CONDITIONED DEMAND AND PROFESSIONAL RESPONSE

GARY RHOADES*

Department of Education, University of California, Los Angeles, CA, U.S.A.

ABSTRACT

This article draws attention to two basic features of British higher education which may influence the workability of certain Leverhulme proposals. These are vertical integration and professionalism. It is suggested that a consideration of these is crucial given the nature of the Leverhulme strategy. Many of the Leverhulme proposals are grounded in assumptions about the behaviour of institutions and actors in British higher education. An examination of vertical integration and professionalism in the system indicates that such assumptions may be unfounded. The discussion focuses both on how the proposals themselves are shaped by the professionalism of British higher education, and on how the feasibility of the proposals may be affected by the system's vertical integration and professionalism. Both the basic proposals of Leverhulme as a whole as well as of the monographs on access, teachers and learning, and institutional change are examined. In concluding it is noted that the treatment of vertical integration and professionalism provide policy makers and reformers with important levers of control to grasp in the future.

Introduction

Systems of higher education are subject to a variety of stimuli, internal as well as external. In significant respects the nature of external demand itself is conditioned by the system of higher education. Moreover, external demands are reacted to and translated by institutional members in ways often not entirely consistent with the original demand. In part this is where the internal stimuli come into play. Not only the demand itself, but the response to it, is shaped by the system. Two features of higher education systems contribute to this – vertical integration and professionalism. To some extent virtually all systems of higher education are professional, vertically integrated systems. But this is particularly true in the case of the United Kingdom.

* The author is a Postdoctoral Research Scholar with the Comparative Higher Education Research Group at the UCLA Graduate School of Education.
In affecting demand and response in higher education these characteristics influence the operation of the higher education market. For they shape the activity of actors and institutions in the world of higher education. To the extent that reforms are grounded in assumptions about the actions and choices of actors in the higher education market and about how they will respond to certain incentives, an analysis of that system's vertical integration and professionalism can facilitate the formulation of more feasible and effective strategies and programs of reform. The Leverhulme strategies and proposals are so grounded. In fact, they bear what might be called an "American imprint". In the following pages some of the recommendations and strategies of the Leverhulme programme of study are considered in light of the vertical integration and professionalism of British higher education. There is a particular focus on the following volumes: Access to Higher Education, Professionalism and Flexibility in Learning, Accountability or Freedom for Teachers, and Agenda for Institutional Change in Higher Education.

Before moving to this detailed discussion the focus turns first to a brief, general treatment of the concepts of vertical integration, professionalism, and of the basic issues and recommendations of the Leverhulme programme.

VERTICAL INTEGRATION

In characterising systems of higher education as vertically integrated reference is to the relationship between a system of higher education and the systemic source of its input. The input is entering students. The major producer of students entering higher education is the secondary school system. Vertical integration, then, refers to the relationship between systems of secondary and higher education.

However, the concept of vertical integration is not to be confused with the notion of articulation. The latter tends to be interpreted as the linkage between sectors of education in terms of the matriculation of students from one stage to another. A system like that of the United Kingdom, in which the vast majority of secondary school leavers do not continue in full-time higher education, would be represented as a poorly articulated system lacking a smooth linkage between secondary and higher education (see Brock, 1981). Characteristic of a poorly articulated educational system is a major break between different levels of education, a situation in which by means of examinations or otherwise one level's output (students) is selected before being accepted as the next level's input. But this same system may be highly vertically integrated. And this is true in the case of the United Kingdom.

How can this be? Vertical integration refers to the influence higher education has on the output of secondary education by virtue of its influence on the structure, curricula, etc., of secondary school systems, its effect on the