

# *Education Across Borders: What is Appropriate?*

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## *The Regionalisation and Internationalisation of HE*

Thank you for inviting me to speak to this conference. I am delighted that Professor O'Shea is chairing this session because we were close colleagues during some exciting years at the Open University in the mid-nineties. It is a pleasure to be back in Edinburgh, a city that I began visiting regularly a dozen years ago. In view of the subject of this conference, namely the internationalisation of UK education, I should recall it was the regionalisation of UK higher education that increased the frequency of my travel to Edinburgh from 1992 onwards.

Those familiar with UK higher education will recall that one of the central features of the major reform of higher education that this country carried out in 1992 was the introduction of federal governance and funding arrangements. Before 1992 higher education was organised nationally on unitary lines. The reform created separate funding councils in England, Scotland and Wales, with special arrangements for Northern Ireland. At that time I was the vice-chancellor of the Open University, for which these new arrangements were of considerable import. The OU operated throughout the UK and benefited greatly from the economies of scale and the commonalities of scope made possible by this national remit. We were eager to maintain these advantages but also to be responsive institutional citizens in each home country.

From my experience of nearly twenty years as a university administrator in three Canadian provinces I realised, as many British academics and civil servants did not seem to realise, that the dynamics of

federalism would lead quickly to significant divergences in policy between one jurisdiction and another. This is only natural. After all, why devolve power if you don't expect people to use it?

Guided by Professor David Murray, a clear-thinking Scot who held the Chair of Government at the OU and was then pro-vice-chancellor, we negotiated for the OU the best of both worlds. We arranged for the University to be named as eligible for funding by each of the country funding councils. Indeed, I believe the OU was the only university mentioned by name in the legislation creating the Scottish and Welsh funding councils. However, we also secured an arrangement whereby, at least to start with, the English funding council would fund the OU for its activities throughout the UK.

In the event, as my Canadian experience had taught me would happen, HE policies diverged quite quickly, particularly between England and Scotland. Soon the differences became such that it was natural for the Scottish funding council to take over the funding of the OU's activities in Scotland. This happened in a smooth and consensual manner, partly because, from the beginning of the 1992 reforms, I was welcomed, as vice-chancellor of the OU, to the meetings of the heads of higher education institutions in Scotland and Wales respectively.

This was a great privilege, not least because in Scotland the principals of the old universities and the centrally funded institutions quickly came together as an effective and collaborative group. This took much longer in England, where relations were soured by some bitter disputes, which seem silly in retrospect, about the choice of new university names for former polytechnics that shared a city with an existing university.

I recall these interesting times not to make the contrast between the regionalisation of British higher education in one decade and its internationalisation in the next, but rather to link the two. Because of the acrimonious debate about Europe, British people have difficulty thinking rationally about federalism, or even pronouncing this dangerous 'f' word. Yet federalism, for a state of any size, is clearly superior to unitary government. First, it allows decisions to be made at the most appropriate level, often closer to the people. Second, it encourages the testing of a variety of policies and the wider adoption of those that prove most effective.

It is only a hypothesis, but I suspect that the greater interest in international education evidenced by this conference partly results from the greater attention given to HE policy in the different UK jurisdictions as a result of federalism. The First Minister confirmed that hypothesis in his speech at the reception last evening.

## Studying International Education

All the same, I am very surprised to find this conference billed as the 1st UK International Education Conference. There must have been meetings on this subject in this country before this. Indeed, I will remember a conference in Birmingham sometime in the 1990s where I made myself unpopular by suggesting that encouraging distance learning across European borders would be more a more cost-effective use of funds than some of the spending on short-term academic tourism through the Erasmus

programme.

At the same meeting, another participant, even more tastelessly, presented research showing that many UK students who had studied overseas under the Erasmus programme came back to the UK more xenophobic than when they left. The other delegates, most of whom had a vested interest in the expansion of the Erasmus programme, sat on this miscreant even more firmly than they sat on me.

If this really is the UK's first formal conference on international education then other Anglophone countries are well ahead of the UK in making international education a subject of collective reflection. Three weeks ago, for example, I attended the annual conference of the Canadian Bureau for International Education, an organisation that goes back 20 years. In October I attended the conference of IDP Australia, whose roots go back to 1969. The USA has a number of associations of respectable longevity covering various aspects of international education.

That said, I greatly welcome the greater attention being paid to international education in the UK, not only by the holding of this conference but even more importantly by the articulation of an international policy by the Department for Education and Skills. This is a very encouraging development. During my eleven years in the UK at the OU, the DfES's predecessor departments, the DES and the DfEE, had attitudes to 'abroad' that vacillated between indifference and xenophobia. Officials seemed to be mainly vexed at the cost imbalance generated by the large net inflow of Erasmus students to the UK. When the OU suggested, in a spirit of European unity and collaboration, that the OU's many students resident in Continental Western Europe should pay the same fees as those in the UK, they put up a fierce resistance. Against this background I find the new policy, Putting the World into World-Class Education, a surprising and encouraging document. Instead of focusing only on selling UK education to the rest of the world it acknowledges that if the next generation of British people are to be global citizens, then the UK must learn from the world beyond Calais as well.

From my vantage point at the Commonwealth of Learning I am delighted to see the excellent collaboration now taking place between the DfES and the Department for International Development. COL is pleased to have close relations with both departments and is already working with the DfES to help implement aspects of its international policy, such as the Global Gateway and the multiplication of contacts between schools in Commonwealth countries.

We are also pleased to note the reference in the policy to one of our programmes, the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth. This is a good example of an important aim of development, which is to help countries to master and use modern technology themselves, rather than giving them ready-made solutions. We shall build the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth from the bottom up, starting from where each state is now in its use of educational technology and advancing from there towards its own objectives. As common aims emerge between groups of states, either for learning contents or for using particular technologies, we shall create coalitions of the willing in order to make them a reality.

## The Development Perspective

All that is a long introduction to my remarks today, which I have entitled Education Across Borders: What is Appropriate? I shall look generally at the question of international education, starting with higher education but then ranging more widely. When I ask, what is appropriate? I mean what is appropriate from a development perspective.

COL is a development agency whose mission is to help countries use all kinds of technologies to render possible the massive increase in human learning that must take place if the Millennium Development Goals are to be achieved. COL starts from the premise that the use of human reason, and the knowledge that flows from it, is the key to enabling all people to enjoy healthy and decent lives. Development depends on the creation, dissemination and application of knowledge by everyone. We look at international education in that context.

## Education and Trade

Soon after I moved from Canada to the OU in 1990 Tony Tysome interviewed me for The Higher - or THES as it then was. The resultant article, on the front page as I recall, was titled 'VC plans to double fees'. As you can imagine, this got me off to a splendid start with the OU's 100,000 students. Last month Tony did an article in The Higher on the DfES' new international policy. It began with the line: 'The Government this week urged universities and colleges to boost their contribution to the UK economy by recruiting more overseas students'.

Although I suspect that in this line and in the article generally, Tony may have heightened the colours to make a point, as he did when he interviewed me, I shall take this line as my starting text. It has the merit of being clear about the purpose and I have no problem with that. As Dr Samuel Johnson once wrote, 'there are few ways in which a man may be more innocently employed than in getting money'.

The statement makes clear the link between education and trade, so it is natural for me to look at international higher education through the lens of the General Agreement on Trade in Services, which distinguishes four types of commercial mobility - in these cases intellectual mobility. They are:

- Presence of Natural Persons
- Consumption Abroad
- Cross-border supply, and
- Commercial presence.

In looking at each type of commerce in a more abstract way, I shall try to establish my credibility as a commentator by first noting my personal experience under each heading.

### Presence of Natural Persons

First then, I hope you will agree that I am present here with you as a natural person. While I can in no way emulate Erasmus of Rotterdam, who is an inspiring historical figure for all of us, I have travelled the world extensively to take part in academic conferences and discussions on a host of topics. It is

sometimes fashionable to decry the value of such conferences as intellectual tourism. 'The Call Girls', was Arthur Koestler's title for his little novel about the itinerant academic conference crowd.

However - and this is my first point from a development perspective - such meetings can be very important for sharing experience internationally, building bonds between practitioners across the world, and creating consensus. It is particularly vital to ensure that people from developing countries are present at these conferences. I observe that colleagues from poorer places gain disproportionately from attending international gatherings.

I give the simple example of the Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning that the Commonwealth of Learning organises every two years. It is a great occasion to take stock of the progress we are making in developing policies, systems and applications for harnessing educational technology to the development needs of Commonwealth countries. For this reason much of its value depends on getting representatives there from all Commonwealth countries and COL is deeply grateful to organisations such as the British Council that help us to do this.

## Consumption Abroad

Hearing the term 'consumption abroad' I instinctively think of D. H. Lawrence dying of TB in New Mexico and of other poets who suffered similar fates. However, in trade terms it refers to the physical mobility of students between countries. I myself was an internationally mobile student when, following some of the best advice my mother ever gave me, I went to France and spent four years at the Ecole des Mines and the University of Paris doing a doctorate in Metallurgy. The act of studying overseas and the fact of learning another culture and language had as great a positive influence on my subsequent career as the research degree that I acquired.

Since most of this meeting will focus on consumption abroad I will make only a few points. First, as the DfES policy states, there is a large demand for international education and it will get larger. IDP Australia forecasts growth in higher education worldwide from around 100 million places in 2000 to 260 million in 2025, of which some 7 million will be international students going overseas or taking courses from overseas. The reason for this demand is clear. In most countries the salary differential between graduates and non-graduates continues to rise even though there are many more people graduating than there were ten or twenty years ago. A recent study in Canada showed that the rapid rise in the number of female graduates has almost closed the earnings gap between male and female graduates. Trends like these mean that individuals want to invest in higher education. That means money, which creates a market.

The UK has now joined Australia in being robust and explicit about its commercial motivation for international education. The commercial aspects of international higher education are simply a manifestation of the commercial aspects of national higher education that caused such a lively debate in Britain last year. Today you are not afraid to call a spade a spade and to call trade trade. My earlier quote from Samuel Johnson refers, and I paraphrase him to add that competition between rich countries to attract foreign students is also an innocent pastime.

The good news is that you are probably operating in a growing market. The bad news is that growing markets attract lots of sellers. This is now a market with lots of state sellers facing a volatile market of individual buyers.

New players are coming into the market in a big way. China, for example, is growing its numbers fast; hoping to increase from the present 86,000 to 120,000 by the time it hosts the Olympics in 2008. China, however, is not yet calculating the economic effect. To quote Ms Chen Yinghui, director of the international students division of the Ministry of Education: "In China we still don't calculate things like that. Our priority is the education of the Chinese students; next we hope to create a lively and cosmopolitan cultural environment for them. Foreign students add to the economy, that's clear, but so far we don't have an overall estimate."

China, with its rapidly expanding higher education system, clearly still has a plenty of room to expand its intake. So, to a massive extent, does another sleeping giant, India. There are fewer than 50,000 foreign students in India, which is an insignificant proportion of the 8 million nationals in India's 260 universities and 11,000 colleges. Having ignored international students hitherto, India's University Grants Commission now has a policy to increase their number dramatically, which I gather has already doubled the numbers even before implementation of the policy has begun. Another emerging state with ambitions in international education is South Africa, which is eager to increase from the 37,000 international students that it has today.

My suggestion from a development perspective is that the UK also pays more attention to the numbers of UK students who go overseas and diversifies the places they go to. Australia is doing just this, having noticed that while it has the highest intake of foreign students per capita to its national student population, only 1% of Australian students study abroad.

Many people, who are otherwise politically very correct, assume too readily that western academic hegemony will go on forever and that English will always be the predominant language of trade. The 35,000 Koreans, 16,000 Japanese, 6,000 Europeans and 7,000 Americans studying in China are doing so because they see Chinese as a coming language.

In short, I suggest that those countries that speak what is now the predominant world language should be particularly active in sending their nationals to study in other languages and other cultures. Doing so is an important contribution to the creation of a more cohesive world.

### Cross-Border Supply

Cross-border supply refers to moving the courses rather than the students. One reason for creating the Commonwealth of Learning was to increase the cross-border supply of courses at a time, in the mid-1980s, when the mobility of poorer students between Commonwealth countries had dropped alarmingly as fees had gone up. In my personal academic trajectory I have taken advantage of cross-border supply on two occasions. As a resident of the UK I took a Diploma in Theology at a distance from a university in Canada. Later, as a resident of France, I completed a distance learning course in international development from the UKOU.

Cross-border supply is a growing business, although it is impossible to get accurate figures because it is so fragmented. It is increasing for various reasons: first, because of the general growth in interest in

international education; second because of demand from working adult students, who cannot travel abroad to study except for short periods; and third because countries like Australia, as they approach saturation in imported students, are exporting the courses instead.

Cross-border supply is also being encouraged by the growth in distance education scholarships, by pressures from developing countries that want to educate their people without seeing them go down a brain drain, and by the development of online technologies that make communication easier.

Exporting courses is a different business from importing students. First, you normally make less money per student unless you offer such minimal service that the business will be fragile anyway.

Second, the students approach you in a different frame of mind. If I come to Britain to study I expect to be taught against a background of British culture. My own reasons for going to study in France were cultural and linguistic as much as academic - and the benefits to me in later life have been cultural and linguistic as much as academic.

However, if I stay in my own country and take a distance learning course from another country I am usually more interested in the content of the course and the qualification to which it leads than any cultural baggage that comes with it. Furthermore, I do not usually have ready access to students from the course's home country who can explain references to cricket that I don't understand.

In my experience, getting such obvious cultural markers out of the course is the easy part. More difficult are the subtle assumptions that course authors make about the students they are addressing. This is a real dilemma because you cannot design a course without making some assumptions. The key is to be aware of those assumptions and to make them explicit where necessary.

To the extent that a large proportion of cross-border undergraduate students are studying business and computing this is maybe not such a big problem. When the UK Open University began teaching business and management to thousands of students in the former Soviet Union in their own languages, it told its partners that university regulations allowed up to 30% of the course content to be adapted to local realities and still count for credit. They replied that they wanted to learn about western management and that Soviet management had nothing to offer. I suspect that things may have changed a bit today as Central Europe and Russia have developed business cultures that are western in inspiration without being western in detail. No doubt the courses have evolved as a result.

From a development perspective I conclude that distance learning across borders is one of those unusual and happy endeavours where sound principles lead you in the same direction as healthy pragmatism. That direction is towards partnership. Partnership is a sound principle because it helps to develop an indigenous capacity for distance learning in the country concerned and to avoid accusations of cultural imperialism. It is also healthy pragmatism because partnering with a local institution, assuming you choose one that is credible or committed to becoming credible, can give you access to much larger numbers of students than going it alone and can facilitate relationships with the national authorities.

Partnership will, of course, strengthen the partner's ability to operate a distance learning system. That may

mean that one day the partner can do without you, but you should welcome that. You will have given that country a bit more intellectual independence. If relations remain cordial the partnership can then explore new directions. You may find yourself sourcing courses from your partner. Even if the partnership does end, there are plenty more countries and plenty more institutions that need your help.

Earlier I mentioned that some of the large developing countries, such as China, India and South Africa, would become big players in the foreign student trade. This will happen even more rapidly in the case of cross-border supply. The Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) in India now has 1.5 million students, produces excellent learning materials, and makes more use of satellite technology than any other university I know. IGNOU is already active in 26 countries and the Commonwealth of Learning is using its courses in Africa because they are more appropriate, and much cheaper, than anything from the OECD countries.

### Commercial Presence

To conclude my examination of the four modes of international educational trade I turn to commercial presence. Here again, I have had some real personal experience of doing it.

When I was president of Laurentian University in the 1980s we created Canada's first campus overseas, the Université canadienne en France. The idea was to bring together Anglophone and Francophone second-year students from across Canada to devote a year to a programme centred on European studies. It was an academic success and lasted ten years until the rising value of the French franc against the Canadian dollar made it difficult for the average Canadian student to afford the programme and its associated living expenses.

Then, while I was at the Open University here in the UK, we developed partnership arrangements in ten countries. They are still going strong. Our strictly commercial presence was modest, because the partners were making the investment, but the administrative linkages had to be very close.

A moment ago I argued that partnerships with local providers are the best route to success in the cross-border supply of distance education for reasons of commercial pragmatism and developmental principle. I suggest that the same is true of commercial presence for the purpose of on-campus teaching.

One of the difficulties of making judgements here is that you cannot get hold of the financial figures. Not long ago I asked a savvy Australian academic administrator with experience of overseas operations whether Australia's campuses overseas were making money. In reply he shared his conviction that if the accounting for such ventures were done properly then none of them would be turning a profit. I am talking here of significant operations mounted by public universities from overseas. Boutique schools run by private-sector operators must make money, or they would close. However, from a development perspective such schools have little impact on the key imperative of increasing access to higher education.

From this development perspective I believe that the best model for a public university that wishes to open a campus overseas is to provide know-how to local investors and help them to get a credible



university going. If the university is successful it will inevitably become more and more indigenous. Furthermore, as it tries to enhance its credibility by adding programmes of teaching and research, it will need all the revenues it can get, so remitting profits overseas will be increasingly difficult. My general point is that public institutions should beware of trying to behave like private institutions. When I was at the UK Open University one of the few of the OU's overseas ventures that did not manage to stay the course was the creation of the United States Open University.

In this case, to our cost, we did not remain faithful to our own principle of partnership. That was because we came up against the Groucho Marx principle. Groucho once said that he would not want to be a member of any club that would accept him as a member. By analogy, we at the OU were snooty about the American institutions that were eager to partner with us. However, we found the institutions that were attractive to us as potential partners were impossibly arrogant to deal with.

The result was that we created the USOU alone and underestimated the combination of time and financial outlay that would be required to bring it to break-even. The model was fine, and had we been in the private sector we could have made it. However, public institutions are, rightly, cautious investors, which was not the name of the game in the dotcom frenzy.

At about the same time, however, the UKOU got the model right in the creation of the Arab Open University. Here the OU supplied know-how, courses and accreditation to what is clearly an Arab institution and one that will, I believe, have a very important future across the Arab world.

## Going Global to Reach the MDG Goals

In these remarks I have concentrated on the four modes of educational trade and focused mainly on higher education. I have done so because I assume they are the primary interests of most of you here.

However, I should like to end with a few comments on what I see as the real challenge of international education, which is to determine how it might help developing countries to address the much tougher challenges of the Millennium Development Goals. It is a fact that very little of the money spent on higher education in the developing world reaches the poorer people, but the problem I wish to address now is even more basic.

The Millennium Development Goals were endorsed in 2000 by the largest meeting of heads of state and government ever held at the United Nations. They identify targets for progress in the areas of poverty, hunger, education, gender equality, health, environment and governance. Achievement of these targets would dramatically improve the lives of most of humankind.

Achieving the MDGs will require a massive expansion of human learning. Much of it is post-secondary learning in the simple sense that billions of people who want to learn are past secondary school, even if most of them never went to secondary school. Traditional methods of education and training cannot address the scope and scale of the task. Technology has already revolutionised other areas of human life

and the world must now harness it to learning and teaching.

The Commonwealth of Learning is trying to do just this. We are a tiny organisation so we try to increase our impact by getting leverage on a few of the major obstacles to the achievement of the MDGs. Let me end with just three examples.

## Poverty and Hunger

The first Millennium Goal is to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, specifically to halve the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day and those who suffer from hunger. What are the critical obstacles to the attainment of this goal?

At COL we consider that fighting hunger means empowering millions of farmers and smallholders and giving the masses in the rural areas of the world more control over their lives.

Many organisations conduct research on agriculture and try to share the results. The most difficult bridge is the last mile to the individual farmer. This is not just a matter of packaging information in an attractive way, such as through a radio soap opera, and pushing it at the farmers. Communication operates in two directions and the first step is to help farmers and smallholders define their own needs. Step two is to enable agricultural extension workers, through dialogue, to match these needs to real possibilities. Technology can help to scale up this process.

In this way the Commonwealth of Learning is using the ICT kiosks that are spreading into villages in the developing world for providing locally relevant information and knowledge in response to the requests expressed by the villagers. This is not the nicely packaged cross-border distance education that we usually think of, but it has the potential to help millions to better lives.

## Primary Education

The second Millennium Development Goal is to achieve universal primary education so that by 2015 all boys and girls complete primary school. This is the most fundamental of the goals because development is freedom and education is the royal road to freedom. Few would argue that open and distance learning has a major role in the primary education of children. But it has a crucial role in removing the major bottleneck to the achievement of universal primary education, which is the training and retraining of tens of millions of teachers.

In my own parish, the Commonwealth, there are 20 million teachers. Many of them need further training to be effective. Millions of new teachers must be recruited and trained as countries seek to expand education with a teaching force that is shrinking through retirement, migration and AIDS. Distance education has already proven its effectiveness for training teachers in many countries.

The divide we have to bridge is to equip existing teacher training institutions and individual teacher educators to deploy these methods and to network themselves into professional communities. In this context one of our projects at COL is the formulation of pan-Commonwealth quality assurance indicators for teacher education.

## Health

My final example is the three Millennium Development Goals in health. One is to reduce infant mortality by two-thirds in the next ten years, the second is to reduce by three-quarters the ratio of women dying in childbirth in the same period, and the third is to halt and reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS and malaria in particular.

The achievement of such goals depends on the improvement of health services. However, it also depends - at least as much - on making it possible for people to learn how to avoid disease and how to keep themselves and their children healthy. This means giving them access to information that they can understand: not just because it is presented in their own language, but also because it is rooted in their culture - even if it challenges some of the habits of that culture.

The best way to bridge that divide is to equip and train people to produce the information themselves. That is what the Commonwealth of Learning is doing through its partnership with the World Health Organisation. As well as training local WHO representatives to expand the impact of their work by using the techniques of distance education, COL has, for example, equipped and trained an NGO in KwaZulu Natal Province of South Africa to reach much greater numbers with health information and training, notably about the problem of HIV/AIDS stigma.

Similarly, mobile units with projectors and generators use radio and television to deliver information about malaria to the villages of Sri Lanka. On a wider scale COL is producing open source radio content with messages of importance to poor people about filtering domestic water and growing food in the cramped conditions of urban poverty. These will be available in various languages.

## Conclusion

I hope these three examples have expanded your understanding of the scope of international education. As a leader in the new field of knowledge management COL has a special mission to help people access knowledge that they can use. Technology can make this much easier. An extension of some of the methods of international education can help billions of poor people achieve better lives.