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The 'Third Way' to widening participation and maintaining quality in higher education: lessons from the United Kingdom

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Abstract

This paper analyses higher education reform in relation to the 'knowledge' society and recent political frameworks developed by governments in response to sociopolitical and economic change. It argues that a wide range of countries have responded to forces associated with globalisation by adopting a 'third way' political approach, which lies mid-way between state collectivism and an unregulated market economy. On the one hand, this political approach promotes policies to support marketisation as the basis for a successful economy. On the other hand, the most corrosive effects of market forces are contained through state regulation and state support for disadvantaged groups. This 'dual' approach is reflected in government reform in higher education, particularly around issues of quality and participation. Presenting the reform of higher education in Britain as a case study, the paper outlines the important financial and other support measures devised by the New Labour government to distribute opportunities for study more evenly across society. The quality assurance measures, which have restructured the higher education terrain within a quasi-marketised framework, at the same time compel universities to compete against other universities for funding and status. This paper illustrates how the institutionalisation of the quality assurance mechanisms inhibits the workings of measures aimed at widening participation in the system as a whole. It concludes that the implementation of the 'third way' approach to higher education reform, which implements policy mechanisms to temper some of the consequences of the marketisation of higher education *within* a quasi-market framework, serves to penalise the very institutions which recruit students with the greatest social and educational need. Interaction of the measures for widening participation and quality assurance is therefore likely

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to lead to a higher education system that is heavily stratified along the lines of prior educational and social disadvantage.

Introduction

Dramatic changes in society and the economy, as well as the political frameworks developed by governments in response to forces associated with globalisation, are likely to have a major impact on the reform of higher education systems internationally. One characteristic of the new global economy is the emergence of the 'knowledge' or 'information' society, a term which refers to the shift from the production of material goods to information-processing activities in advanced capitalist societies (Castells, 1996). The knowledge society has not only given rise to an increased reliance on science-based production and continuous technological innovation, but has also led to a demand for workers with multiple and transferable skills to engage with new and complex tasks and technologies (Leadbeater, 2000). In this context, there is the expectation that higher education will contribute to enhancing the nation state's competitive edge in the global marketplace by developing innovations in knowledge and technology and producing the new 'smart' workers, who will take up key positions in the knowledge economy (see Gibbons *et al*, 1994).

The perceived relationship between investment in higher education and national economic advantage has led to increased state intervention in higher education in two main areas. First, in order to enhance their national skills base, governments have developed policies to increase the proportion of citizens attending higher education. Mass systems of higher education have been constructed and mechanisms have been developed to facilitate the access of those socioeconomic and ethnic minority groups which have been historically excluded from post-secondary education. Second, governments have attempted to monitor and enhance the 'quality' of higher education by introducing new forms of measurement to assess institutional performance, and by creating new relations of accountability between universities and external stakeholders.

Higher education reform must also be analysed in relation to the efforts of nation states (including France, the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, South Africa and New Zealand), to develop a political approach that occupies a middle ground between centralised state collectivism and a deregulated market economy (Rose, 1999). This centre-left approach has been characterised by political commentators as a renewed form of social democracy. Giddens, for example, has presented this new approach as a political framework of policy-making that 'seeks to adapt social democracy to a world that has changed fundamentally over the past two or three decades' (Giddens, 1998, p. 26). What is distinctive about this new form of politics is its 'dual' nature. On the one hand, policies of marketisation are adopted as a basis for a successful economy and concerted efforts are made to create market relations between and across various sites in society, including sectors such as higher education, which were previously insulated from direct contact with market forces (Rose, 1999). On the other hand, 'equity' and 'social justice' policies are developed to deflect the most corrosive effects of market forces through state

regulation and state support for the most vulnerable groups in society (Hirst, 1999). Reform strategies in higher education are thus likely to reflect both the 'marketisation' as well as the 'equity' strands of the 'third way' political frameworks.

While government efforts at reform in school education have been extensively reviewed, there is relatively little analysis of higher education reform in relation to changing national and global economic, social and political frameworks. Research is generally confined to descriptive or technical accounts of policy which detach universities from the social consequences of change in higher education. This paper provides an alternative to these approaches by presenting a case study of higher education reform in the United Kingdom. It assesses the extent to which policy mechanisms associated with widening participation and quality relate to the 'knowledge' society and reflect the 'equity' and 'marketisation' strands of the New Labour government's third way political programme. More importantly, the paper analyses the extent to which such policy mechanisms are likely to contribute to a more inclusive system of higher education.

The British case study is useful and relevant in an international context for at least two reasons. First, higher education reform in Britain closely follows, in rhetoric and practice, the guiding principles of the third way. Britain's 'third way' is the most highly developed and publicly articulated example of the centre-left political models adopted by governments positioning themselves between rampant free market ideology and state collectivism. Second, while higher education reform in Britain reflects the aim of almost all governments across the political spectrum to increase participation at the same time as assuring quality, British policy mechanisms are highly divergent. The measures chosen to widen participation draw on both 'social justice' and economic arguments and are highly innovative. The quality framework, on the other hand, has been constructed almost entirely within the discourse and logic of the market and has been referred to by at least one international commentator as a 'crude' measure to ensure compliance with state directives (see Cloete, 1997). An analysis of the implementation and the interaction of quality and participation measures in the United Kingdom is therefore likely to lead to important insights which may be applicable to other national contexts.

In the first part of this paper, I document the policy rationales and mechanisms associated with widening participation and enhancing quality in the context of the knowledge society and Britain's third way political framework. I then document the extent to which such policy mechanisms are likely to encourage the development of a more inclusive system of higher education. In the final section of the paper, I draw on the case study of reform in British higher education to highlight policy implications and insights that may be useful for higher education systems internationally.

New Labour, the Third Way and Higher Education Reform

New Labour's election victory in May 1997 heralded a heightened expectation of far-reaching change in all spheres of society. Education, including higher education

and its contribution to lifelong learning, was hailed by New Labour as 'the key to economic success, social cohesion and active citizenship' (Labour Party, 1996, p. 2). New Labour's approach to policy reform is emblematic of its 'third way' political programme, which attempts to move beyond the traditional fault lines of the 'old left' and 'new right' (see Giddens, 1998, 2000). On one hand, this assumes a 'marketisation' approach to social policy through fiscal restraint, a reduction in the size of the public sector and the creation of market relations between and across various sites in society. On the other hand, a commitment to temper market forces in the interests of reducing unacceptable inequalities in power and wealth is assumed. Referred to by Giddens (2000) as the actions of a 'social investment' state, New Labour's policy initiatives are designed to encourage a more equitable distribution of study and employment opportunities through targeted state support and incentives.

The New Labour government was compelled to respond to the recommendations of a major review of higher education soon after it came to office. The National Commission of Inquiry into Higher Education (NCIHE) (hereafter referred to as the Dearing Commission) had been commissioned by the previous Conservative government. The Dearing Commission was charged with the task of recommending how 'the purposes, shape, structure, size and funding of higher education, including support for students should develop to meet the needs of the United Kingdom over the next twenty years' (NCIHE, 1997, p. 3). As an interim response to the Dearing Report, New Labour announced new student funding arrangements in July 1997 (to be discussed in subsequent sections of the paper). In 1998, the Government published its response to other recommendations contained in the Dearing Report in a publication entitled *Higher Education for the 21st Century: Response to the Dearing Report* (hereafter referred to as *Higher Education for the 21st Century).* This document was published in parallel with a Green Paper titled *The Learning Age: A Renaissance for a New Britain* (hereafter referred to as *The Learning Age),* which contained a substantial section on higher education.

More recently, the Secretary of State for Education, David Blunkett, delivered what was hailed as a landmark speech on higher education at Greenwich University. This speech has been compared in terms of policy significance to the one delivered by a government minister in 1965, which established the binary divide in British higher education. Given the paucity of research in higher education policy, I will draw primarily on the above-mentioned government policy documents, the text of David Blunkett's speech and selected press releases and funding council publications, which collectively contain a comprehensive record of New Labour's approach to higher education reform. In the following sections of this paper I will analyse policies around widening participation and quality in the context of the general principles associated with the third way.

Widening Participation for Economic Prosperity and Social Inclusion

Countries as far afield as Hong Kong (Cheng, 1996), the United States of America (Franzosa, 1996) and South Africa (Naidoo, 1998) have developed policies to widen

and increase participation as a response to national and international economic and social change associated with the rise of the knowledge society. In Australia, for example, the shift from an elite to a mass higher education system has been linked to the necessity for building a national skills base to enable newly developed technology and service industries to compete in the global arena (Yerbury, 1997). In rapidly developing countries such as those in South East Asia, governments are making concerted efforts to boost access to higher education so that rates of participation reach levels similar to those of the most advanced countries (Carnoy, 1994).

In Britain too, there is a growing recognition that skills and knowledge are critical in determining the ability of the nation to compete in the global economy. This is reflected in the Green Paper *The Learning Age*, which draws on the argument that knowledge and the pursuit of knowledge have become the key factors shaping a globally competitive economy. *The Learning Age* refers to this context as the 'information and knowledge-based revolution of the 21st century' and declares that Britain's success in this new economy needs to be built on a very different foundation from the past. Success in this new context is first dependent on technological improvement and innovation. For example, *The Learning Age* pronounces that Britain 'will succeed by transforming inventions into new wealth' (DFEE, 1998a, p. 10). Second, there is a need to generate a wide base of highly skilled, flexible, knowledge workers. According to the Green Paper, '*everyone* must have the opportunity to innovate and gain reward', as the 'most productive investment will be linked to the best educated and best trained workforces' (DFEE, 1998a, p. 10, italics in original). As higher education institutions are major contributors to the knowledge economy, one of the main concerns reflected in the documents is how existing institutions can 'transform' themselves to widen participation (DFEE, 1998a, p. 13). In particular, concerns have been raised regarding low levels of participation by students from disadvantaged social and educational backgrounds.

Reflecting the social justice strand of the third way, widening participation strategies in the United Kingdom have also been linked to the values of equity and social cohesion. Learning, for example, is expected to contribute to a sense of 'belonging, responsibility and identity' within communities. Higher education also offers a way out of 'dependency and low expectation' and 'is capable of overcoming a vicious circle of underachievement, self depreciation and petty crime' (DFEE, 1998a). In addition, economic and social justice arguments are integrated with the more traditional liberal values of higher education. According to *The Learning Age*, higher education offers *inter alia* the 'excitement and the opportunity for discovery', stimulates 'enquiring minds' and nourishes 'our souls'. The *Learning Age* also accords higher education with great emancipatory potential and argues that learning 'takes us in directions never expected, sometimes changing our lives' (DFEE, 1998a).

Strategies for Widening Participation

In general, New Labour's approach to widening participation envisages a larger role for state funding than that envisaged by the Conservative government (see for example DES, Scottish and Welsh Office, 1987). New Labour announced that it would lift the cap on student numbers imposed by the previous government, thus increasing the number of places in higher education. Funding levers have been developed to encourage institutions which, in the Dearing Committee's terms, demonstrate 'a commitment to widening participation' (NCIHE, 1997, p. 107). Extra funding, for example, has been set aside to promote partnerships and development work between universities, schools and further education colleges to promote access to groups of students traditionally excluded from higher education (DFEE, 1998b, p. 13). The Government has also proposed an increase in sub-degree provision to attract non-traditional groups of learners. A new two-year programme of study, the 'foundation degree', was announced by David Blunkett in his speech at Greenwich University, with half a million places to be introduced over the next ten years (Blunkett, 2000, para 41). Funds are also available to support institutions which recruit and retain groups of students who have been traditionally excluded from higher education. In addition to receiving premiums for part-time and mature students, institutions will also receive new student-related additional funding for disabled and young full-time undergraduate entrants from disadvantaged backgrounds (HEFCE, 1998). The Government has also set up mechanisms to assess and monitor the effects of the various policies designed to encourage the development of a more inclusive system of higher education. Such mechanisms include performance indicators for widening participation developed by the funding councils (HEFCE, 1999a).

The highly controversial changes introduced by New Labour to the student financial support system have also been presented as a strategy to promote inclusion. New Labour has asserted that the 1998 Teaching and Higher Education Act (Part 11), which abolished student awards for support and maintenance and introduced contributions towards tuition fees, will bridge the deep divide between those who benefit most from higher education and those who benefit least. The government has argued that the previous system of full public support for tuition fees and maintenance, to which the Labour Party had historically subscribed, did not facilitate access and in fact failed to transform the socioeconomic mix of the student intake (Blunkett, 2000). New Labour has also indicated that savings from the new student funding arrangements will be used to provide financial support where it is most needed (DFEE, 1998c; DFEE, 2000). The Government has implemented various financial support measures including non-repayable bursaries for young students from disadvantaged backgrounds; a limited amount of support in the form of grants for lone parents with dependants; and 'access funds' to be distributed at the discretion of individual institutions. In the next section, I will analyse New Labour's rationale for the development of policy mechanisms designed to maintain quality in higher education.

The Quality Framework

The shift from elite to highly diverse mass systems and the increasing competition between national university systems to recruit international students and develop research 'products' for the knowledge society have resulted in increasing government concern over quality in higher education. Governments have sought to implement new forms of measurement to assess and enhance the performance of higher education institutions and ensure external accountability. In Australia, for example, measures of performance have been combined with financial incentives to encourage universities to contribute to the country's transition from being an exporter of primary goods to becoming a high-technology industrial nation (Pratt & Poole, 1999). In Singapore, quality measures have been applied to fulfil the state's development needs by ensuring that universities contribute to the development of an economy based on commercial services and technological sciences (Carnoy, 1994). Quality assurance mechanisms in the United Kingdom have reflected the 'marketisation' strand of the third way political programme and have been highly interventionist in forcing higher education institutions into the marketplace. The same may be said of the quality mechanisms in New Zealand (Marginson, 1997), South Africa (Cloete, 1997) and Australia (Meek & Wood, 1998).

While quality has been a recurring concern throughout much of the history of British higher education, dramatic shifts in approaches to maintaining quality were introduced by the Conservative government in the 1980s. Higher education, which had previously been relatively autonomous from direct economic influences, became increasingly tied to the logic of the market. Market relations were not merely generalised across higher education and other sites in society but were also constructed within the higher education sector itself (Avis, 1996; Funnell & Muller, 1991). The right to safeguard academic quality was removed from the ambit of the universities and placed under the control of external quasi-state funding agencies. In addition, quality assurance arrangements, in relation to both funding and research, were directly tied to funding. Based on competition between universities for a limited pool of money, a funding framework was introduced as a lever to enhance quality (Le Grande & Bartlett, 1993). From the mid-1980s, a policy of selectivity for research was introduced. Through this, support from the higher education funding bodies was selectively allocated between institutions, according to measures of research excellence. The research assessment exercise (RAE), which began in 1986, was set up to measure research quality on a numerical scale. In 1992, the funding councils were made statutorily responsible for maintaining teaching quality in all institutions that were publicly funded. Teaching quality assurance (TQA) was divided between 'quality audit'; the review of an institution's internal processes for maintaining academic quality carried out by the Higher Education Quality Council, and 'quality assessment'; an external review of the learning experiences and achievements of students in each subject, carried out by the funding councils.

Since coming to power, New Labour has strengthened crucial aspects of the quality framework. The present approach to quality continues to rely mainly on assessment carried out by external regulatory bodies using output indicators endorsed by the Government. The model of achieving excellence in research remains market-driven, with the underlying assumption that a competitive model in

which institutions bid against each other will enhance the quality of academic research. The research assessment exercise consists of a seven-point scale, ranging from '1' at the bottom to '5*' at the top. RAE ratings are translated into a funding scale. For example, departments rated '1' or '2' are awarded no research funds, while a rating of '5*' receives four times as much money as a rating of '3b'. The total for all departments is awarded to the institution as a block grant (HEFCE, 1999b, p. 3).

Here, the underlying assumption is that research excellence is enhanced and safeguarded by its concentration in a small number of universities. David Blunkett has argued that government support for research must be selective in order to 'retain world class university research in an increasingly competitive environment' (Blunkett, 2000). The Dearing Committee noted that the 1996 RAE resulted in five universities (out of 176 higher education institutions in the United Kingdom) in England receiving almost one third of the available research funding. The concentration of research in a few institutions is compounded by the funding methodology of the research councils, which award funds on a competitive tendering basis. In 1996, 50 percent of research council grants were awarded to individuals in a mere twelve universities (NCIHE, 1997, p. 41).

The quality assurance process for academic programmes developed by the New Labour government has subjected universities to a high degree of external scrutiny. Strong objections have been raised by significant sections of the academic community against components of the quality regime perceived to undermine the traditional role and functioning of higher education. Directly contracted by the funding councils, a single agency was set up in 1997 to carry out both academic audit and assessment: the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for Higher Education. In general, the QAA assesses the quality of programmes in each subject, including aspects such as curriculum design and student progression, and reviews each institution's internal processes for maintaining standards of awards and academic quality. The method combines self-assessment by the institution with visits by trained external assessors. Assessors award grades on a scale of one to four for each aspect, where four is the highest. Comments identifying good practice and areas for improvement are published in an assessment report. Where any aspect is graded '1', the institution must take action to remedy shortcomings as a condition of future funding (HEFCE, 1999b, p. 6). In addition, both experienced and inexperienced lecturers are required to gain formal accreditation of their professional skills through an external body, the newly established Institute for Teaching and Learning.

In addition to the procedures mentioned above, supposedly designed to measure and enhance quality by linking assessment directly to the public funding of higher education, a further level of accountability has been imposed on the higher education system through the development of a plethora of performance indicators. These indicators have been designed to improve the working of the higher education market by enabling the consumers of education to make judgements about the effectiveness of institutions. The Government has instructed the funding councils to develop indicators and benchmarks of performance for the higher education sector. The Performance Indicators Steering Group was established in 1998 with

membership drawn from government departments, funding councils and other representative bodies. The task of this group was to formulate performance indicators which provide a 'snapshot' of an institution's performance in specific areas including student progression, learning outcomes such as non-completion, and efficiency of learning and teaching (HEFCE Annual Report, 1999c). In a similar vein, the introduction of student contributions to tuition fees has been linked to an enhancement of quality. New Labour has argued that when individual students contribute financially to their education through 'investing' in student loans and tuition fees, they become 'critical consumers' with 'choice' and certain rights, hence re-enforcing the accountability of higher education providers (Blackstone, 1999).

The above sections have illustrated the rationales and policy mechanisms developed by the New Labour government to widen participation and ensure quality in the context of forces associated with globalisation and international trends in higher education. In the next part of the paper, I turn to an assessment of the policies mentioned above to determine the extent to which they are likely to lead to a more inclusive higher education system.

Policies for Inclusion or Exclusion?

New Labour's concern with equity and social justice is reflected in the policy changes that have occurred in relation to widening participation. The allocation of special funds for widening participation projects is likely to provide support for strategies initiated by institutions such as the University of Bradford (Goddard,2000a), and will hopefully encourage universities to bid for funds to implement high quality projects to recruit students that have traditionally been excluded from higher education. The extra funding, allocated to institutions in recognition of the additional resources needed to successfully teach students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds, is particularly welcome. While the performance indicators and targets for widening participation do not steer institutions directly towards widening participation through formula funding, or link widening participation to other measures such as quality, they are nevertheless welcomed because they place the development of a more inclusive system of higher education in the public domain. It is likely that such publicity will apply pressure on elite universities to be more attentive to the social backgrounds of their student constituency.

Changes in student funding arrangements, however, are likely to act as a disincentive to students from lower socioeconomic groups attending higher education. Recent research by Callender and Kemp (2000) has indicated that certain groups of students, especially those from the lowest socioeconomic groups and certain ethnic minority communities, are 'debt adverse'. While these students are the most reliant on financial support to attend higher education, they are the least likely to take out loans because they are concerned about borrowing and getting into debt. It is therefore open to question whether the financial support mechanisms targeted at these groups will be adequate to compensate for the loss of financial security provided by student grants. It is also questionable whether the Government will be able to resist the pressure from some universities to charge 'top-up' tuition fees. If

top-up fees were to be introduced, they would inevitably lead to greater elitism, regardless of additional funding mechanisms put in place by universities to 'soften' their impact.

The most significant barriers to developing a more inclusive system of higher education emerge with the implementation of the quality framework. Operating within a quasi-market framework, the quality machinery as a whole combines to apply pressure on universities to achieve a type of productivity which can be measured by quantifiable outputs such as the progression rate of students, the number of postgraduate students and the proportion of staff undertaking research who produce publications of 'good standing'. Such output-based numerical measures of quality are not set up to differentiate between different categories of students, different systems or the different means required to produce a successful 'outcome'. As such, the model is inevitably blind to social and educational factors generally associated with strategies for widening participation. The quality regime also demarcates the functions of research and teaching and accords greater status to research. While university status has always been dependent on research reputation, the RAE has resulted in a more explicit hierarchy associated with major differences in the allocation of resources (for example, see Kogan & Hanney, 2000). In offering incentives for academics to undertake more research, the RAE is likely to have a significant impact on the quality of teaching.

The logic of the policies developed to maintain and enhance quality, which require institutions to maximise research output and demonstrate student success and progression in the shortest time possible, mitigate against the development of a more inclusive higher education system in at least two ways. Institutions which have not traditionally included widening participation in their missions are unlikely to develop admission strategies to recruit students from under-represented groups. Analysis of student enrolment figures indicate that the Russel Group of universities, comprising elite universities such as Oxford, Cambridge, Warwick, Bristol and Imperial College, have failed to meet basic targets for widening participation set by the funding council for 1998/1999 (Goddard, 2000b). As I have shown in the context of South Africa (Naidoo, 1999), students from non-traditional constituencies are viewed by elite universities to be time and resource-intensive. Such students are therefore perceived to threaten institutional arrangements around core activities such as research, through which universities accrue academic status and financial resources. In addition, such students would be unlikely to enhance the institution's 'output' indicators. In the context of New Zealand, Marginson (1997) has also indicated that the marketisation of higher education has not resulted in universities becoming more accountable to the consumers of education or more responsive to student choice. Since the demand for places at elite universities far outstrips the number of places available, it is the elite higher education providers that 'choose' the student, rather than the other way around. In addition, in cases where there is great demand and no possibility of charging differential fees, higher education providers simply increase the 'price' of access in the form of raised entry requirements. The quality framework is therefore likely to lead to increased selectivity along the lines of prior educational achievement in high-status courses

and institutions, thus positioning widening participation even further away from the core mission of such institutions.

Second, the extensive machinery of quality assurance may result in an increasingly stratified university system by implementing an institutional framework likely to empower and disempower individuals and institutions largely on the basis of prior historical and social disadvantage. Geoffrey Copland, vice-chancellor of the University of Westminster and chair of the Coalition of Modern Universities, has indicated that new funding arrangements do not reward universities which recruit large numbers from the socioeconomic groups targeted by government in a battle for social inclusion (Copland, 2000). Instead, institutions absorbing students from groups that are traditionally excluded from higher education are likely to be financially penalised, particularly since the quality framework does not differentiate between categories of students with regard to social disadvantage and differences in prior educational attainment. While quality measures are presented as one of the main devices for drawing diverse institutions into a high quality and unified system, in reality, the impact will be to encourage the development of a university sector in which status and resources are likely to be inversely proportional to institutional and student disadvantage.

Conclusion

The case study of reform in British higher education has highlighted the relationship between higher education, the knowledge society and the political strategies developed by governments in response to forces associated with globalisation. Many governments, including that of Britain, have adopted a 'third way' sociopolitical approach which promotes the development of a market economy while containing the scope of market forces through state regulation and support. In Britain as elsewhere, this approach is reflected in government reform in higher education, particularly around issues of quality and participation. The case of the United Kingdom, where the market culture has been relatively highly developed, illustrates the potential of quality frameworks based on market mechanisms to inhibit the workings of equity measures. Policy incentives for widening participation in the United kingdom are tied to relatively small amounts of ear-marked funds, rather than attached to formula funding. Widening participation strategies are therefore not institutionalised within the system and are largely dependent on the will and motivation of those controlling admission policies. This has resulted in elite universities maintaining highly selective admissions criteria that function to exclude students from under-represented groups. The quality assurance framework, on the other hand, measures institutional performance against government-endorsed indicators and is linked directly to the block grant received by institutions from the state. Universities are therefore compelled to enter into competition with other institutions over quality, in order to win a substantial proportion of their total resources. In this way, the quality framework acts as a powerful and institutionalised policy steer which marginalises measures for widening participation.

One of the most important insights gained from the British case study is that the 'third way' approach to policy reform, through which policy mechanisms to

temper some of the consequences of the marketisation of higher education *within* a quasi-market framework are implemented, appears likely to lead to a higher education system that penalises the very institutions serving the students with the greatest prior educational and social disadvantages. The quality framework thus combines with the measures for widening participation to develop a highly stratified higher education system that may contribute to reproducing the 'unacceptable' inequalities in wealth and status that social democratic governments are seeking to eradicate.

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