
Article:
Parry, G. (2014) Robbins and Advanced Further Education. Higher Education Quarterly, 68 (2). pp. 187-209. ISSN 0951-5224

https://doi.org/10.1111/hequ.12041

Robbins and advanced further education

Gareth Parry, University of Sheffield, g.w.parry@sheffield.ac.uk

Abstract

In appraising existing patterns and assessing future needs, the Robbins inquiry broke new ground in treating British higher education as a system. In so doing, it went beyond its terms of reference to consider the situation of part-time higher education. This brought into view the scale, scope and character of provision and participation in the further education sector of higher education. While the need to focus its thinking and recommendations on full-time courses was never in doubt, the inquiry insisted that central policy decisions take account of all sectors of higher education and that sources of evidence be comprehensive in range and reach.

Introduction

If the Robbins Committee on Higher Education (1961-63) had held only to its terms of reference, significant areas of participation and provision would have been excluded and its conception and treatment of higher education as a system would have been compromised. Instead of limiting its review to the pattern of full-time higher education, as required by its remit, the scope of the inquiry was broadened to include the situation and future role of part-time higher education. In so doing, it brought into view a greater number and variety of students, courses and institutions. These were populations and providers associated, not with the university and the teacher training sectors, but mostly with the further education sector of higher education. In conducting for the first time a comprehensive examination of the field of higher education in Great Britain, the committee equipped itself with an evidence base for appraising existing arrangements,

for framing recommendations on longer-term development, and for making the case for a co-ordinated system to meet future demand.

These imperatives were pursued by a Committee in which the interests of universities were powerfully represented, where ministers had already approved plans for additional growth in university places and for the creation of seven new universities, and whose own recommendations were for the university sector to take the larger share of future expansion. As a consequence of the greater access afforded to full-time courses, the rate of growth in part-time higher education – up to then the equal of expansion in full-time numbers – was expected to diminish over the coming period, albeit with a continuing rise in total enrolments. For the teacher training sector, where there was hardly any part-time work, their proportion of all full-time places was expected to stay the same. For the further education sector, which offered full-time and the great majority of part-time places in higher education, the Robbins proposals amounted to a reduced share of full-time students and reduced rate of growth in part-time numbers.

In this commentary on the Robbins Report, the evidence and arguments adduced for the future pattern of development are examined, and an account and assessment is given of how higher education in the further education sector was enumerated, described and viewed in the published volumes of the inquiry. Given that further education was mostly a responsibility of local government, attention is given as well to the proposals for changes to ministerial responsibility and the level of co-ordination required for a greatly enlarged three-sector system of higher education. The recommendations on the machinery of government were also the subject of an important note of reservation by a member of the Committee (Harold Shearman) which highlighted the need, he argued, for administrative arrangements that recognised the essential unity of education and the continuity between schools, further and part-time education, and full-time higher education.

The work of the Robbins review was published in 1963 in fourteen volumes: a Report, a set of five Appendices presented in six volumes; and seven volumes of oral, written and documentary evidence. The Report and Appendices are the main inquiry documents referenced in this article. They are also the sources for two tables which bring together statistical information from these volumes. For ease of citation, the Report and Appendices are individually referenced by their shorthand titles. The full titles are given in the References.

Fifty years on, an obvious justification for another look at the place of further education in the Robbins review is the extent to which institutions in this sector have since featured in policies to expand and diversify higher education. Under the binary policy announced in 1965 and supported by all Governments up to 1992, the Polytechnics and other major providers in the non-university sector increased their share of full-time higher education, with the bulk of further education colleges offering courses of vocational higher education at the sub-bachelor levels and as a minority of their total provision. The paths taken by higher education in the further education sectors in the four countries of the United Kingdom have been different and distinctive, with some significance for how and when their systems moved to mass and near-universal scales of participation (Parry, 2005).

In Scotland, the growth of short-cycle vocational higher education in further education colleges has contributed significantly to the higher levels of participation in that country, reaching 25 per cent at the beginning of the 1990s and climbing to 50 per cent at the opening of the new century. During the peak expansion years, up to a quarter of Scottish higher education students were studying, mostly part-time, in the colleges of further education. In England, where participation rates were consistently lower and where the main providers of higher education were removed from the further education sector ahead of the shift to mass levels of participation, the college

contribution was smaller and more diverse in its provision. Equipped with its own Scottish Committee and guided by the example of Scotland, another national inquiry into higher education – the Dearing Committee, 1996-97 (NCIHE, 1997) – looked to a larger role for further education colleges in English higher education: a recommendation followed and elaborated by successive Governments.

Although they provide an historical perspective on the Robbins proposals, the later policy-participation trajectories of British higher education are not the focus of this paper. The concern here is what the Robbins Report had to say about the world of higher education in the further education sector: its contemporary contours and characteristics; and its place in growth projections. A reminder of these dimensions will serve as a corrective to readings which underplay the coverage and consideration given to further education in the Report. It will acknowledge too the range and reach of its surveys and other investigations. At the same time, a re-examination of the Report through the lens of further education can highlight descriptions, interpretations and omissions that bear on its assumptive foundations.

At the time of Robbins, the higher education located in this sector was termed 'advanced further education'. It comprised degree and other advanced qualifications studied part-time or full-time in establishments of various kinds, often alongside courses of non-advanced further education. None of these institutions had the power to award degrees or equivalent qualifications. Up to 1962, when the Colleges of Advanced Technology (CATs) ceased to be maintained by local authorities, nearly all colleges of further education in England and Wales were administered by local education authorities, subject to general guidance from the Ministry of Education. Advanced courses were financed partly from taxation and partly from the rates, with provision for sharing the costs amongst all authorities. In Scotland, nearly all full-time advanced further education was undertaken in the Central Institutions. These were independent establishments financed directly by the Secretary of State for Scotland. Some part-time

advanced courses were also provided by Further Education Centres which were maintained by the education authorities.

Committee members and their interests

Given the composition of the Robbins Committee, the world of advanced further education and the work of 'technical colleges' and other local authority establishments were unlikely to be familiar to most of its members. According to Carswell, the Treasury assessor on the inquiry and an observer of its meetings, only Shearman – Chairman of the Education Committee of the London County Council and 'a power in local authority educational administration' – had some appreciation of the 'vast and barely comprehensible network' of colleges that populated the further education sector. For the majority of members, it would seem, higher education was routinely identified with that undertaken in universities, at least before they had become acquainted with the evidence collected by the inquiry or submitted by external parties.

> The university model they knew and understood exercised so strong an influence on the Chairman and the majority of the Committee that they had little sympathy or understanding for any other. (Carswell, 1985, p. 49)

> The purposes of local authority institutions, their links with local (or denominational) power and affection, the need to replace their work below degree level if they vanished into the university world, the fact that their staff were not paid the same as university teachers, were not discussed. (ibid., p. 50)

Such supposed ignorance of non-university higher education was most likely overstated, even among its most influential members. According to Carswell, there was to some extent an 'inner, influential group' within the Committee. Including the Chairman, this small circle brought together three of the seven members drawn from the world of universities and one of the three 'assessors' to the Committee. Lionel Robbins aside, Sir Philip Morris (Vice-Chancellor of the University of Bristol) had been a member of the

McNair Committee (1942-44) which had called for three-year courses of training for teachers and the establishment of more advanced courses in technical colleges for intending youth workers. Before that he had been Director of Education in Kent and Director-General of Army Education. The third university member of this inner group was Sir Patrick Linstead (Rector of Imperial College) who had been on the Crowther Committee (1956-61) which recommended the raising of the school-leaving age to sixteen and the expansion of further education as an 'alternative road'.

Like Morris and Linstead, Sir Keith Murray – Chairman of the University Grants Committee and assessor to the Committee – was hardly innocent of further education or the role of local government in higher education. As Chairman since 1952, Murray and his officers had been closely involved with policy developments in technological education and they had regular dealings with the other branches of higher education. During his time as Rector and Bursar at Lincoln College, Oxford Murray had been a city councillor and a member of the county education committee.

Outside this circle, only Lionel Elvin among the other university members was directly engaged with post-school education. As Director of the Institute of Education at the University of London he had first-hand knowledge of teacher education and its relationship with schools. As a former Principal of Ruskin College at Oxford, he was versed in the traditions and practices of adult education. In Cambridge, he had served on the town council and its education committee. Helen Gardner (Fellow of St Hilda's College, Oxford), James Drever (Professor of Psychology at the University of Edinburgh) and David Anderson (Professor of Accounting and Business Methods also at Edinburgh) 'represented' the arts, social sciences and professional subjects, respectively.

The remaining members were drawn from the worlds of school education, industry and administration. Dame Kitty Anderson was Head of North London Collegiate School (a direct grant school for girls) and Anthony Chevenix-Trench was Head of Bradfield

College (a private school). Of the two, Anderson was closer to the grammar schools at which the numbers of school leavers achieving the standard entry qualifications were increasing faster than the places at universities to take them. The mounting pressure on university entry was a principal reason for establishing the Robbins inquiry. Prior to her appointment to the Robbins Committee, Anderson had been a member of the UGC when Murray was its Chairman.

The two representatives of industry (three, if David Anderson was seen in this role) were Reginald Southall – a Director and General Manager with British Petroleum – and Sir Edward Herbert who was a machine tool manufacturer and a former President of the Institution of Production Engineers. The voice of industry was 'little heard', reported Carswell, and with it an employer perspective on the further education and training system. That left Harold Shearman as the sole representative of the local authority interest in higher education and, with it, an appreciation of relationships between advanced and non-advanced further education. In short: 'By an oversight which turned out important, there was no member drawn from the world of the technical colleges' (Carswell, 1985, p. 31).

Within and beyond the terms of reference

The remit for the inquiry was set out in a short Treasury minute:

> to review the pattern of full-time higher education in Great Britain and in the light of national needs and resources to advise Her Majesty's Government on what principles its long-term development should be based. In particular, to advise, in the light of these principles, whether there should be any changes in that pattern, whether any new types of institution are desirable and whether any modifications should be made in the present arrangements for planning and co-ordinating the development of the various types of institution. (Report, 1963, p. 1)

That the appointment of the Committee and its terms of reference came by way of the Treasury reflected the long-standing and special relationship of Government to the universities. That only full-time higher education should be reviewed owed much to the university model of undergraduate education reproduced in this relationship. The dominance of the concept of the full-time student in thinking about higher education was further reinforced by the acceptance by the Government of the recommendations of the Anderson Committee (1958-60) for mandatory grants to all those achieving two A-levels and accepted for entry to full-time higher education.

References in the remit to the pattern of higher education and the arrangements for the planning of institutions pointed to another trigger for the review. The new Public Expenditure Survey system created to bring more clarity and control to exchequer funding mean that the Treasury would need to find an alternative machinery to handle relationships with the universities (Shattock, 2012). This was not just about its formal responsibilities for the UGC grant but also the capacity of the Treasury to manage the scale of expansion planned and agreed for the 1960s and early the 1970s. On this reading, the terms of reference were less an invitation to consider further significant group and more a call to address major matters already decided.

One of these was the extension of technological and technical education and, on this, the division of labour to be struck between the universities and the establishments of further education. The Ministry of Education had been active in bringing the local authority technical colleges behind reform efforts in this area, notably the selection of a number of colleges of high standing for exclusive concentration on advanced studies. With their elevation to the status of Colleges of Technology after 1956 came the invention of a national degree-level qualification – the Diploma in Technology – to recognise their advanced courses. With it came the innovation of the ‘sandwich’ course in which academic study was combined with industrial experience.

The Ministry had general responsibility for ensuring an 'adequate' system of education and, with few specific powers and little money under its direct control, the main relations of the Ministry were with the local education authorities, the voluntary bodies and the educational associations and trade unions. It nevertheless had a clear duty to plan for the future and so was a key government department, along with the Treasury, in any inquiry into higher education. Its writ did not extend to Scotland which had a separate education department as part of the Scottish Office.

If the original idea had been for a Royal Commission (about which the universities were uneasy), the alternative of an interdepartmental committee was not suited to tackle such important questions. The chosen instrument was a departmental committee appointed by the Treasury, but established by the Prime Minister (as the First Lord of the Treasury) as a committee with responsibilities over and above individual departments. These ministries each appointed senior officials as assessors who sat with the Committee and acted as liaison officers with their respective departments. The Secretary of the Committee was from the Treasury and the Assistant Secretary came from the Ministry of Education.

Such was the authority of the Committee, especially the confidence in its Chairman, that it took a broad interpretation of its remit and, from the beginning, was determined to assemble a body of evidence that treated higher education as a system. This required the Committee and its team of analysts (led by Claus Moser) to include part-time higher education in its examination of official statistics, in the design of surveys, and in its assumptions about locations and levels of future growth. On this and other fronts, the Committee ventured beyond the terms of reference (Dent, 1964). At the same time, the need for the inquiry to focus its thinking and recommendations on full-time higher education was never in doubt.

A note of guidance prepared for those submitting evidence to the inquiry was informative about what the Committee was asked to do and how it intended to interpret and broaden this brief:

> The Committee have been specifically asked to cover universities, colleges of advanced technology and teacher training colleges … Their inquiries will, however, range wider than this. They will be concerned with other advanced work, for example, in technical education. Moreover, while it is unlikely they will wish to deal with them in detail, they consider it necessary to take cognizance of other forms of education and training provided for people over 18. They also intend to bear in mind the implications which any changes in higher education might have on education at earlier stages. (Report, p. 313)

Again:

> Part-time classes and correspondence courses are outside the terms of reference. On the other hand, they offer the possibility of higher education to those who have missed it in earlier life, and are still important for those wishing to qualify in many professions and vocations. The scope of part-time education is, moreover, changing at the present time and the Committee will wish to form a view on the proper balance between full-time and part-time study in the future. (ibid.)

One system, two jurisdictions and three sectors of higher education

The pattern of higher education in Great Britain at the beginning of the 1960s was described by Robbins as a system of three sectors, with features distinctive to Scotland that required their separate description alongside that for England and Wales. At the base of the system was a sector of further education accounting for the largest number of higher education students, a multitude of institutions, the widest range of higher-level qualifications and the great majority of those whose 'method of study' was part-time. Such was the size, span and heterogeneity of the sector that it carried its own hierarchy of institutions, reflecting the varying levels of dependency on external

authorities – national, regional, local – for the conduct, development and management of their advanced courses.

The distinction between advanced and non-advanced courses was central in the definition of higher education adopted by the Committee. Advanced courses led to 'recognised qualifications' that were 'above the standard for instruction' required for the General Certificate of Education (Advanced) level or the Ordinary National Certificate or its equivalent. In Scotland, advanced courses were those above the standard required for the Higher grade of the Scottish Certificate of Education. Only advanced courses were defined as higher education. Institutions that taught courses above this level thereby came within range of the definition. Even so, there were exceptions and exclusions. Not all further education establishments with some advanced work were included and not all courses taught in universities were automatically inside the boundary.

On the other hand, courses without an institutional or sector location were brought within the scope of the inquiry, notably advanced professional qualifications studied by correspondence or by private study (whether or not the students also attended classes organised by professional associations). Private study was also taken to include all other correspondence courses or where students were working 'unaided' for an advanced qualification. Outside the three sectors were 'other' parts of post-school education and training provided by independent or private organisations, by institutions grant-aided by other government departments, or within the sphere of the Health Service, such as nurse education. Training for nursing and for other occupations associated with medicine was not classified as of the level of higher education.

Sectors, institutions and exclusions

At the apex of the system were 25 ‘autonomous’ universities, including one of the seven ‘new’ universities founded in the previous five years (the other six did not have students in 1962-63). Only universities held the power to award degrees and they alone received Treasury grants from a body they themselves controlled – the University Grants Committee (UGC). The UGC was independent of ministerial or departmental control and it performed two functions: advising the Government on the size of the total grant ‘appropriate to give to the universities as a whole’ (Report, p. 235) and distributing these funds as block grants, leaving individual universities to decide on the uses to which they would be put. Although research was not confined to the universities, their pre-eminence in that domain constituted ‘an additional mark of distinction from other educational institutions’ (Report, p. 22).

The term undergraduate was reserved for university students reading for first degrees (and a handful studying for first diplomas). Apart from postgraduate awards, the first degree was the only other major qualification offered by the universities. That said, there was significant variation in the structure of first degrees, not only between universities but also between faculties, and even between courses offered within a faculty. Furthermore, the pattern of honours and ordinary degrees in the five universities in Scotland was substantially different from the structure of first degree courses in England and Wales.

As degree-awarding authorities, the universities exercised an important influence on the development of institutions in the other two sectors of higher education. They were responsible for the content and standards of the courses offered by the teacher training colleges in England and Wales. In the further education sector, the external degree system of the University of London played ‘a pivotal part’ in the history and development of the leading technical colleges.

On the status of university adult education, the Report was ambiguous. The 'proud record' of the Extra Mural Departments of universities in providing courses of liberal adult education did not, for statistical purposes, classify them as higher education. Like similar courses offered by voluntary bodies and local education authorities, entry to them did not necessarily require advanced qualifications, they were usually studied part-time, and they did not normally lead to a qualification. On the other hand, the level of teaching was deemed equivalent to undergraduate education and, as university courses for adults, their main educational purpose was to broaden understanding: 'judged in this light, work in adult education must clearly form part of any survey of higher education not bounded by technicalities of definition' (Report, p. 168).

The 153 institutions devoted to the education and training of teachers comprised a second sector of higher education. Whereas most graduates seeking a professional qualification for teaching took a one-year course in a University Department of Education, the training colleges provided a general three-year course (lengthened from two years in 1960), mainly for those entering straight from school. The administration and financing of these institutions was 'essentially outside the control of those directly engaged in their academic work' (Report, p. 28).

In England and Wales, the local education authorities were responsible for 98 training colleges, their costs shared by all authorities in accordance with an accepted formula. The other 48 institutions were the responsibility of religious and other voluntary organisations, with the whole of their recurrent expenditure met by the Ministry of Education. For academic purposes, the training colleges were linked with universities through seventeen Institutes of Education which supervised and co-ordinated their academic work and made recommendations to the Minister of Education for the award of qualified teacher status. On questions relating to the training and supply of teachers, the Minister was advised by a National Advisory Council. In Scotland, by contrast, the seven Colleges of Education provided courses for both graduates and non-graduates.

They were financed partly by a direct grant from the Scottish Education Department and partly by the local authorities. Apart from the inclusion of university representatives on the boards of governors, there was no formal link between the Scottish Colleges of Education and the universities.

Of a different order again were the 400 and more establishments of further education that offered advanced courses leading to degree, degree-equivalent and other higher-level vocational and professional qualifications. The Robbins Report used the classification of further education establishments that had come into operation following the designation of Colleges of Advanced Technology after 1956. In that year, four categories of college were defined in order to 'facilitate a rational distribution of resources'. These consisted of ten Colleges of Advanced Technology, 25 Regional Colleges, 165 Area Colleges, numerous Local Colleges, six National Colleges and 166 Art establishments. Importantly, these segments were not intended to be closed categories:

> the system was left flexible with opportunities for a college to move from one category to another. All are expanding and even within each category there is a great deal of variety, because the colleges have differing traditions, serve different needs and are at different stages of evolution. (Report, p. 30)

Advanced further education: college segments

Advanced courses were taught in each category but, given that Local Colleges were 'very largely concerned training junior technicians, craftsmen and other workers, in addition to general education', this tier of further education was declared 'outside our terms of reference'. While the number of advanced students in Local Colleges was small and all their advanced courses were part-time, the Report acknowledged nevertheless the potential for growth and change: 'as advanced courses are approved from time to time in response to local initiatives, Local Colleges may move into the category of Area Colleges' (Report, p. 31).

On the highest rung of the further education ladder were the Colleges of Advanced Technology. They were intended by the Ministry to be exclusively concerned with advanced work 'although part-time courses were to remain alongside full-time courses'. Beneath them, the Regional Colleges had been envisaged by the Ministry as centres in which 'the main development of new advanced full-time courses might be expected' (Appendix Two A, p. 97). Unlike the CATS, they 'could not reasonably be expected to divest themselves of lower-level work'. Area Colleges were those where lower-level work predominated. In a good number of them advanced courses were 'developing rapidly'. Among the Local Colleges were those that offered only non-advanced courses. The Art establishments were mostly separate art schools, though a number were attached to Regional and Area Colleges (with their own principals). The National Colleges provided courses in specialised technologies and they received a direct grant from the Ministry.

In Scotland, nearly all full-time advanced further education was carried on fifteen Central Institutions financed directly by the Scottish Office. Some of the larger Central Institutions were of broadly the same standing as the CATs and were in process of transferring to Further Education Centres their lower-level part-time work. The 80 Further Education Centres corresponded broadly to Area and Local Colleges in England and Wales. Their day classes were set up by education authorities to 'relieve the Central Institutions of the less advanced courses' (Appendix A, p.114).

Advanced further education: sector shares

Applying its definition of higher education, the Report assembled published statistics from the UGC and the Education Departments to provide a picture of the system in 1962-63 and for previous years. The exercise highlighted gaps and inconsistencies in the

administrative data, especially in respect of part-time students and courses. Table 1 is compiled from tables in the Robbins volumes to describe the size and shape of the system as a whole and, specifically, the contribution made by the different types of further education establishment.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Out of a population of 362,000 students, establishments in the further education sector accounted for 42 per cent of the total, those in the university sector comprised 35 per cent and institutions in the teacher training sector another 15 per cent. Those pursuing private study were 'outside these institutions' and, within the Report, they were represented as a separate category. At 29,000 students, they accounted for eight per cent of the total.

These were headcounts. When converted to full-time equivalents by the inquiry team, the relative contributions looked markedly different. Seven part-time students were held to be equivalent to a single full-time student, given 'the load they impose on accommodation and staff' (Report, p.158). In further education, it was assumed that four part-time day students and ten part-time evening students were equivalent to one full-time student. Expressed this way, and excluding those engaged in private study, the share of students taken by the further education sector was reduced to 29 per cent, behind that for the university sector at 51 per cent and ahead of the teacher training sector at 23 per cent.

Whatever the weightings, further education establishments were the near-monopoly providers of part-time higher education, with 92 per cent enrolled in this sector and the rest (mainly postgraduate students) in the universities. Their full-time numbers, on the other hand, represented one in five of the full-time population. The universities had just over half the total of full-time numbers (at 55 per cent) and the teacher training

institutions a quarter. The variety of modes and lengths of study in the further education sector, including sandwich provision, was matched by its assorted types of qualifications. These ranged from postgraduate programmes (albeit less than 1,000 students) through to the first degree and the Diploma in Technology. At levels below the first degree were the Higher National Diploma (HND), the Higher National Certificate (HNC), the National Diploma in Design and a host of professional qualifications in science and technology as well as in subjects such as commerce, architecture, surveying and law.

In the Colleges of Advanced Technology, the great majority of students took advanced courses, mostly on a full-time basis: about half studying for the Diploma in Technology (awarded by the National Council for Technological Awards) and about a quarter for the external London degree. In England and Wales, the CATs were the only segment with more full-time than part-time advanced students, though even here these were a small majority. The same was the case in the Central Institutions in Scotland and where their part-time advanced numbers exceeded those in the Further Education Centres.

In the Regional Colleges nearly two-thirds of students were on advanced courses as were a quarter of their part-time students. The largest volume of advanced students was in the Area Colleges where 63,000 were enrolled on part-time courses along with 9,000 on full-time programmes. In this category of college, advanced work was a minority of the provision, at 15 per cent of full-time numbers and about ten per cent of part-time numbers. Area Colleges were the major providers of courses leading to the HNC and the HND. They also provided most of the part-time education for professional qualifications outside science and technology. The Local Colleges taught another 4,000 advanced students, the Art establishments a total of 10,000 students (mostly full-time) and the National Colleges just 1,000 students (all full-time).

As a sector, advanced further education was also distinctive in other respects. The average age of its students was older and not just because of its large part-time population part-time students. The same was true for full-time entrants. Second, the overwhelming majority of students were male. Only one in five part-time day students were women and, among part-time evening students, this went down to four per cent. A third, and less expected feature, was the higher proportion of overseas students on full-time courses than in the universities, although the difference was not great. These were characteristics that the Robbins inquiry, care of its statistical and other investigations, was able to describe in detail and sometimes for the first time.

Apart from the statistical work carried out in collaboration with Government departments, some of which involved 'fresh, and often complex, analysis of routine information', the Committee had the benefit of the findings of six major sample surveys. Four were commissioned on students in higher education, including one devoted to those on advanced courses in further education. A fifth was a survey of university teachers and the sixth was a survey of 21-year-olds. In addition, a number of special inquiries also provided original material, several with a particular relevance for (or exclusive focus on) further education: on professional education; on student 'wastage'; and on teaching hours. Besides filling 'numerous gaps in our factual knowledge', they were used to inform assessments of future demand and judgements about where additional places should be located.

Advanced further education: past trends, future forecasts

The patterns and trends in student numbers reported by Robbins for previous years are set out in Table 2, alongside the projected number and distribution of places needed over the medium to long term. On past trends, they indicate how poorly served was the Committee by existing statistical records, especially in comprehending the expanding and changing contribution to higher education of further education institutions. On

future forecasts, they highlight the singular attention given by the Committee to estimating demand for full-time places and, as an outcome of its analytical studies, the slower rates of growth anticipated for further education than for other sectors.

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Between 1954-55 and 1962-63, the number of full-time students in British higher education grew by 77 per cent, with further education establishments experiencing a nearly four-fold increase in their enrolments compared to a near-doubling of numbers in the teacher training sector and a 44 per increase in the university sector. The spectacular expansion in the further education sector was attributed in some measure to the shortage of places in university undergraduate education, especially for those entering colleges with two or more passes at A-level. Students with these qualifications represented just over half of the entrants to full-time courses in the CATs and over a quarter of those in other further education colleges, compared to nearly all undergraduate entrants in universities. Even so, that left considerable numbers entering with the Ordinary National Diploma or Certificate or with one A-level or with other qualifications (each normally insufficient for university entry).

Equivalent figures for part-time higher education were not available to the inquiry. No statistics on advanced day students in England and Wales were available before 1954-55 and for advanced evening students before 1958-59. However, the Report presented statistics on entrants to full-time and part-time advanced courses for the five years up to 1962-63 showing growth rates for part-time day and part-time evening students each increasing by a third, compared to a growth rate of 83 per cent for entrants to full-time advanced courses. No information was available on students beginning part-time undergraduate courses in the universities but ‘they must be very small’ (Appendix Two A, p. 38).

At the head of the 178 recommendations in the Robbins Report was the proposal to increase the total number of places in full-time higher education in Great Britain, from 216,000 in 1962-63 to about 560,000 in 1980-81. Over these seventeen years, the plan for expansion saw universities increasing their share of full-time places to 62 per cent (from 55 per cent) and further education establishments decreasing their share by eight percentage points, from 20 per cent down to 12 per cent. Teacher training institutions had their proportion increasing by a single percentage point to 26 per cent.

The distribution of places was based on analyses of current and future demand for higher education from young people, including the extent of the spillover into further education establishments by qualified students not getting into universities. While there 'must be some' applicants for university places who would have chosen to go to training colleges or institutions of further education if they could have obtained degrees by studying there, the 'route cause of the problem' was the shortage of places in universities:

> There would be considerable relief if institutions other than universities had greater attractive power, so that the ambitions of young people and their parents were not directed so exclusively towards one sector. We think that the development of these other institutions that we shall recommend, and in particular our recommendation that degrees should be more widely available than at present, would go some way towards achieving this. … But, even so, for as far ahead as we can see, the prestige of university institutions will continue to exert great attractive power and will cause the pressure of demand to remain most intense in this sector. (Report, p. 78)

Given that one in seven of full-time entrants to further education institutions in 1961/62 had applied and were qualified for admission to universities, and that demand in some areas of further education (such as art) was unlikely to show a rapid increase, the presupposition was that the places 'lost' by the elevation of the CATs to university status would be made good by developments in the remaining colleges.

Throughout the Report, future numbers for part-time higher education were 'given for illustration and not as recommended targets' (Appendix One, p. 167). Although it was not possible for the inquiry to estimate the proportions of day and evening students, the projection of demand for part-time courses 'suggested' that numbers would grow from 110,000 in 1962-63 to about 200,000 during the 1970s. This too was cited in justification of the 'modest' increase in full-time places proposed for further education, with the part-time expansion being 'equal to that for some 15,000 additional full-time entrants' (Report, p. 158). As a consequence of pressure from employers and in light of the student survey findings indicating that a majority of those studying part-time would prefer full-time courses, it was also assumed that in future 'a good many' would switch to full-time higher education.

For the system as a whole, part-time numbers up to 1980-81 were expected to grow by two-thirds over the period. This was a much lower rate of expansion than for full-time higher education where numbers were projected to increase by more than one-and-a-half times. On these projections, the part-time proportion was set to reduce dramatically, from around a third at the time of the inquiry to a quarter at the beginning of the 1980s. In the longer range estimates for 1985-86, which were not put forward as recommendations in the Report, the part-time share of places was unchanged.

Institutional development, student transfer and system governance

In a section of the Report that has figured less frequently in discussions and critiques, the Committee made a series of recommendations that 'should together give new impetus to the development of vocational higher education' (Report, p. 146). As with previous interventions and initiatives in this area, they would help tackle weaknesses in the nature and organisation of technological and technical education.

Along with the recommendation to grant university status to the CATs (and to most Central Institutions) was a proposal for the development of a small number of Special Institutions for Scientific and Technological Education and Research. One of these was intended to be a new foundation: in effect, the technological counterpart of the six new universities also recommended by the Committee.

There was scope for innovation and experiment in the further education sector as well. The Report argued the need for a new range of degrees and a new system for their development and approval. The London external degree was being used by some 70 colleges (other than the CATs) but the system lacked flexibility and afforded no opportunity for teachers to share in devising courses suited to the needs of their own institutions.

A Council for National Academic Awards for the whole of Great Britain would replace the National Council for Technological Awards. Unlike its predecessor, the new Council would award degrees at pass and at honours level and, importantly, it would cover areas of study outside the field of science and technology. Greater representation would be needed from the universities (providing important assistance in establishing standards and 'helping the colleges in their academic progress') and from the Regional and Area Colleges 'for whose benefit the Council will in future operate' (Report, p. 143).

The Regional Colleges were encouraged to develop a wider range of full-time courses, especially in subjects relevant to the problems of business and in the practical use of languages. In addition, there was room for variety in their organisational arrangements, through federation with other institutions or by becoming constituent parts of universities, new or old. The path was open for some to attain university status. The number of colleges and the rate at which it should be given would be primarily judged on their record of achievement. It was 'a reasonable hope' that ten colleges (including

Central Institutions and training establishments) would have reached university status by the end of the period.

In relation to Area Colleges, a powerful case was made for selective development. Encouraging the growth of full-time work at the level of higher education came with two reservations. First, the 'organic connections between the different stages of technical education must not be harmed'; and, second, the smaller classes in Area Colleges (a result of the wide dispersal of educational facilities) were 'much less defensible for full-time than for part-time courses' (Report, p. 139). Accordingly, it was recommended that full-time courses in the main be concentrated in those colleges likely to be selected for Regional College status.

For the Committee, a necessary corollary of this policy was the principle of student transfer. Arrangements were to be made for the transfer of students from Local Colleges to advanced courses in Regional and Area College; and, at the postgraduate stage, to universities and technological universities.

> The co-operation between the colleges should be such that full credit can be given for work already done. Students who transfer to another college will often have to live away from home … [and] … Such students may also need financial assistance and their proper needs must be met. (Report, p. 140)

In this and the selective development of colleges, the Regional Advisory Councils would have an increasingly responsible part to play. These bodies, on which both industrial and educational interests were represented, advised local education authorities on the provision of courses to meet the special needs of industry in different parts of the country. Advice to the Minister was given by the National Advisory Council on Education for Industry and Commerce, formed largely from representatives of the regions.

The Local Colleges and a number of the Regional Colleges would continue to be maintained by the local education authorities. However, the local authority stake in

higher education was potentially much reduced by the proposals to bring the training institutions in England and Wales into closer association with the universities for the provision of degree courses. Renamed as Colleges of Education, all the training institutions were to become members of new Schools of Education and financed through the grants committee system.

In his note of reservation, Harold Shearman argued that the teacher training establishments could still be associated with the universities without disrupting the existing administrative arrangements. He also made clear his disagreement with the proposed division of central control between two ministries. In proposing this 'solution' to the problem of how to manage a much larger system, especially one with more autonomous institutions, the Committee first rejected a plan for overall unification of the entire organisation of higher education on regional lines. Such an organisation would provide a desirable integration of all levels of higher education avoid the disadvantage of central control, but it was 'inappropriate to the needs of the situation':

> It would be a mistake to bring the autonomous and non-autonomous institutions under administrative authorities each limited to a particular region, for the trend has been for institutions to move from locally-maintained to autonomous status at the same time as they have begun to develop a national area of recruitment. The national needs of the autonomous bodies would be ill co-ordinated by regional bodies independent of each other; and administrative devices suitable to the control of such bodies would be needlessly multiplied. (Report, p. 239)

It was better that autonomous (wholly full-time) institutions come under central arrangements and that non-autonomous (mostly part-time) establishments were left in local hands:

> In the system we have recommended, the institutions wholly devoted to full-time to higher education, as we have defined it, are to be autonomous and we think it is possible to provide safeguards against any danger of undue uniformity that might arise from central controls as are necessary. (ibid.)

The preference therefore was for a separation of ministerial responsibilities. For the universities, the 'more appropriate conjunction' would be with 'other autonomous state-supported bodies (such as the Research Councils and the Arts Council) in a new Ministry of Arts and Science. Responsibility for 'other higher education' would remain with the Minister of Education and, in the main, with the local education authorities; and, in Scotland, with the Secretary of State.

With divided arrangements came the need for co-ordination and liaison, the more so if policy and policymaking were to be guided by common principles. This involved the Committee in another rejection, this time the creation of a general advisory committee. The history of committees of this sort had been 'unhappy' and, devoid of specific duties or executive responsibilities, their activities 'can easily become unrelated to the practical business of government': 'a fifth wheel on the administrative coach' (Report, 253). The need was for something that could provide 'an outlook more comprehensive and perhaps more detached' than that of individual departments or the new Grants Commission proposed to advise on the needs of autonomous institutions. In the event, the chosen vehicle was a small Consultative Council composed of people representative of educational and other interests to which ministers could remit questions.

Some of this might have appealed to the local authorities but annoyance with other recommendations in the Report was to be anticipated. From the start, they were 'particularly aggrieved' that only one member of the Robbins Committee had been drawn from their world. At the conclusion of the inquiry, the nature their concerns was conveyed formally in the note of reservation.

> Those who favoured the development of a local authority sector of higher education did not expect the Robbins Committee to produce recommendations which would please them and their fears were fully justified. (Sharpe, 1987, p. 12)

Conclusion

As mapped by Robbins, British higher education in the early 1960s was a small yet highly distributed system recruiting eight per cent of young people to its full-time courses. Outside a sector of autonomous universities providing full-time undergraduate education to school-leavers, a network of local, regional and some national colleges offered a variety of full-time and usually part-time advanced courses to adults and young people. A third set of institutions provided full-time courses for the education and training of teachers.

At the opening of the 1980s, an expanded system on the threshold of mass higher education was expected to provide entry to full-time programmes for about 17 per cent of the age group. Of these, the majority would be joining a greatly enlarged university sector. Other full-time entrants and nearly all part-time students would be taught in a proportionally smaller further education sector. Save for reform of the machinery of government and the university sector exercising greater responsibility for teacher education, the structure of the system was much the same, dominated as before by the universities and with few or no new major types of institution in sight.

To achieve this pattern of expansion required a concept of system and a framework in which higher education was planned or developed as a whole. However well the country might have been served by relatively unco-ordinated arrangements in the past, the Committee was clear that these were no longer good enough. This was not a demand for control from the centre. Rather, it was an insistence that central decisions be coherent and take account of the interests of all sectors of higher education.

Equally, high policy needed to be informed by a base of sound evidence, especially statistical information, which was relevant and comprehensive. An adequate and continuing statistical service would not just be for the benefit of planners and

policymakers. Other important users were the institutions of higher and further education themselves and, as stressed in the Report, the researchers who operated inside and outside the official sphere. Last, but not least, there was a public interest in having information produced on a comparable basis: within and between sectors, relating to all stages of education and including private providers. If the changes implied in the recommendations were to be effectively carried through, and their effects properly monitored and reviewed, it was essential that the analytical work started by the inquiry should be continued. On this the Committee was unequivocal.

References

Carswell, J. (1985) *Government and the Universities in Britain. Programme and Performance 1960-1980*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Committee on Higher Education (1963a) *Higher Education. Report of the Committee appointed by the Prime Minister under the Chairmanship of Lord Robbins 1961-63* (Report), Cmnd. 2154. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

Committee on Higher Education (1963b) *Appendix One. The Demand for Places in Higher Education* (Appendix One), Cmnd. 2154-I. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

Committee on Higher Education (1963c) *Appendix Two (A) Students and Their Education* (Appendix Two A), Cmnd. 2154-II. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

Dent, H. C. (1964) England: The Robbins report in retrospect, *Melbourne Studies in Education*, 7 (1), pp. 231-250.

National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (NCIHE) (1997) *Higher Education in the Learning Society. Main Report*. London: NCIHE.

Parry, G. (2005) British higher education and the prism of devolution. In T. Tapper and D. Palfreyman (eds.) *Understanding Mass Higher Education. Comparative perspectives on access*. Abingdon: RoutledgeFalmer, pp. 160-189.

Sharp, P. R. (1987) *The Creation of the Local Authority Sector of Higher Education*. Lewes: Falmer Press.

Shattock, M. (2012) *Making Policy in British Higher Education 1945 – 2011*. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill.