

Editorial

Funding crisis in higher education and the World Bank report

The World Bank report, *Higher Education: The Lesson of Experience*, some points of which are presented in **Engineering Education World** in this issue, has already generated much debate. On the one hand its main author, **Jamil Salmi** from Morocco, could hardly be seen as representing the Western establishment of higher education, on the other hand he is to be congratulated on digging beneath the surface of the apparent 'all is well' academic world. His thesis that higher education needs a larger share of private funding in order to be sustained meets with particular opposition from the world's most conservative larger educational systems in the United Kingdom, France and Germany. These systems are also the models from which most other systems have historically evolved. With increasing student numbers and decreasing tax revenue surpluses, it seems that the time has come when the wealthy cannot be absolved from making a contribution towards the higher education of their offspring. Western European countries have become fat with the privilege syndrome and the concomitant demand that the state has to provide for most declared needs. The right of free higher education for everyone is being taken for granted. State control of higher education has led to higher education leaders being elected political administrators, and they have become adept at milking the system for their institutions. Higher education tends to be managed by committees with only a random selection of volunteers who assume the role of experts on these committees. Reforms of the system are possible only with massive public pressure—this happens on a time scale which makes reforms redundant by the time they are introduced. The report corroborates what I have said in many previous editorials, namely that higher education systems need to open up to non-governmental private funding. With our huge student populations, at least some monitoring of activities at universities and colleges needs to emerge from our real social situation, and consequently also real technological needs. The 30% recommended by the World Bank report, with the establishment of equity by making those who can afford it pay for higher education, may be near the right mixture. The ivory tower needs some metal struts. The regular world has to have a voice in the running of higher education. This diffusion may help in avoiding the dichotomy of having two worlds, private only and public only.

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