

# **EQUITY, EXCELLENCE AND EVER-EVOLVING H.E.**

**WORKSHOP ON HIGHER EDUCATION IN PRETORIA**

**30/31 May and 1 June 2016**

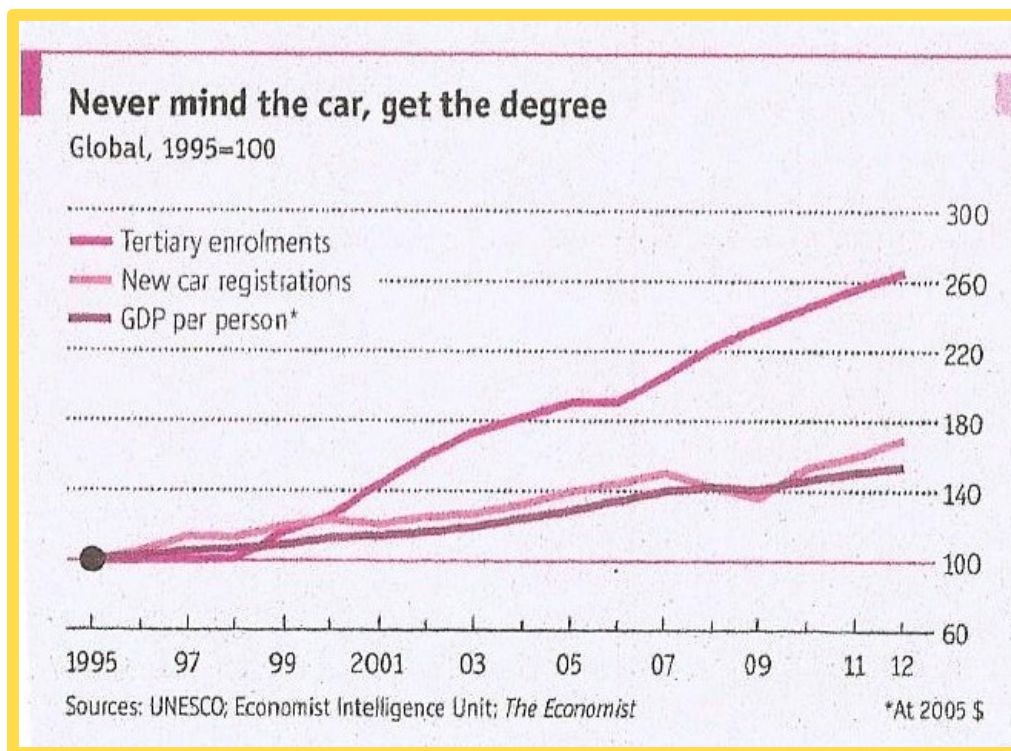
**MIKE DOUSE**

Higher education, along with education itself, evolved out of religion, widely-defined. The first universities sprung up around the Mediterranean a millennium or so ago. They were essentially theological colleges and thus the community service dimension, equally widely defined, was there from the outset.

A hundred or so years ago, the Americans married up the 15th century Oxbridge college with the 'research university' that had been developed by the Germans in the 19th. In the 1940s America led the world in creating mass higher education, in part to meet the economy's need for higher education and in part to give the men who'd fought in the Second World War a chance to better themselves.

So there was from the outset a built-in gender bias and a link between graduation and growth.

And so governments – geared to getting growth – saw the positive consequences of university research as well as academic credentials. And so did people – families and children – as depicted in these worldwide data from UNESCO via The Economist.

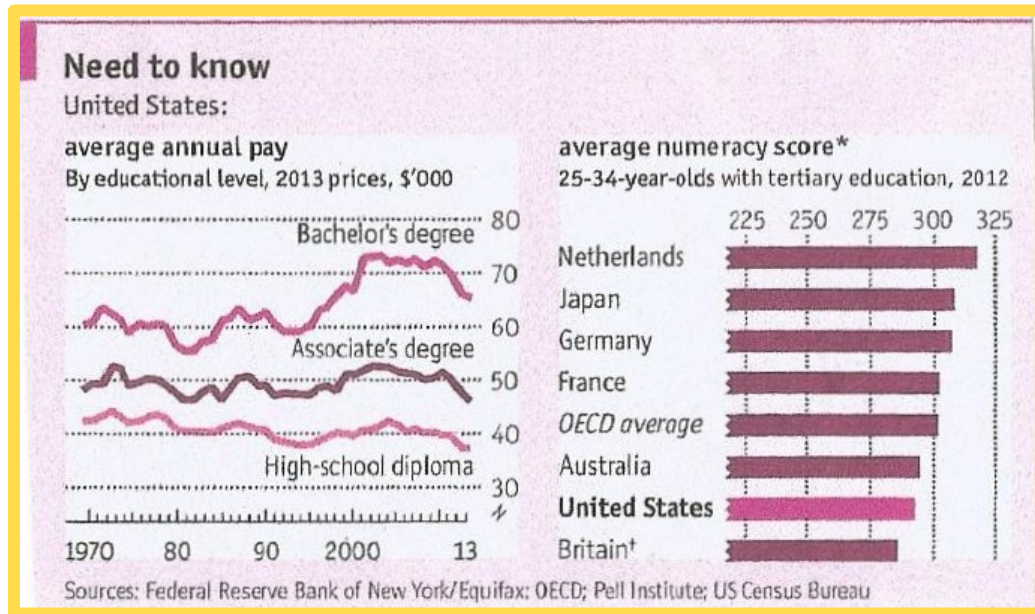


Not only has the number of higher educational establishments gone up and up, institutions that previously seemed content to call themselves Polytechnics or Technical Institutes or Teachers Colleges, transmogrified into universities: a development that undoubtedly enhanced the status of those institutions but set back further education considerably.

Undoubtedly the demands of work such as policing or nursing or, indeed, managing and personnel handling became more technical cum professional, and graduate (and very soon, postgraduate) credentials became essential, with analyses to be reflected upon and underlying theories to be mastered, and governments underwrote this expansion in relation to growth, just as individuals did so in terms of private returns.

And individuals got it right. These graphs (on the left, below) are USA data – again from the Economist. Note not just the differentials but also how the non-university-graduate wages have tended to decline. As better universities get bigger, worse ones come under increasing pressure. Moreover, graduation rates between rich and poor are diverging. And, so research indicates, employers are not so much interested in

the education provided – which they find it hard to assess during recruitment – as in the university's status



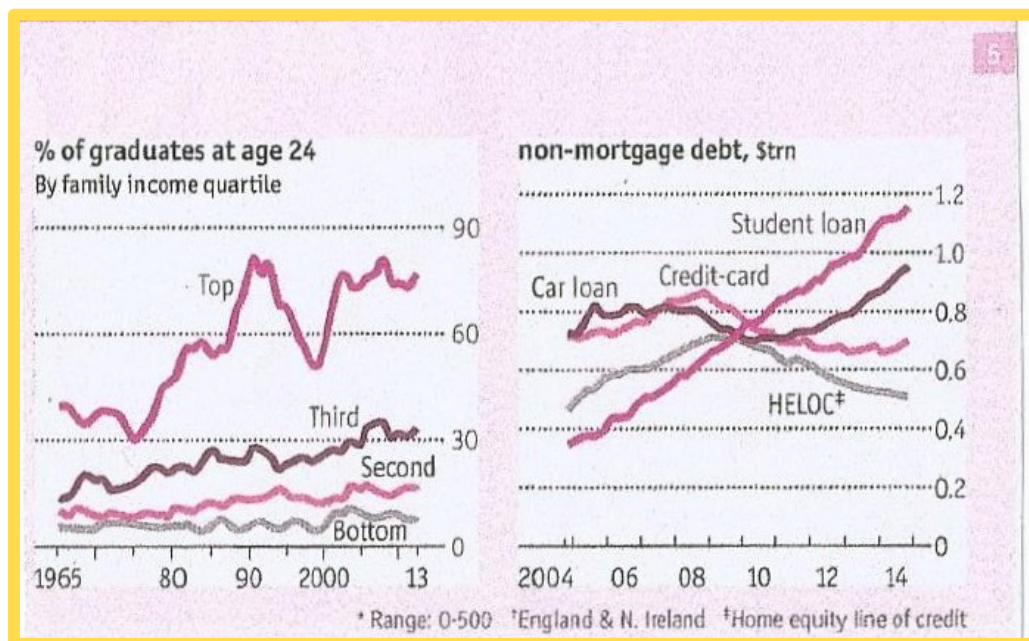
But note also the OECD figures on the right. How good with numbers are – on average – a country's university graduates? If you're good with numbers you'll already have jumped to a few conclusions. The UK and the US have high proportions of graduates so maybe this shows that 'more means less'. Or maybe it implies that university standards are higher in some countries than others. Or that numeracy is prized in some places and, say, literary creativity in others. You can do anything with statistical data – but maybe you do it best if you're Dutch.

For academics, the key to advancement is research: publication in peer-reviewed journals plus getting research grants to the school. For OECD country universities, the key is fee-paying students and sponsored research – tending to be applied rather than pure – for governments, defence and drug industries especially, and major multi-laterals rather than SMEs.

Transnational higher education is a major source of income – through tax to host governments, to universities attracting fee-paying overseas students, to local shops, restaurants, transport services et cetera – and many ACP countries have developed and implemented TNHE plans, made investments and streamlined procedures to enable their HE institutions to attract international students. There can of course be

negative social consequences: one Caribbean country with around 60,000 citizens has around 15,000 medical students – at least they're OK if they get ill.

In a similar manner, TNHE – at a very simple level, a Western nation giving scholarships to talented students from a developing country – tends to result in the brightest and the best migrating from the latter to the former. In all sorts of ways, higher education reproduces inequalities.



Note here that who gets a degree depends to a large degree on family income. And not only, as depicted on the graph, do far more UK 24-year-olds in the upper family income quartile have degrees than does the other 75%, these degrees tend to be from the top universities and in the most marketable subjects. And these relatively rich young graduates have the family businesses and family connections. Not just in the UK. So far I've used Developed Country data because those are readily available – but the implications are universal.

And in very many countries, graduates from some institutions, in some subjects, cannot get employment. In the UK, 1 in 6 call-centre staff have degrees. In much of southern Africa, hundreds of Arts graduates are unemployed – and angry. It's said that a Bachelor of Economics degree doesn't get you a job – but at least you know why. Higher education and the market won't add up to social mobility – students

from the poorest backgrounds are more likely than others to lack the financial and emotional resources that might help them stay on and complete their degree.

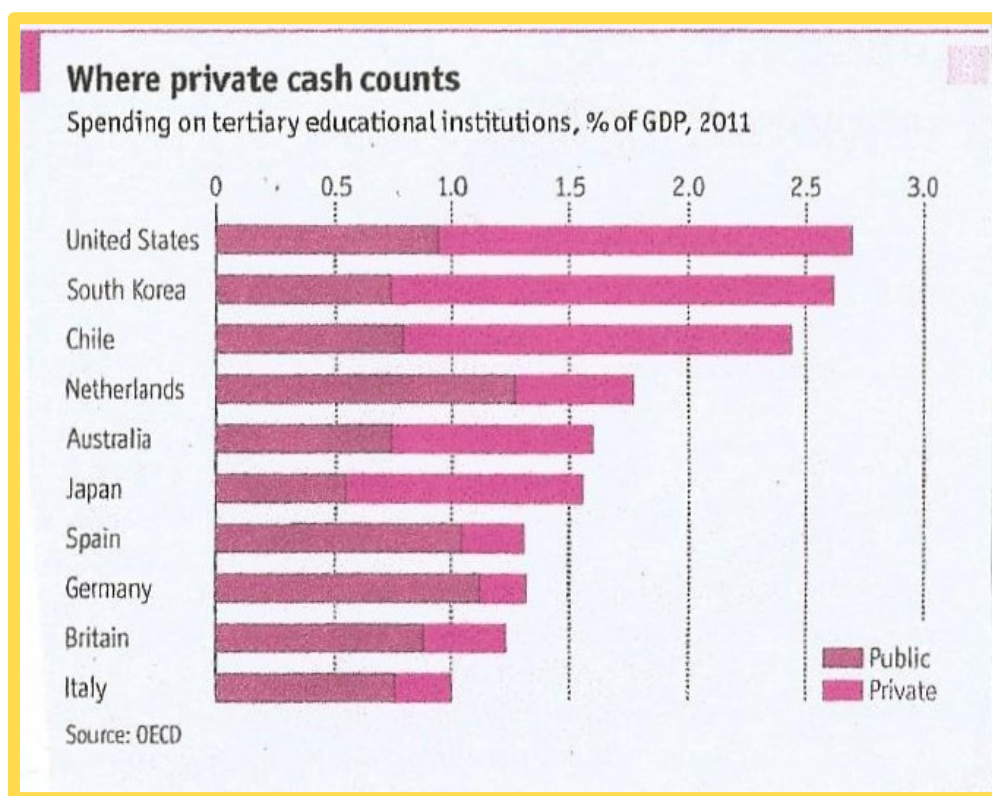
The debt figures also relate to the UK – apart for mortgages, students loans are now the highest category. Please see my article ‘Every tax is a graduate tax’ [in the sense that, if the qualification does lead the individual to higher reimbursement, that will be associated with higher income taxes and, indeed, higher indirect and possible corporate taxes – student loan systems are inefficient, dis-incentivising and unnecessary].

As well as teaching, researching and serving their communities, universities provide a convivial social environment. Ministers of Education and Permanent Secretaries have great memories of their student days – not just of studying but the debates and the union bar and the friendships: the overall university experience. Working hard, in order to pass exams, in order to obtain credentials, in order to get a good job, in order to achieve fulfilment, to serve society and be able to afford to live well is, ultimately, about human happiness.

But it's a long – albeit worthwhile – journey. A quicker route is to recognise that education should be pleasurable – not just because students learn better when they're happy but because happiness in the here and now is a worthy aim in itself.

And as well as teaching, researching, serving their communities and contributing directly to the sum of human happiness, universities are channels of advocacy, from Professors of Economics writing to the Times regarding the UK's current Brexit debate, to Feesmustfall here in South Africa to health scientists calling for the Rio Olympics to be abandoned, higher education is in the lobbying business which is possibly distinct from the community service contribution.

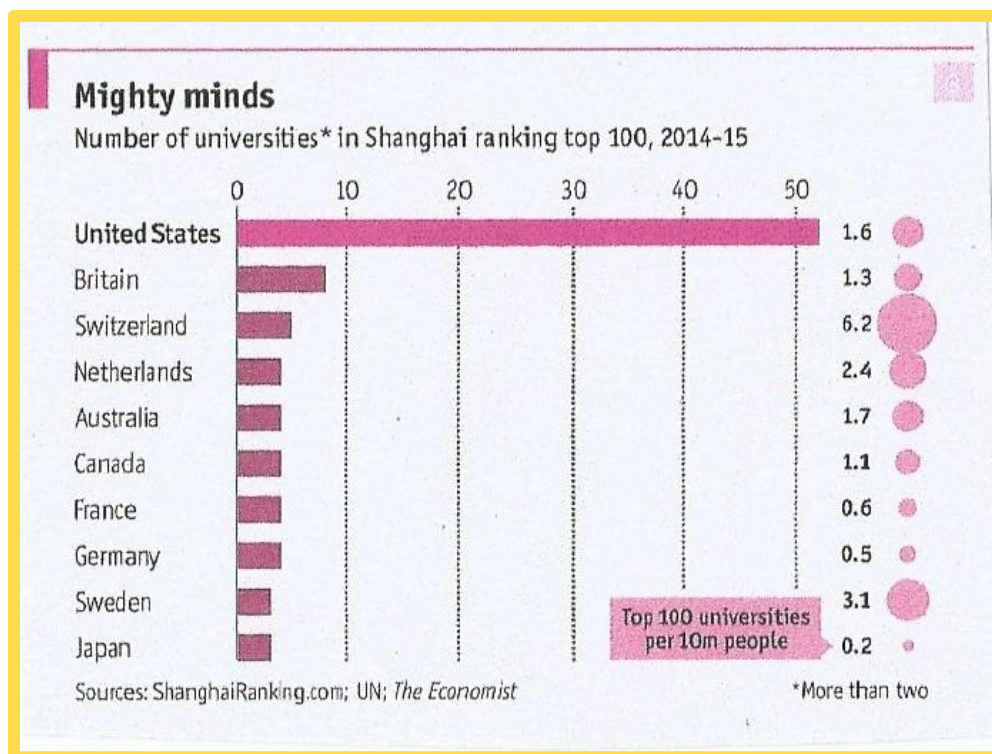




Note also the recent phenomenon of the Moocs – Massive open online courses. According to their advocates, they make HE borderless gender-blind, race-blind, class-blind and bank account-blind. They say also that this form of online delivery promotes active learning through an innovative user interface incorporating instant feedback, self-paced learning, online discussion forums and the application of gaming mechanisms to virtual laboratories. Reports on their usage and effectiveness levels are still coming in. Perhaps they are changing – have changed – the face of education. Anyone with an internet connection can have access and thousands of students, many in under-served, developing countries, are participating.

A reputable historian of Oxford University claims that virtual learning has the potential to make universities such as Oxford redundant, advising that it should offer undergraduate degrees via online learning and transform itself into a ‘world university’ open to all. [But, in all fairness, I refer to an earlier speaker at this Workshop’s statistics on the failure rate of distance mode students: it isn’t as easy for many as is the campus-based full-time route.]

Look now at these OECD data on public and private expenditure on tertiary education institutions. Both the provision and funding of higher education in much of the developed world is shifting towards the private sector. Note the high proportions of private spending by students and their families in, for example, the USA, South Korea and Japan – Chile is an interesting case [which we have someone on hand to explain]. What are they buying? A passport into lucrative employment? Knowledge for its own sake? Ivy-covered lecturers in ivy-covered halls?



Governments want world-class universities because modern economies are driven by human capital. The slide shows the Shanghai top rankings – Switzerland scoring best in terms of top universities per population. The EU has created the U-multirank which provides ratings based upon a range of criteria – more subtle than the Shanghai Ranking but less easy to depict on a slide. [Please have a look at U-multirank later and ask ‘how do you determine how ‘good’ a university is? Some would take into account the levels of satisfaction reported by students and graduates. Others – especially the unpopular institutions – dismiss this as subjective.]



Student numbers are growing faster than global GDP – the proportion of the global age cohort enrolled in university rose from 14% to 32% in the two decades to 2012 – the only part of the world where ‘massification’ isn’t yet in evidence is sub-Saharan Africa [Professor King suggested a current figure of cohort enrolment of 4-6%]. And it’s that relative scarcity value that gives this region the leading incremental earning percentage, as illustrated.

Countries whose EU Delegations are represented here – and I’ve worked in education in 11 of them – may grow economically by getting more graduates in skills areas that will be in greatest demand. Private economic returns will be there also – getting a relevant credential in a key professional or technical area. But a mis-match between supply and demand has negative social as well as economic consequences, inevitably hurting the underprivileged more than the well-cushioned relatively wealthy.

Especially if we wrongly insist that universities are there solely to match students with jobs. For, despite the great educational enfranchisement that has occurred, it remains true that the university should be a protected space. It is still the case that these semi-marketised employment-oriented institutions should go beyond mere economic return. That an undergraduate degree is not a commodity and that higher



education is much more than a market. That universities, changing as they invariably will, remain custodians for the present generation of a complex intellectual inheritance which we did not create and which is not ours to destroy.