

The Browne Review: implications for part-time study

**National conference: Part-time study in HE:
a new deal for part-time and distance students?
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Browne and the CSR

- ‘cannot be disentangled’ (Langlands)
- To understand the impact of Browne on PT, we must understand the impact of Browne and the CSR on the whole sector (including: HE in FE, private/for-profit HE, and post-1992 universities)

Browne's Principles

1. More investment for HE (less by Govt)
2. Increase student choice
3. Fair access
4. No upfront cost to students
5. Graduate repayments affordable
6. Treat PT and FT students the same for the costs of learning

Browne's assertions

- What matters most are global economic competitiveness and labour market skills
- Higher fees will
 - bring greater competition between institutions for students, which will
 - drive up the quality of the student experience, which will
 - improve graduates' skills for work

The impact of Browne/CSR?

- T - £3bn – ‘support’, no ‘blanket subsidy’
- Govt sets minimum qualification for entry
- More student choice, no barriers to access
- Popular HEIs expand: +10% ‘places’
- Better quality HE through competition
- More help for low income families

Questions Browne didn't ask

- Will graduate salaries rise to attract and reward beneficiaries of higher quality HE? If not, will enough students be willing to incur more debt?
- If graduates pay for greater exclusivity, prestige and reputation, won't elite institutions respond by raising fees but **not** expanding?
- Will 'reputational range' widen? Expansion only in cheaper HEIs, in private HE, or not at all? A race to the bottom, not the top?

The impact of Browne/CSR?

- Govt to cap fees at £12000 (Clegg)
- Will Russell and 1994 Groups break up?
- Will some go private?
- Private HE to expand, exploiting Govt support for poor students (cf USA)?
- Academic 'arms race' inevitable

The impact of Browne/CSR?

- Most HEIs reduce T&L spending (fees < £7K, 'arms race', marketing x10?)
- HEIs close/merge? Coverage more patchy
- No wider participation in elite universities
- Less scope to subsidise PT courses
- Less choice, lower participation for disadvantaged and PT students

Part-time students

- 77% of PT students are in only 60 HEIs
- More likely to be older than FT students
- More likely to be female than FT students
- Concentrated in 'non-priority' courses
- Mostly not doing degree/FD/HND/HNC
- How many do <33% FTE? (eg almost all HND/HNC, Browne's only example)

Part-time students

- 60% earned >£25000 in 2007-2008, ie 2/3 would start repaying straight away
- 40% self supporting, 40% employer support, 22% fee waivers
- What the market will bear: PT fee = $\frac{1}{2}$ FT fee at Open University
- Still no support for ELQ students

Part-time students

- Different expectations - don't want/use much of what attracts FT students
- What if the best PT student experience is in HEIs which don't have high fees for FT?
- Impact on 'exit, voice and loyalty'?
- Is there latent demand, will it be released?

Government policy since 1975

- Individual economic benefits/returns to students matter most
- Social-class exclusivity of highly selective universities: unfortunate, but tolerated
- Research-intensive is 'best'
- The rest are second-best, or worse

Students are more than customers

- The Browne narrative is flawed and partial
- We should pay more attention to:
 - the public good (Bynner et al)
 - HE for individual growth and citizenship
 - transmission of a common culture, and/or transformation of culture and society

An accidental revolution?

- Organic growth and development? (Scott)
- Policy even more focused on the institutional level: we risk losing the capacity for social policymaking in HE (Denham –v- Richard)
- A vicious circle: less public funding + more regulation = less public engagement

What is to be done?

- Create milestones/break points for reform eg:
 - tie higher fees to real expansion of ‘popular’ universities. Not just franchising-as-distancing, perhaps also part-time?
 - don’t allow gradual dilution of diversity commitments (eg as HEIs blame schools for applicant ‘quality’). More access through PT?
 - retain a ‘reverse gear’ for HE as social policy

What is to be done?

- Actively oppose the ‘concreting in’ of stratification, in particular any increase in the % of full-time in high-fee institutions
- Greater emphasis on the social, individual, non-economic benefits of HE (the big society?) and students as much more than customers – what role for PT courses?

Sustainable HE

- Freedom
 - at the point of entry
 - academic freedom, institutional autonomy
- Fairness
 - in admissions
 - in funding

Sustainable HE

- Responsibility
 - of institutions and staff, to society, culture and community as well as economy, and to academic and educational values
 - of employers and students?
 - of Government, for the **whole** of HE

Quality and access

- Robbins: 'monitoring' and 'matching'
- Dearing: an integrated, diverse, socially responsible HE sector
- Browne: a regulated market
- where will students find critical thinking?
how will universities retain their critical capacity? What role will PT courses and students play in access and quality?

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