

The University business model

I am an unpaid fellow of an Oxford College and a former part time Professor at another University. I come to the debate on students from a position of sympathy, wishing to see a strong UK independent university sector. I am pleased we host several of the world's best universities.

I am no supporter of the model which creates a large number of places for overseas students which leads to a major expansion of students staying here after graduating taking low skill jobs and seeking to convert their degree course into a permit to live and work in the UK thereafter. Nor do I think it a good idea to encourage a lot of older postgraduate students to come with their families adding to the pressures on public services and housing. It is a thoroughly bad idea to let good postgraduate students from authoritarian and hostile countries get places in cutting edge research that could be useful for weapons manufacture, electronic surveillance, new materials, and other dangerous technologies as they will return to their homes to apply what they have learned in ways which might harm others.

The government is taking action to restrict university action in each of these three categories. Selling courses to overseas students mainly sells to the rich from abroad as these courses are expensive. Charities and the overseas aid budget can provide money for low and no income students from poor countries to come to gain necessary skills and to return to apply them to help their own country.

UK universities at their best are hosts to the best of world academic talent capable of world class research. Inviting in some overseas students to pay high fees helps with their finances. If they invite in too many without ensuring they return home after their course they add to housing and public service stress. Some of these universities imply there is no other way of covering costs other than a big rise in foreign students. They need to develop other ways of paying for university. Too many foreign students changes the ethos and culture of the institution and limits places for UK students where we want a better educated and skilled workforce.

The Endowment model of leading US and UK universities is a good one. Many alumni who succeed are happy to offer money during their lives and or on death to build endowment funds. These provide an excellent addition to student fees. There can be profits from spin out investments from university research. There is also plenty of scope given the many weeks each year when universities do not teach students to use their buildings and personnel to earn conference and adult training money. When I was years ago a full time academic I taught at summer schools as well,