher education. Older ones have much in common, more recent ones show a distinct shift. Moreover, I am speaking of the interrelation of independence and quality of institutions and how they are regulated, which is the theme of all six of my lectures this year. Many hands have attempted to define their purpose and I can do no better than start with Newman, "The Idea of a University" (1852). His assertions had a different aim from mine: he was pleading for intellectual education as a force in its own right, distinct from moral and spiritual indoctrination. But he warned about preserving the difference between information (the passive reception of facts) and education: the enlargement, comparison and advancement of what men, as he said, knew, a distinction even more important to elaborate in our times. He stressed the need to educate oneself, to evaluate and judge in order for the mind to come to a decision. This is especially important in an age when the indiscriminate collection of information on the internet is common.

There has been reported this month the result of a survey of 1200 Oxford University students and staff on the idea of a university. 98% agreed that universities exist to add to the sum of knowledge in the world, 93% that they added to the sophistication of human thought and 86% that they exist to equip people to change society. Very few saw themselves as consumers, or education as a consumer good. Those who did see themselves as consumers were less likely than average to be looking for a good life, for truth, wisdom virtue or beauty. They were less likely to see themselves as acquiring knowledge or skills for their own sake, to be doing something they loved, or to see themselves as being formed by education. They were less likely to see university education as a privilege, a pleasure, or a social, moral or personal good, unlike the teachers and the postgrads. (Survey by and quotations from Teresa Morgan, reported in *Oxford Magazine* no. 322, Hilary Term 2012, p.3; full results will be available at www.ousu.org).

The differences between education on the one hand and training on the other, between knowledge and skills, should be made clear as a base of any policy discussion. Universities ought not to be exclusively or primarily concerned with immediately applicable knowledge. Their task is the assembling, transmission and development of a common body of knowledge, the fostering of intelligence, intelligibility and independence of mind in students for the common good. They are therefore the proper concern of the government of a democratic state in its allocation of resources. Too heavy a reliance on support from industry or the professions, and the pressures likely to be imposed by them as employers, e.g. instant applicability, value for money, controlled publication of research, may be even more damaging to the task of higher education than government controls and accountability in a well-intentioned democratic system. For example, lasers and penicillin were both the results of pure research. Whether competition has a proper place in this pursuit is as complex a question as it is in the NHS, another national public facility.

Education is not simply a matter of imparting information, inculcating skills and training the individual to make autonomous choices. It is not simply a matter of preparing the right number of candidates with the skills currently required for business. Education is also a matter of inducting successive generations into the society in which they will be participants. Education is preparation for citizenship and for many and varied forms of employment and leadership in society. It should impart ambition, motivation for living, ability to savour work and leisure, independence of thought, an appreciation of politics, the feeling of a stake in the future and control over one's destiny. These qualities ought to be valued by any government, which aims to achieve the preservation of high quality higher education for as many as possible. And of course at the same time it has to enable each generation not only to be educated but to climb onto the shoulders of the previous generation and make advances in science, technology, medicine, economics and the critical analyses that underpin our advanced, democratic, globalised society.

Why does their independence matter? According to Professor Zellick in his Atkin lecture (2000) the independence of universities is important because no other institution in society, and certainly not the internet, has the responsibility for preserving, advancing and communicating knowledge. There will be no development of national political policies or of any other institution, unless the universities establish and keep the right of being exemplars of fearless criticism. The need for integrity in climate change research is a good example of the need for trust in what the universities do. Limitations on the autonomy of universities impact adversely on the academic freedom of individual academics too, as exemplified by the blue skies research mentioned above, although this does not rule out the need for accountability mechanism for the spending of public money. Lord

Jenkins of blessed memory secured the insertion of a definition of academic freedom in one of the most repressive pieces of legislation, the Education Reform Act 1988, s.202(2), which was ending tenure: "to ensure that academic staff have freedom within the law to question and test received wisdom, and to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions, without placing themselves in jeopardy of losing their jobs or privileges they may have at their individual institutions." Though no doubt any expression of criticism of government policy will keep them from quangos and vice-chancellorships.

University education is for the public good, regardless of who pays for it, and ought not to be put to gain political advantages. Let me also scotch the notion right away that university education only benefits those who receive it and therefore only they should pay for it. The entire population benefits from the services of doctors, scientists, architects, broadcasters, authors and all the other professions that graduates may enter, indeed, the children of the woman graduate themselves benefit from her care even if she is not at outside work. It is dangerous for students to see it largely as a stepping stone to a more lucrative career, or for academics to lose interest in teaching because only research counts in the allocation of resources. The way higher education is regarded has however changed, at the hands of the distinguished alumni of top universities and schools whom I listed at the start of this lecture. According to Sir Ivor Crewe in *The Role of Universities in the 21st Century* (HMC 6.10.09) they are now expected to "create apparently useful knowledge and transfer it to business . . . provide professional training for almost all the public services . . . help local schools to raise their standards and ambitions . . . promote social mobility by widening participation." This is a distortion of the way higher education is seen in almost all other western countries.

Every time there is a need to review universities or inject an extra element into their governance, a businessman, sometimes with a less than perfect record of success, is set to draft a new scheme for higher education. It might make more sense to put a philosopher or academic economist in charge of reforming business than the other way around. The recent reviews of HE have seen it merely in terms of economic or private benefit terms, job prospects and pay. Lord Dearing envisaged the purpose of universities as serving the local and national knowledge-based economy. On the first occasion that I ever met him in Oxford, while he was researching for his report, he asked me whether higher education had done anything to stop the growth of Nazism in Germany. Lord Browne's seemed to assume that HE exists to provide workers for business and science (securing a Sustainable Future for Higher Education 2010 www.independent.gov.uk/browne-report).

Students have come to be regarded as consumers, with consumer type rights and contracts. Using business language, education is treated as something that can be "delivered". But it is not a neat complete package that needs only to be skilfully handed from one to another in order to ensure continuation and success. It is a participatory and continuing process, the content of which is never fixed. No amount of good teaching can succeed without the intelligent participation, reception and contribution of the student, and that is why some of it will always fail. When I was the Independent Adjudicator for HE, charged with reviewing student complaints that had failed to be resolved by universities, I used to use this analogy: the government and sometimes students see universities as rather like package holidays. The brochure promises sun, sand and sea: the reality may be a building site, bad food and a motorway obstacle to reaching the beach, and if sufficiently disappointing there can be legal action. In reality, higher education is more like going to the gym. One has to go every day and make every effort until exhausted and even then there is no guarantee that one will become fit and lose weight.

By adopting the business attitude the levers of control were rationalised by 20th century governments and a grip taken on numbers and fees. I do not have the space here to go into the history of controls and funding, but note that Lord Robbins in his 1963 Report (Cmnd 2154) envisaged the doubling of the university population from 7% as it was then to 15% in 1980, and saw that as coping with his target of finding places for all who should have them, free. Lord Dearing in his report (*Higher Education in the Learning Society* 1997) recommended fees. The report was cherry picked by Gordon Brown who imposed the recommended fee of £1K pa (Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998) but cut state funding to the university sector by the same amount and imposed a bursary requirement as well as abolishing the student grant. In 2002 the government lifted the fee to £3K, repayable once the graduate was earning over £15K pa. None of these moves, not to mention the rigid requirements of HEFCE and the RAA, elicited much protest from the universities, until the Browne review, the £9K fee and the students taking to the streets. The biggest protest against the salami slicing of both support and freedom came in the feeble and self wounding gesture of Oxford refusing an honorary degree for Mrs. Thatcher in 1985. Unit funding per student fell by 40% in the 1990s, while participation rose to over 40%. The Education Reform Act 1988 took the polytechnics away from local authority control and turned them into universities, ending the binary system, where it had been understood that there were different missions for the two groups. There was little resistance to this at the time because the purpose and identity of universities had become so confused as to render a defence based on ideology unacceptable. It was a quick fix for enlarging numbers in HE.

There are many controls over universities and I will focus on the social mobility issue shortly. Despite the cull of quangos promised by the Public Bodies Bill 2011, the university ones seem to have survived intact. HEFCE, SHEFC, HEFCW, DELNI, ECU, QAA, TQA, SLC, Unistats, HESA, UCEA, RAE, P4P (Partnerships for Progression), National Consortium of University Entrepreneurs, the Graduate Talent Pool, UCU, CUC, UUK, OFFA, OIA, Higher Education Better Regulation Group, all flourish and I have probably omitted some. Indeed the Browne Report promised a new superquango amalgamating some of them. One of the worst controls was the Research Assessment Exercise. The pressure it exerted on individual lecturers for quantity of publication was inimical to

the good and extra teaching called for by the expansion of student numbers. Because the demand of research comes so early in an academic career, combined with overcoming the probationary periods for beginners, in my experience teaching colleagues will no longer go the extra mile, as they once did, with the resultant adverse consequences for self-government of HEIs, which used to be achieved by the voluntary assumption of time consuming administrative and pastoral offices. Lecturers are tempted to cut back on feedback and extra tuition. The most recent RAE involved checking 200,000 pieces of work, and overall HEFCE is micromanaging. In 2014 RAE is to be replaced by the Research Excellence Framework. It is based on metrics, that is, quantifying the elements regarded as important in an attempt to assess research objectively, not subjectively. There will be a weighting of impact of submitted research at 20%, impact being the effect on the social, cultural and economic world outside the academic community of origin. So much for laser research in the 1960s, then. The assessment of research output will count for 65%. There will be citation analysis, that is how many times a particular piece of work has been cited by others (plenty of scope for friendly arrangements between academics there). 15% will be awarded for the excellence of the research environment, the team I imagine. It remains to be seen whether this new scheme will be less inept than the one it replaces.

Other controls developing are over entry standards, the right sort of students, fees and scholarships, the size of the student population and the quality of teaching provision. The most recent tightening of the screws comes from the BIS White Paper Students at the Heart of the System (Cm 8122, June 2011) – a title worthy of debate in itself. Contrary to the other pronouncements about increasing participation by the socially disadvantaged, this paper proposes that universities should be allowed unrestrained recruitment of those students who achieve AAB or better at A-level, some 65,000. Another 20,000 places will be allocated to universities charging lower fees, that is under £7,500 pa. So the top universities will take in more top students, who are more likely to come from the independent schools, and the cheaper ones will get the less well qualified ones. Since more higher grades are awarded in humanities than in the STEM subjects, this will also tilt applications to top universities towards those taking nonscience subjects. The top 10 universities that already have the highest proportion of students with AAB grades, or better, (including Oxford and Cambridge at 99%, Imperial 96%, LSE 93%, UCL 82%, Bristol 85% and Exeter 74%) are also more or less the same ones with the lowest proportion of students from state schools (Oxford 54%, Durham and Cambridge 59%, Bristol 60%, Imperial 63% inter alia). The White Paper also proposes loosening the rules to enable there to be more private degree awarding universities. So far there is the BPP Business and Law Schools, with pretty high fees and the New College of the Humanities in London at £18K. They may risk the stigma of being where you go if you cannot get a place elsewhere. Universities are also to be required to publish more data, including contact hours, student satisfaction surveys, employment and salaries after graduation, and actual A grades of admitted students.

The White Paper contains two meaningless or sinister statements. “Putting financial power in the hands of learners makes student choice meaningful.” I think this may mean that if students shop around ready to pay high fees, universities will have to compete for their payments by offering more popular courses. Or it may mean that by taking out loans from the SLC the student can choose whether to study at an HEI or not. In the former case, universities do not in fact compete for students, but students compete for the best universities, and the competition was as fierce when they were free (note – why did the socially disadvantaged not apply to higher education in larger numbers when there were no tuition fees to pay at all, and grants were given to students for maintenance costs?) Moreover, student choice can be quite dangerous. Before they reach the stage of applying, many courses may be closed to them because they have not taken the right A levels; they may choose in a way that disadvantages them because they were not given the information in time to evaluate it. For example, the hours required of students in different disciplines can be tougher or less so – Medicine is top at 35.5 hours weekly median, Mass Communication bottom at 19.4, yet many state educated students may well opt for the latter. It ought to be the universities themselves that decide what and how to teach, and they should not have to pander to student passing fashions or preference for lighter workloads.

The White Paper also stated that universities “must take more responsibility for increasing social mobility.” There are almost daily attacks on the alleged failure of universities to include sufficient numbers of the socially disadvantaged amongst their number, sometimes emphasising the failure to attract applicants, at other times the failure of the applicants to secure admission, although no allegations of direct discrimination have been made. This is implicit, however. Take for example the attack by Gordon Brown on Magdalen College in 2000 for not giving a place to read Medicine to Laura Spence, who had perfect grades and came from a comprehensive school, where she was the only Oxbridge candidate. There were 5 places for 22 applicants, and those who secured places included state school educated students. In April 2011 David Cameron branded Oxford disgraceful because, as he put it, only one black person went there in the previous year. How much more attractive Oxford and Cambridge might appear to the timid applicant from a non-traditional background if our government made encouraging noises about competition rather than the inaccuracies and damaging assertions of these cases? In no other country would a leading politician attack leading universities, especially those who are themselves graduates of them. Oxford has spent many millions over the years on attracting students from all sorts of backgrounds to apply to Oxford. The increased number inevitably brings disappointment to many more. The Prime Minister gave the impression that either Oxford discriminates against black candidates or that it is not doing enough to attract them, thereby undermining its reputation and sabotaging all the efforts made to increase recruitment. In fact, nothing gives lecturers more pleasure than discovering and nurturing talent in students from less privileged homes. After all, they want the brightest to share their own passion for their academic subjects, and the success of their students is their success too. The Prime Minister got his facts wrong. 19% of Oxford students are BME, whereas the percentage in the general population is about 14%.

But I do not believe that there should be any concept such as “overrepresentation” or “underrepresentation” in considering the makeup of university students, any more than there should be in the Cabinet or in Olympics teams. And I believe universities are more akin to an Olympics of the mind than a driving test pass/fail situation. Is anyone going to complain that there are “too many” students from one race or religion? The notion of quotas should be alien, for restrictions on the entry of certain groups to higher education is a hallmark of totalitarian regimes. My father told me that he was not allowed to graduate from Vienna University in the 1920s. In the interwar period, many of the central European states imposed quotas based on the census, for education and jobs. (1920 Hungary, 1937 Poland). There was a German National Law of 1933 against Overcrowding of German schools and Universities, which limited them to 5% non-Aryan and was embraced by the university staff themselves. In order to achieve the breaking of the old order, when a new political regime is installed, it is vital to prevent the legacy of influence and the expectation of a good education being handed down in the generations: The Chinese knew this during the Revolution and so did the E Europeans during the cold war. Both sectors had in common the practice of preventing the children of the intelligentsia from following in their parents’ footsteps. In Poland after the war the children of the intelligentsia were deliberately handicapped in university entry as a way of repressing their parents. The whole society was divided into “peasants”, “workers” and “intelligentsia”. Children of the first two categories got extra admissions points, the latter had to score more highly. There was special higher education for communist dignitaries, “dishing out diplomas with no respect for educational standards”, according to Lapniewska and Tarasiewicz “Analysis of the national framework in Germany” (December 2006). Shades of the treatment afforded by LSE to the son of Gaddafi recently.

In my youth, certain selective schools and some colleges had quotas for Jews. My distaste therefore has deep roots. Moreover this is the policy devised by the men whose background (private and grammar schools, Oxbridge) I highlighted at the start. What was good enough for them is not now going to be available, and the social mobility that was engendered by grammar schools and free universities will never return. Nor do we quite know what is meant by social mobility. It seems to mean that there should be equal chances of persons from different backgrounds by birth ending up in certain social or income brackets; or earning more than their parents.

There are three further issues with the notion of universities as a tool of social mobility. One is that the desired social preferment itself depends on a certain exclusivity; once everyone is a graduate, it dissipates, and if everyone is going to be socially mobile into the (otherwise despised) middle class, there will still logically have to be some who are higher and some who are lower. Universities used to and are still thought to confer individual mobility towards success and professional status and to define artistic and professional success. There was a time when the universities and the rest of the country were in agreement on the definition of success. Now there is a rival elite group made of the rich, the celebrities, the TU leaders, the media, the fashionable and influential. They may or may not be university educated and their education has played little part in their success or the esteem in which they are held. The university elitism of the old sort was based on intellectual struggle and objective attainment and it stands as a permanent reproach to the alternative celebrity elite. If you do not believe me, have a look at the annual Sunday Times list of the 1000 richest, and see how far down the list you have to go before you come to one who is university educated and one whose education was determinant of their success. Although higher education does not often produce wealth in itself, we seem to be moving to a concept of higher education as an investment of future personal property, like taking out a mortgage in order to benefit from future property prices.

The second issue with social mobility is the age at which it starts. I have written elsewhere about the importance of the earliest years in securing the potential of a baby. By age 3 and certainly by age 5 many determinants of the child’s potential are fixed, and they depend on not coming from a broken home, not being born in poverty to a single parent, and having parents who read to and nurture the child. 53% of 5 year old boys are lagging behind in development when they start school and 35% girls. One third leave primary school without adequate ability in the 3Rs. By age 18 there may be little that can be done to awaken ambition where it has never existed; and if there is to be social mobility, it is a case for government interference in the earliest years and exhortation to build stable families, a topic that governments fear to address.

Nevertheless today’s most controversial area of interference in the universities is the composition of the student body university by university. In Newman’s time, religious affiliation was the controversial criterion; more recently it was gender and now it is social class. First there were exhortations from HEFCE to take a certain proportion of students from the maintained sector. When this was shown to be illogical in terms of the numbers staying on into the sixth form, HEFCE moved to the postcode premium – more funds for universities which took students from SW2 but not SW3. Then grants were made to spend on outreach work, and the imaginative and widespread of the efforts of universities should be applauded. There have been endless initiatives and often a change in government policy or funding has meant the end of one and the start of another before there is time to see whether any of them have been successful. But there is no way that some universities will ever change the standard of entry. Nor do they need to, for virtually all the 3A grade applicants try for Oxford or Cambridge in any case. To recruit and encourage applications from all over the country is one thing, and a good thing, but to socially manipulate the entry for ideological or financial reasons should have no place in university thinking. In the end, everything comes down to family and school influences. There are too many teachers who are anti-elitism and discourage their students, and there are many students who do not want to go away from home, or whose families discourage them from aiming higher than their parents. The abolition of the maintenance grant, which enabled a student to live in a university far away from home, is arguably more damaging than anything

else in social mobility, which depends on breaking away from local roots in many cases. And there are problems with the advice given in schools about applications and subjects to take at A level and for which to apply. Universities are berated for the profile of their students, but there is no enquiry into the school failings. Independent schools produce 33% of the 3A candidates, although they educate only 7% of the population. 41% of state school 3A candidates apply to the oversubscribed professional university subjects of law, medicine, economics/management, maths and English. Many state school applicants want to study subjects that some of the Russell League universities do not offer, such as mass communications, business and veterinary science. They choose the wrong A levels and sometimes the wrong subjects in terms of what is on offer from leading universities. Some recent legislation has not helped universities to distinguish one candidate from another. The Data Protection Act has made all references bland and unhelpful, for the candidate may see them, and the schools fear to give an honest if unflattering portrait – as they did in the past – even though such awarts and all reference would be of assistance. Sheer numbers of applicants make it difficult to pick out the plagiarised personal statement; the more anonymity is introduced into applications and the fewer the interviews, the harder it is to find the applicants from disadvantaged background who have the ambition and the talent to succeed. Access Agreements typically focus on spending more resources on outreach work and scholarships, and requiring the publication of more data about targets and percentages already reached in relation to class and ethnic groups.

Nevertheless, the latest regime requires all universities that plan to charge more than £6K pa to reach an Access Agreement with the Office for Fair Access (OFFA, soon to be headed up by Professor Les Ebdon). According to OFFA guidelines (March 2011/01) the underrepresented groups who must be sought out are the lower socioeconomic groups, the low income (below £42K pa), some ethnic groups, persons in care and the disabled. There are to be sanctions for “serious and wilful breach” of the Access Agreement. What used to be penalised was failure to deliver measures, but now the emphasis has switched to outcomes, ie a requirement that the student body must reflect certain patterns. This it seems to me would not be legal for the OFFA has a duty to protect admissions from external political interference under s.32(2)(b) of the Higher Education Act 2004, and any steps towards requiring a student makeup could be resisted by Judicial Review. Moreover there is a human rights obligation under Art. 14 of the ECHR, reflected in the Human Rights Act 1998, not to discriminate on grounds of social origin. I do not know how this squares with the obligation placed on public authorities by the Equality Act 2010 to have due regard to the reduction of socioeconomic disadvantages in designing strategy. OFFA requires Access Agreements to relate to progress towards targets and milestones: it emphasises outcomes but there is no legal obligation to change entrance requirements for certain groups; there is however a steer towards using contextual data, which might mean relativity in entrance requirements according to background, subject of course to the restraints of the law cited above.

If proportional outcomes are necessary in HE, why not in health? Are hospitals to be required to treat patients according to social class, since we know that health outcomes and life expectancy are worse in the worse off. Ironically, the third pillar of a civilised society, access to justice through legal aid, has been left out of social mobility requirements by the government. The cuts proposed in legal aid, without proper regard to their impact, will disadvantage the already disadvantaged disproportionately.

The third issue with social mobility is that it is clearly damaged by the rise in tuition fees to £9K. Although it is argued that this amount of debt should not be a deterrent because the fees are not repayable until a certain income level is reached later in life, nevertheless the headline figures about the cost undoubtedly act as a deterrent to the very people whom it is sought to attract. Already universities are anticipating a drop of about one-fifth in recruitment for 2012 and that the shortfall (of the less advantaged) will be made up by foreign students.

Combined with cuts in funding, will all this damage the quality of our universities? The status of British universities has undoubtedly fallen: the question is how far. Lord Baker said: “When great institutions decline they do not suddenly fall over a precipice, they simply slide down the slope, a little further each year, in a genteel way, making do in their reduced circumstances, like a spinster in an Edwardian novel.” (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2001/nov/05/highereducation.uk1>).

So time for only a brief look at the controlling influence exercised by the setting of fees and the underfunding of universities. It is hard for universities to complain. If they say they cannot manage on the resources made available, they lose their reputations at once; so they manage, with the result that further cuts are made because they are seen to be able to cope with reduced income. But look at some of the external measures. From 1970-2010 163 of the Nobel laureates in science worked in the US, while 36 worked in the UK, and not all of them in universities. And the US has 50 times as many frequently cited scientific researchers as the UK. In 2010 the average salary of a university lecturer in the UK was £42K. A few years ago vice chancellors were colossi bestriding the land – Annan, Beloff, Franks. They are no longer household name. There is little scope for visionary leadership because the policies are laid down by government, and good managerial skills are most important to implement and perhaps deflect them.

State spending on universities is dropping dramatically. Teaching in the humanities is no longer funded at all – so much for the purpose of a university – and the institutions will become increasingly reliant on the goodwill of alumni. Yet alumni will themselves be paying off their loans and older ones financing their children’s education for much longer. The loan system, which is destined to fail since so many will never repay because they are on low

salaries or out of the jurisdiction, will have two results. One is to indicate to women that government policy makes it sensible to find a rich husband while at college and never work; or take the lowest paying part time jobs in order to avoid reaching the lower limit for payment. The other solution is to go private and for universities to reject state funding with its strings in its entirety. This may not be practicable for expensive research, which should be concentrated in the top research universities and not spread thinly. If universities were freed to charge as they will, they could create a system whereby the fees paid by those who can would be sufficient to fund bursaries for those who cannot, bearing in mind that the independent school parents are paying up to £30K a year before reaching university stage. Or a drastic pruning, returning the former polytechnics to the local authorities that once took responsibility for them, and confining state funding and full scholarships to a narrow range of universities taking the cleverest students. All the quangos that unnecessarily and restrictively assess universities should be abolished. The grant that HEFCE handles (currently £7361m) could be used to fund a rolling endowment programme with the aim of eventually endowing most universities and leaving them free to set their own fees and scholarships, as proposed by Sir Martin Jacomb. This would take a very long time. It is the families of low ambition and schools of low ambition that hold our young people back from aspiration, if at all, not HE. One should support schemes, such as run by Nottingham University, that target primary school children. Universities should plan to go private, and be left to set their own fees and bursaries. The way to treat OFFA is by resistance: to press for its abolition in the promised bonfire of the quangos, and to challenge any ruling about sanctions by way of judicial review based on current law and human rights. The costs of OFFA are about half a million pounds and one can be reasonably confident that the universities would be doing their outreach work without it, as they were before its establishment in 2004.

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