The Marketisation of Higher Education and the Student as Consumer

Edited by Mike Molesworth, Richard Scullion and Elizabeth Nixon

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Until recently government policy in the UK has encouraged an expansion of higher education to increase participation and with an express aim of creating a more educated workforce. This expansion has led to competition between higher education institutions, with students increasingly positioned as consumers and institutions working to improve the extent to which they meet 'consumer demands'.

Especially given recent government funding cuts, the most prevalent outlook in higher education today is one of business, forcing institutions to reassess the way they are managed and promoted to ensure maximum efficiency, sales and 'profits'. Students view the opportunity to gain a degree as a right, and a service which they have paid for, demanding a greater choice and a return on their investment. Changes in higher education have been rapid, and there has been little critical research into the implications. This volume brings together internationally comparative academic perspectives, critical accounts and empirical research to explore fully the issues and experiences of education as a commodity, examining:

- the international and financial context of marketisation
- the new purposes of universities
- the implications of university branding and promotion
- league tables and student surveys vs. quality of education
- the higher education market and distance learning
- students as 'active consumers' in the co-creation of value
- changing student experiences, demands and focus.

With contributions from many of the leading names involved in higher education including Ronald Barnett, Frank Furedi, Lewis Elton, Roger Brown and also Laurie Taylor in his journalistic guise as an academic at the University of Poppleton, this book will be essential reading for many. *The Marketisation of Higher Education and the Student as Consumer* offers a groundbreaking insight into the effects of government policy on the structure and operation of universities.

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Chapter 1

Introduction to the marketisation of higher education and the student as consumer

Frank Furedi

Since the late 1970s the culture of academic life has been transformed by the institutionalisation of the policies of marketisation. At least outwardly universities increasingly ape the managerial models of private and especially public sector corporations. Quaint academic rituals and practices have been gradually displaced by management techniques as departments mutate into cost centres often run by administrators recruited from the private and public sector. Whatever one thinks about the costs and benefits of these changes, marketisation is a reality that academics have to live with. This collection of articles addresses this reality and offers a variety of perspectives on the not-so-quiet managerial revolution in the university.

Advocates of marketisation argue that this process will turn higher education into a more flexible and efficient institution. They claim that the expansion of the market into the lecture hall will provide better value for money and ensure that the university sector will become more efficient and more responsive to the needs of society, the economy, students and parents. The policy-driven term 'marketisation' is fundamentally an ideological one and as this collection of articles indicates, its meaning is far from self-evident. As the chapters by Roger Brown and Nick Foskett suggest, marketisation does not necessarily mean or lead to the creation of a market in the sale and purchase of academic education. Indeed it is not always clear what is being bought and sold. So is the student purchasing instruction in an academic discipline or buying a credential necessary for the pursuit of a profession? Or is he or she doing both? It appears that what we have is a highly controlled quasi-market that forces institutions to compete against one another for resources and funding.

In one sense there is very little that is unique about the embrace of competition by higher education. Academia has always been a highly competitive enterprise and since medieval times universities often possessed a profound sense of institutional self-interest and regarded one another with a degree of suspicion. Universities have always competed for resources, and in modern times for research funding. These forms of rivalries have existed in an uneasy relationship with the imperative of academic collaboration. Academics are members of an intellectual community who need to collaborate with another. Yet they are also individuals who are concerned with cultivating their own reputation and are sometimes fiercely aggressive towards each other. However, this form of competition has little to do with the late-twentieth-century market-driven ideology that prevails in higher education. What is new and potentially disturbing about the marketisation of education is the attempt to recast the relationship between academics and students along the model of a service provider and customer.

It is important to understand that marketisation is as much a political/ideological process as an economic phenomenon. So for example, through the medium of marketisation governments often promote clearly defined political policies. As the chapter by Colin McCaig suggests, marketing has become a vehicle for the promotion of widening participation. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that marketisation is as much about social engineering as economic concerns. In practice, a quasi-market in higher education propped up by state subsidies and micro-managed through government intervention co-exists with genuine market-driven activities. There are of course dimensions of university life that are relatively open to the imperative of the market. The influence of the market mechanism is fairly apparent in the international student bazaar. In this domain there is fierce competition between universities, who with the help of their governments seek to position themselves as global players in a lucrative sphere of economic activity. Universities, particularly those who possess an international reputation for research, also sell patents, provide consultancy and services and launch private companies. Higher education has also become involved with the provision of leisure and conference services and operates in this sphere according to the norms that prevail amongst private sector service providers.

In principle there need not be any objections to universities competing for funds and selling the fruits of their research. It is not this relatively distinct and contained form of economic activity that has led to academic disquiet about the marketisation of education. Often it is the cultural, intellectual and pedagogic consequences of marketisation that represent a cause for concern. From a cultural perspective the project of marketisation represents the attempt to commodify academic education. Specifically it is oriented towards the transformation of what is an abstract, intangible, non-material and relational experience into a visible, quantifiable and instrumentally driven process. The various rituals of commodification, such as quality control, auditing and ranking performance, quantifying the experience of students and constructing league tables, are essentially performative accomplishments. Attempts to endow these rituals with symbolic significance are promoted through the act of branding, mission statements or student surveys. The chapters by Liz Morrish and Helen Sauntson, Chris Chapleo and Stella Jones-Devitt and Catherine Samiei offer compelling evidence of these rituals of commodification.

The tendency to commodify higher education does not represent a triumph of free-market economics. Indeed it can be argued that the marketisation of education has been paralleled not by a decrease but an increase in state intervention and the micro-management of university life. The very attempt to regulate economically the provision of academic education is itself a highly politicised activity. Governments are desperately mobilising students and their parents to place universities under market pressure. As the article by Joanna Williams shows, newspapers in England are literally inciting students and their parents to complain and force universities on the defensive. The promotion of student consumer consciousness is not simply motivated by the idealisation of the customer-service-provider model. As customer, the student is expected to serve as the personification of market pressures on an otherwise archaic and unresponsive university. Since according to the logic of marketisation, the customer is always right, the university had better listen to the student. Appeals to the identity of student-as-customer are underpinned by an agenda that seeks to discipline academic life through consumer pressure on higher education. From this perspective the complaining pushy-parent is likely to emerge as the hero in the drama of marketisation.

The culture of complaint has encouraged the emergence of a form of 'defensive education' that is devoted to minimising sources of disputes that have the potential to lead to complaint and litigation. Defensive university education encourages a climate where academics are discouraged from exercising their professional judgment when offering feedback or responding to disputed marks. Courses, especially ones that do not rate highly in student surveys, are modified and made customer friendly. Academics have become more defensive and circumspect about expressing their views with clarity. They write formulaic letters of reference and refrain from stating opinions that could provoke complaints from their customers. One of the most obvious strategies for avoiding complaints is to flatter students. Feedback is often used as a vehicle for validating the efforts of a student instead of pointing out weaknesses in presentation and argument.

Sadly many universities have embraced the student-as-customer model. For example the 1994 Group of UK-based universities has adopted the idea that the customer is always right and that flattering them is the way forward. In its statement 'Enhancing the Student Experience', the 1994 Group notes that students 'play an important role as "change agents", challenging the established modes of learning, and contributing to making it more exciting and relevant' (2007: 16). The conceptualisation of students as change agents may represent a form of unwitting manipulation of students to act in accordance with the logic of marketisation. However, it is likely that sections of the leadership of higher education have come to internalise the ideology of marketisation to the point where they find it difficult to distinguish between an academic relationship and a commercial transaction. Consequently there is a growing tendency to represent students acting in their role as customers as providing a positive contribution to academic pedagogy.

'Students know how they want to be taught and have ideas about how techniques can be improved' is the conclusion drawn by the 1994 Group (2007: 6). Aside from a disturbing tendency to equate academic teaching with a technique, the assimilation of the idea that the customer 'knows how they want to be taught' reduces academics to a service provider. As always the commercialisation of education encourages institutions to provide what customers want rather than what they need to become truly educated. This is a problem that philosophers have wrestled with since the beginning of human civilisation.

Socrates revisited

Criticism of the practice of treating students as customers was forcefully pursued by Socrates and Plato in ancient Greece. The principal reason why Socrates was critical of Sophist philosopher teachers was because they charged money for their services. Socrates took the view that payment for teaching compromised the relationship between teacher and student. According to Xenophon, Socrates compared those who peddle their wisdom to those who sell their caresses. Today, such an anti-mercenary stand is likely to strike one as unnecessarily purist and unrealistic. However as J. S. Mill wrote back in 1866, even in an age where the language of cash dominates everyday life there is a lot of sense in Socrates' concern with the commercialisation of education and relating to students as customers. Mill echoed Socrates' concern and noted that paid teachers 'attain their purposes' not 'by making people wiser or better, but by conforming to their opinions, pandering to their existing desires, and making them better pleased with themselves and with their errors and vices than they were before' (Mill 1978: 401).

Mill was writing almost a century and half before the celebration of 'student satisfaction' and the 'student experience' was integrated into the culture of higher education. But it is unlikely that he could have imagined just how uninhibited the universities' 'pandering' of 'existing desires' has become. The current worship of student satisfaction has fostered a climate in which institutions are obsessed with pleasing students and avoiding complaints and fear that disputes with fee-paying customers could lead to litigation. In some cases institutions have adopted practices that border on bribery to get their undergraduates to give the right answers to student satisfaction surveys. There is considerable pressure on academics to put on their customer services hat and do their best not to put students off. Neither Socrates not Mill would have been surprised by the current massaging of examination conventions that aim to avoid customers becoming disappointed by poor results.

From a Socratic perspective the very term 'student satisfaction' is an irrational one. Why? Because students need to be placed under intellectual pressure, challenged to experience the intensity of problem solving. Such an engagement does not always promote customer satisfaction. Not a few individuals at the receiving end of a Socratic dialogue felt provoked and angry. Today, this old philosopher would not rank very high in a student satisfaction survey. So the question worth asking is 'ought the satisfaction of the student customer be one of the central objectives of the university?' From the perspective of the development of a stimulating and creative academic life, the answer must be a resounding NO! The moment that students begin to regard themselves as customers of academic education, their intellectual development is likely to be compromised. Degrees can be bought; an understanding of a discipline cannot.

Mill took the view that the commercialisation of education threatens the integrity and independence of teachers and academics. In particular he feared that commercial pressures would drive educationalists to accommodate prevailing prejudice and encourage them to subordinate the educational needs of students to the project of attracting potential customers. At one point in his writing, Mill paused and asks what Plato would make of the situation in nineteenth-century England. He imagines Plato saying 'schoolmasters, and the teachers and governors of universities, must, on every subject on which opinions differ provide the teaching which will be acceptable to those who can give them pupils, not that which is really the best' (Mill 1978: 402). What Plato is really saying is that once teaching becomes subordinate to an agenda that is external to itself it will become distracted from maintaining its integrity. The pressure to accommodate and compromise will prevail. Today such trends express themselves through grade and degree inflation and the adoption of conservative and instrumentalist skills-based pedagogy. As Socrates and Plato anticipated, the commercialisation of education is driving universities to adopt pedagogic techniques that have little intellectual value. Even the Sophists would be disturbed by an academic culture that is so whole-heartedly devoted to the flattering of students.

In comparison to Athens in the fourth century BC and Victorian England we live in a world where the transformation of the student into a customer has become an accomplished fact. Moreover the tendency to recast an academic relationship into a commercial transaction is no longer represented as the unintended consequence of powerful economic forces but as the explicit objective of higher education entrepreneurs and policy makers. Indeed instead of being embarrassed about treating the academy as a credentials bazaar many universities celebrate their new-found role. On open days, after boasting about their department's incredibly high RAE ratings, academics compete with one another to assure potential customers that their courses are less demanding than those of rival establishments. In this consumerist climate, no lecturer wants to gain a reputation for being 'awkward', 'demanding' or a 'hard marker'. Consequently the culture of positive marking and grade inflation has become a fact of campus life.

Many of the ideas of Socrates and Mill may well be outdated. But tragically their fear that students do not get what is 'really the best' when their teachers become peddlers of ideas has proved to be all too true. The idealisation of the role of customer of academic learning conveys the promise of student choice. As Richard Scullion, Mike Molesworth and Elizabeth Nixon indicate in their chapter on this subject the promise of student choice is rarely realised. In the abstract every student can choose to purchase seminar tickets from Trinity College, Cambridge. In reality the exercise of choice is constrained by access to cultural capital and socio-economic realities. Nevertheless the ideology of choice has a powerful influence on shaping students' identities and works to distract them from realising the potential of their intellectual engagement.

Experience shows that the provision of academic teaching does not fit easily into the paradigm of consumption. It becomes something else if it becomes commodified and bought and sold. Commodification inexorably leads to standardisation, calculation and formulaic teaching. It reduces quality into quantity and transforms an academic relationship between teacher and student into a transaction dominated by concerns that have little to do with education. Thankfully academic and research-based knowledge cannot be standardised and pre-packaged consumer goods, which is why the tension between academic life and marketisation is ultimately irreconcilable. Either academics mutate into the trainers of customers or marketisation works as essentially an ideological or public relations accomplishment. Although the marketisation of education has acquired a formidable influence in Anglo-American universities, its future trajectory is far from clear. This collection of articles provides a unique opportunity to reflect and debate a phenomenon that is likely to exercise a powerful influence on the academy.

Although written from different perspectives this collection of articles shares a common interest in demystifying the workings of the marketisation of higher education. Through their analysis it becomes evident that there is little about this process that we should take as self-evident. Concepts like marketisation, the higher education market, student choice, the branding of universities or the meaning of consumption need to be unpacked and carefully analysed. After reading this collection it is likely that academics will have to start rethinking many of their assumptions about the institutions they inhabit.

Roger Brown's and Nick Foskett's chapters on government policy provide excellent overviews of the workings of what is a highly politicised quasi-market in higher education. In different ways the contributions of Ronald Barnett, Paul Gibbs and Lewis Elton are devoted towards an exploration of the potential for a constructive form of accommodation to the marketisation of universities. Barnett is relatively upbeat about this development and takes the view that 'the presence of the market may lead to a student taking a heightened interest in his or her learning'. The chapters by Morrish and Sauntson, Chapleo and Jones-Devitt and Samiei provide important insights into the workings of the new rituals associated with the market in higher education. McCaig's analysis of the marketing of wider participation raises questions about its relation to student choice. Through an analysis of the conceptual distinction between consumer, customer and client, Felix Maringe offers a compelling critique of the consumer metaphor. Katherine Nielsen engages with a problem rarely discussed, the tensions raised by the attempt to sell education as a form of authentic (tourist) experience.

The focus of section 3 is the student. Johan Nordensvärd outlines and advocates a citizenship perspective on the status of students and counterposes it to the consumer model. Mike Neary and Andy Hagyard advocate a more radical approach – what they call the pedagogy of excess – towards the transformation of student life. In an important phenomenological study of the management of student desires, Helen Haywood, Rebecca Jenkins and Mike Molesworth look at the way that higher education fuels consumer fantasy. Williams offers a disturbing analysis of the way in which the media associates education with an instrumentalist ethos. The media self-consciously mobilises students and parents to adopt the role of the complaining consumer focusing their anger at the university. The question of student choice is forcefully addressed by Nixon, Scullion and Molesworth. Their study calls into question the numerous pedagogic claims made on behalf of student choice. They suggest that the pursuit of student choice tends to avoid experimentation and encourages conservative attitudes towards learning. Socrates would have agreed and perhaps it would help if higher education policy makers acquainted themselves with his dialogues.

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Section 1

Marketisation of higher education in context

Chapter 2

The march of the market

Roger Brown

It appears that everywhere there is a trend towards 'marketisation' (Williams 1995). Higher education systems are being liberalised, with private 'for profit' providers entering and competing with publicly funded and private 'not for profit' ones. Tuition fees are being introduced or raised so that students and their families are bearing an increasing share of the costs of teaching. Maintenance grants are being supplemented with, or replaced by, loans. Institutional rankings and other aids to consumer choice are proliferating whilst universities and colleges devote increasing resources and energy to marketing and branding. In short, the market is coming to dominate what Burton Clark many years ago called the 'triangle of coordination' (Clark 1983), at the expense of the academy and the state.

This chapter discusses, on the basis of existing scholarship, what is meant by marketisation; distinguishes marketisation from 'privatisation'; describes the principal features of a higher education market; and considers how far a number of developed higher education systems have moved down the market route. For this purpose, the chapter distinguishes between systems that already incorporate some market features, and those still in the process of acquiring them. It should be noted that it does not discuss the implications or make recommendations: the aim is rather to indicate some of the general issues with marketisation as a backdrop for the rest of the book (for such a discussion, see Brown 2010).

The meaning of marketisation

In economic theory, a market is a means of social coordination whereby the supply and demand for a good or service are balanced through the price mechanism. Consumers choose between the alternatives on offer on the basis of perceived suitability for them (price, quality, availability). It is often held that organising economic relations on these lines represents the best use of society's resources. Markets provide both greater 'static efficiency' (the ratio of outputs to inputs at any point in time) and greater 'dynamic efficiency' (sustaining a higher rate of growth over time through product and process innovation and better management of resources) than any alternative. In particular, markets are often contrasted favourably with 'command economies', where both prices and quantities are controlled by the state.

In relation to student education, a 'pure' market would have the following main features:

1 legally autonomous institutions
2 little or no regulation of market entry (hence plenty of market competition including from private and 'for profit' providers)
3 no regulatory limits on the prices charged (fees) or the numbers enrolled
4 the cost of teaching met entirely through fees which would approximate to average costs
5 the cost of fees met from users' (students and their families) own resources: there would be no subsidies from the taxpayer
6 users would decide what, where and how to study on the basis of effective (valid, reliable and accessible) information about the price, quality and availability of relevant subjects, programmes and providers.

The fact that no developed system has all of these characteristics suggests that there may be limitations on the theory of markets as applied to higher education. The main ones include:

1 the fact that higher education confers both collective (public) and individual (private) benefits. Because of the risk of under-supply, the provision of first cycle education (including student living costs) and academic research are subsidised in most systems
2 because of the key role which higher education plays as an accreditor of knowledge, especially the knowledge required for the practice of the professions, market entry and competition are also regulated in most systems
3 because of the difficulties of obtaining and disseminating proper information about quality, there is a case for a mixed system of regulation, with important roles for the state and the academy, as indeed is the case in most systems
4 further problems arise with the amount of product differentiation and the difficulty which institutions face, by virtue of the length of the product life cycle, in moving rapidly in response to market signals.

Marketisation and privatisation

Before looking more closely at the main features of marketisation as it applies to higher education, it may be worth distinguishing marketisation from 'privatisation', the penetration of private capital, ownership and influence into what may previously have been publicly owned and funded entities and activities. Conceptually, the two are distinct, and indeed the term 'quasi-markets' has been coined (Le Grand and Bartlett 1993) to describe the organisation of the supply of services on market lines where very little or no private capital is involved, the public funding of academic research being a case in point. In practice, however, marketisation will usually involve some degree of privatisation. This reflects the fact that marketisation and privatisation have common origins, the underlying beliefs of which were usefully summarised by the late Peter Self:

> The 'free market' and market-led growth are the principal and overwhelmingly the most important sources of wealth; large incentives are necessary to market efficiency; the wealth created by a free market will trickle down from the successful to benefit all members of society; the market is intrinsically more efficient than government; to gain greater 'efficiency', government should be redesigned according to market methods and incentives.
>
> (Self, 1999: 26–28)[1]

Characteristics of higher education markets

How then should we recognise the marketisation of higher education? The following key indicators are suggested:

1 institutional autonomy
2 institutional competition
3 price
4 information.

Institutional autonomy

The issue here is the freedom that institutions have to determine their mission, subjects, programmes, awards, fees (if any), admissions, student numbers, staff numbers, terms and conditions etc. In other words, the freedom to specify the product and to procure and deploy the resources to deliver it.

In the more marketised systems, institutions enjoy a considerable degree of autonomy in most or all of these respects. In others, they may either not be legally autonomous or they may be autonomous but still be subject to all sorts of controls, for example over the introduction of new subjects or programmes. In some Continental European systems staff remain civil servants employed by the education ministry. Restraints also continue over such matters as carrying over unspent moneys from one financial year to the next.

Institutional competition

The issue here is the amount of competition between institutions for students, revenue and status. This in turn points to a number of market requirements:

1 relative ease of market entry, with regulation being used to facilitate competition and provide basic consumer safeguards rather than to constrain competition that could threaten standards

2 genuine possibilities of student choice: students have a real choice of what, where and how to study. This is not only a function of overall system policy. It can also be a matter of geography (in larger countries, students may have greater difficulty in travelling to study) and funding (if there is limited public support for the costs of courses and living costs, many students will be constrained to attend a local institution)
3 institutional funding should be linked to numbers of enrolments, providing institutions with incentives to recruit
4 an absence of externally imposed limits on the numbers or categories of students that individual institutions can enrol.

Together, these requirements create conditions for genuine competition between institutions, which is reinforced by competition on price (see below).

Public and private institutions

Competition can of course include competition from private, including 'for profit', institutions. In principle, there are two distinctions that can be made:

1 between 'public' and 'private' institutions
2 between 'not for profit' and 'for profit' institutions.

Unfortunately, both distinctions turn out to be rather less helpful when closely analysed.

The usual basis for the first distinction is the source of ownership and control. But even where this is clear, there is also the question of funding. In the more marketised systems both public and private institutions receive both public and private funding. This then leads to the broader issue of accountability because funding implies some degree of accountability even if the mechanisms for this are not always clear. Large and prestigious institutions like the Ivy League universities and colleges in the US are effectively public institutions, even if they sometimes behave more like multinational corporations.

The 'for profit'/'not for profit' distinction also turns out to be less helpful than it appears. Certainly in theory there is a clear distinction between an organisation, the first claim on whose trading surplus lies with its owners (the proprietor and/or shareholders), and one that is under no such constraint. But in practice 'not for profit' universities and colleges in marketised systems often behave in ways indistinguishable from 'for profit' ones, cutting out less sustainable programmes or subjects, investing in various non-core operations and engaging in all sorts of revenue-raising activities (Weisbrod 1988). This growing commercialisation is indeed one of the challenges that marketisation and privatisation together offer to the long-term autonomy and health of higher education.

Price

There are several variables here, namely:

1 whether there is a tuition fee
2 whether the fee covers a significant proportion of the costs of provision
3 whether institutions are able to charge what they like and/or whether there are either controls or associated conditions (or both) (in the UK institutions wishing to charge the full permitted fee must offer bursaries and submit a widening participation plan to a special regulator)
4 whether and to what extent the fee is subsidised, for example through the availability of an income contingent loan
5 whether students' living costs are subsidised in any way.

Information

The issue here is whether students have access to information that assists them in their choice of programmes and/or institutions (and whether they use it). This leads on to the more general question of how, in a marketised system, quality can be protected.

According to market theory, quality is protected automatically as consumers use the available information to select the product that is most suitable for them: suppliers that do not provide goods that are suitable go out of business. In higher education the difficulty is that the product is not visible and the opportunities for repeat purchases are limited (Cave *et al.* 1992).

This does not of course stop either commercial publishers or government agencies from producing information to guide students and funders in the form of institutional rankings and 'league tables'. There is a vast literature on this subject, so vast indeed that (at least without going mad) no one can possibly have read everything that has been written (for useful recent summaries, see Dill and Soo 2005; Van Dyke 2005; Yorke and Longden 2005; Usher and Savino 2006; Marginson 2007; Salmi and Saroyan 2007; Centre for Research and Information in Higher Education *et al.* 2008; Fidler and Parsons 2008; Hazelkorn 2008; Kivisto and Holtta 2008; Kehm and Stensaker 2009). From these and other writings it seems clear that the main limitations on rankings and league tables as guides to quality include:

1 lack of transparency especially in how indicators/scores are weighted
2 a focus on input indicators (staff and student qualifications, resourcing) when it is what institutions do with those inputs that matters
3 a tendency to focus on full-time, undergraduate provision and institutions at the expense of specialist, postgraduate, small and predominantly part-time providers
4 the ranking of institutions as if they all had the same student intakes, resources, etc. More generally, the creation of the impression that some

institutions are better than others when in a diverse, mass system there can be no one 'best university' or single view of quality. League tables indeed strengthen the market position of institutions that are already prestigious and well funded, at the expense of those that may be seeking to build reputation by attending to the needs of students and employers
5 league tables also reinforce the tendency to see higher education as a product to be consumed rather than an opportunity to be experienced
6 by encouraging institutions to game play, they reinforce another market tendency, that of using their resources to improve their attractiveness instead of using them to improve quality. Volkwein and Sweitzer (2006: 145) add that since institutions only change slowly, annual surveys should be discouraged.

In short, rankings misrepresent the work of universities and colleges in the interest of selling newspapers (Brown 2006).[2]

A marketised system

This discussion suggests that a fully marketised system of student education would be one where:

1 there is a significant amount of competition between institutions for students, reflecting the requirements listed earlier, including a significant amount of choice for students and other funders about where to put their 'vote'
2 tuition fees exist and represent a significant share of the cost of teaching
3 private support for those costs represents a significant share of institutional funding.

As we have already seen, research funding is more often a quasi-market where the state uses its monopsonistic position to increase the proportion of funds that are the subject of competition between institutions (for a useful recent summary, see Salmi 2009).

Survey of systems

Against this background, it is suggested that developed higher education systems can be broadly divided into two groups:

1 those that already incorporate a significant degree of marketisation ('marketised systems')
2 those where marketisation has still to develop ('marketising systems').

The remainder of this chapter discusses the evolution of markets in the first group and the pressures for marketisation in the second.

Marketised systems

The United States is often seen as the closest there is to a marketised system, given that no major system is fully marketised. US institutions have a high degree of autonomy. There is a considerable amount of competition amongst a diverse range of institutions. This reflects a liberal entry regime and means that, except in remote locations, students have a wide range of choices. There is a substantial and significant private sector consisting of both 'not for profit' and 'for profit' universities and colleges. Institutions compete on tuition which typically represents about half of the cost of teaching: the balance is made up of institutions' own funds together with state appropriations (for public institutions) and donations (for private ones). There are state and institutional subsidies for both tuition and living costs. Institutions spend a considerable amount of effort on marketing and branding, the US being the home of institutional rankings and league tables. There is also strong competition for federal research funds and donations. The proportion of private revenue to institutions is very high as is the level of expenditure per student.

The United Kingdom has moved down the American path. Again, there is considerable competition for both students and research funds amongst a wide range of autonomous institutions. Market entry has been liberalised so that a small number of private providers now have powers to award their own taught degrees (Bachelor's and Master's) and there is one private university. Tuition fees were first introduced in 1998 and now represent nearly 40 per cent of institutions' income for teaching, the rest being from state grants. There are state and institutional subsidies for students. Private fundraising for institutional development is still in its infancy but the proportion of private income has been increasing and in 2005 stood at 33 per cent (the US figure is 65 per cent; the OECD average is 27 per cent – OECD 2008: 253).

Australia is in a broadly similar position to the UK though competition for research funding is more recent. Other countries with a significant degree of marketisation include Canada and New Zealand. Amongst the Continental European systems, the Netherlands has a significant degree of competition for both students and research funds. In 2007, tuition fees represented 6 per cent of university income in the research universities and 18 per cent in the Universities of Applied Science (UAS); the share of third party (non-governmental) revenue reached 28 per cent in the universities and 14 per cent in the UAS (Jongbloed 2010).

Japan (and Korea) stand somewhat apart from this. Japan has a substantial private sector (78 per cent of institutions and 76 per cent of students) (Huang 2010) and a high level of private expenditure on both teaching and student support. Both private and public institutions charge fees: traditionally, the private sector has charged more but some convergence is now taking place. However this marketisation has only been gradual, as a number of recent reforms attest. These include the incorporation of national and public universities (including a Global Centres of Excellence Programme launched in 2007), the incorporation of national and public universities, the ending of civil servant status for staff in the national and public sectors, the introduction of company or corporation universities, and evaluation of teaching quality. There have also been reforms to university governance to strengthen governing bodies and weaken faculty meetings. There are some parallels here with the situation in Continental Europe which we shall look at shortly.

Before doing so, it may be worth emphasising that even in the marketised systems state funding and regulation play a crucial role in determining the scale, character and direction of the provision. Even in the US, public sources represent a third of expenditure on institutions (this is an average figure so many institutions rely much more heavily on the state). The state's role in research funding is even greater. The state determines and implements the criteria for market entry and underpins the academic regulatory framework by virtue of the fact that only students attending institutions accredited by one of the regional accrediting commissions can receive federal financial support.

Marketising systems

Before considering a number of systems that are introducing some degree of marketisation, it may be worth reflecting on the causes. As with the more marketised systems, these are a mixture of ideology and pragmatics.

Gareth Williams's 1995 summary of the beliefs that underlie the introduction of market approaches has not yet been bettered:

> that efficiency is increased when governments buy academic services from producers, or subsidise students to buy them, rather than supplying them directly, or indirectly through subsidy of institutions;
>
> that as enrolments rise, the private sector must relieve governments of some of the cost burden if acceptable quality is to be obtained;
>
> that many of the benefits of higher education accrue to private individuals, so criteria of both efficiency and equity are served as students or their families make some contribution towards the costs of obtaining the benefits
>
> (Williams 1995: 179; cf. Goedegebuure *et al.* 1994: 323–4)

Ideologically, there is a strong belief on the part of many governments and policy makers that market competition makes institutions more efficient and responsive to stakeholders. Pragmatically, marketisation (and privatisation) may be the only way, given the difficulties of cutting costs, of sustaining an expanded higher education if quality is to be protected.[3] The issue is the balance between market and 'non-market' (Wolf 1993) coordination and how society can gain the benefits of competition without the detriments.[4]

A further, more recent factor has been the desire on the part of the European Union to 'modernise' European higher education systems to enable them to make the maximum contribution to the development of their societies (and compete with the most prestigious systems worldwide), a process encapsulated in the Lisbon Declaration but also one of the drivers behind the Bologna Process.[5] As a result, most of the Continental European countries are introducing some elements of marketisation into their higher education systems.

Germany is a good example. Over the past decade, German universities have gradually gained more autonomy in financial, organisational and staffing matters. They are able to select their students and some Länder (in Germany, higher education is basically a Land responsibility) have introduced tuition fees. Another important development is the Excellence Initiative. This promotes outstanding science and research in Germany in order to raise its visibility in the international scientific community. Organised by the German Research Council and the German Council of Science and Humanities, through a peer review process with international experts, the Excellence Competition in 2006/7 selected excellent projects in three areas: 39 Graduate Schools, 37 Clusters of Excellence and nine Institutional Strategies. The Federal Government and the Länder will provide 1.9bn Euros from 2007–2011 and a further 2.7bn Euros thereafter (Hartwig 2010).

In some other European countries the move towards the market has been more limited. The Nordic countries are distinguished by their strong public (and limited private) support for higher education, both institutions and students. Finland is a good case study (Holtta *et al.* 2010). The right of institutions to charge fees has recently been accepted but only for students from outside the European Economic Area (established between the member states of the European Free Trade Association, the European Community and the European Union). There is limited competition for students. There is practically no freedom of entry for new suppliers. There is some competition for research funding. There has been some move towards granting institutions greater autonomy and finance. But, as in many Continental European countries, ministry approval is needed for the introduction of new subjects or courses, reflecting the important role of central forecasts of labour market needs that provide the context for individually negotiated performance agreements between institutions and the government (in other words, resource allocation is driven not by student demand but by labour market forecasts). Similarly, and again as in many other Continental European countries as well as Japan, academic staff are civil servants though new legislation will change this and give institutions some discretion in determining salaries and terms and conditions. The role of the state in regulating higher education in Finland is thus strong and likely to remain so.

Elsewhere in Europe, marketisation is proceeding in the form of two steps in a market direction, one step back. Italy and Portugal are good examples. In Italy greater autonomy has been given to institutions and there has been greater pressure on them to increase non-state funding and compete for students, research funds and scholars. However, so far the effects have been limited, partly owing to the absence of sufficient state financial support (so that reforms have been implemented without extra financial resources) and partly because of academic resistance (Rostan and Viara 2009). In Portugal there has been an increase in competition between institutions but also a strengthening of regulation, for example in how the Bologna Process has been implemented and in quality evaluation. Even where new legal possibilities were created for institutions, such as public foundation status, constraints were also introduced (Teixeira and Amaral 2010).[6]

It would be good to think that this somewhat crabwise approach reflects the overall ambivalence of the literature on the impact of marketisation to date (Brown 2010). It is more likely to be a product of three factors:

1 a strong belief in equity and an avoidance of inequalities between different categories of institutions and students, except where these can be justified as, for example, through the creation of separate sectors of higher education with separate and distinctive missions
2 an inability to see how the various aspects of marketisation are linked, and the need for an integrated, coherent and consistent strategy which is pursued with tenacity over time if the benefits are to be secured
3 the strength of academic resistance, especially at professor/head of department level, and the relative weakness of university heads and governing bodies.

It is also the case, at least for the Nordic countries, that there are good grounds for caution.

As we have seen, one of the drivers of marketisation in Europe has been the desire to 'catch up' with the American and British systems, by making universities more autonomous and less reliant on state funding. One of the measures is the 'performance' of the various systems in the international university rankings, where the top positions in the Shanghai Jiao Tong (SJT) University and Times Higher QS university rankings are dominated by the American and British institutions. However, as John Gerritsen (2008) has pointed out, if you take the number of Top 500 (SJT) universities relative to population size, four of the top ten systems are Nordic: Sweden (1st), Finland (3rd), Norway (5th) and Denmark (8th). Whilst the US produces one top university for every 1.9 million people, Sweden does so for every 822,000.[7]

Conclusion

The marketisation of higher education is a complex process, with every major system falling somewhere between the market and non-market extremes. Nevertheless there is a clear international trend towards introducing greater competition, including price competition, into the provision of student education and, as a quasi-market, into the supply of academic research. Even the Nordic countries, bastions of public support for a non-market system, are beginning to introduce some market features. Whether the recent events in the financial markets, and the clear evidence of market failure even in the supply of conventional services to which the theory of markets is best suited, will slow or reverse this trend, can only be a matter of conjecture.

Two concluding comments can be offered.

First, whilst the main drivers of marketisation include the need to accommodate larger numbers of students without compromising on quality, we should not underestimate the influence of the various rankings and league tables and the way in which these reinforce the pressures for the pursuit of prestige within the academy (Brewer *et al.* 2002; Calhoun 2006; Brown submitted for review). Deem *et al.* (2008) draw attention to the way in which these are driving national strategies for higher education in Europe and Asia as they have long driven institutional strategies in the US.

Second, we should not overlook the key role of the state in determining the extent and the pace of marketisation. Roger Geiger recently pointed out that federal student aid is now the largest source of revenue for US higher education (Geiger 2009). This trend to fund institutions via the student began with the Reagan reforms of funding in the 1980s which reflected neo-liberal beliefs in the power of the market and the inutility of state intervention. It seems unlikely that there will be any serious reversal of the 'march of the market' until these beliefs have given way to a more socially responsible perspective. This takes us not only beyond the scope of this chapter but even beyond the scope of this book.[8]

Notes

1 Belfield and Levin (2002) distinguish between 'external' and 'internal' privatisation, where external privatisation refers to the market entry of privately owned providers whilst internal privatisation refers to the increased contribution of private forces to institutional revenues.

2 It is becoming increasingly clear that one of the main impacts of rankings is upon institutional managers, and especially institutional heads (see Hazelkorn 2008; Volkwein and Grunig 2005) even though, as Marginson (2007: 5–6) and others have pointed out, rankings also take judgements of quality out of the hands of the academy.

3 There is an extensive debate in the literature about whether universities can reduce costs without damaging quality. On the one hand, it is said that cost reduction is difficult because of the customised nature of the 'product' (Baumol *et al.* 1989; cf. Archibald and Feldman 2008). On the other hand, it is argued that institutions could make better use of modern communications technology to educate as well or better whilst containing or reducing costs (see, for example, Vedder 2004). In a recent issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* Vedder is quoted as saying: 'With the exception of – *possible* exception of – prostitution, I don't know any other profession that's had no productivity advance in 2,500 years' (Parry 2009: speaker's emphasis). Vedder goes on to advocate online education as the application of technology to lower rather than add to costs.

4 In a review of the literature, Brown (2010) finds that marketisation is generally held to increase institutional efficiency and responsiveness, increasing user satisfaction and making the resources allocated to higher education go further. The main detriments are seen to be increased stratification (both of institutions and of the social groups served), reduced diversity at institutional level, reduced quality and value for money,

and increased intra-institutional differentiation (activities, structures, personnel). Marketisation also poses a threat to the implicit 'contract' between higher education and society whereby institutions enjoy certain privileges (such as academic freedom) in return for producing valued public goods.

5 The Director-General for Education and Culture at the European Commission was quoted in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* recently to the effect that she would like to see European universities securing more private financing, including increased tuition, and become less reliant on government support: 'we still have countries where universities are strongly controlled and regulated by the state, which doesn't necessarily help competitiveness' (McMurtrie 2009).

6 This ambivalence towards liberalisation is not however confined to Europe or Asia: 'public universities hear time and time again from both elected public officials and governing board members that they desire a more market-focused, cost-effective, and competitive paradigm for the university. Yet these are the first people to hold up their hand to halt the changes necessary to respond to the marketplace' (Duderstadt *et al.* 2003: 98).

7 It is interesting to note that six of Gerritsen's ten countries – Sweden, New Zealand, Switzerland, Norway, Austria and Australia – were also in the top ten for levels of spending on educational core services per tertiary student in 2005 (OECD 2008: table B1.1b). New Zealand, Switzerland, Austria and Australia were also amongst the seven OECD countries, for which we have data, that spent above the country mean on educational institutions per student for all services relative to GDP per capita. In other words, their propensity to spend on teaching is relatively high.

8 Arthur Hauptman (2001: 93, 97) refers to Nicholas Lemann's (1998) description of the 'new American consensus', a consensus focused on the primacy of suburban, middle class interests, 'government of, by and for the comfortable'.

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