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Symposium on the Funding of and Access to US &
UK Higher Education

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The themes of the funding of higher education, and of access to it, were the subject of a late-September gathering in Oxford of some of the major US and UK economists and sociologists of higher education. The University of California and the Sutton Trust sponsored a Symposium on Access to and the Funding of US & UK HE, held at New College, Oxford, and jointly organised by the Centre for the Study of Higher Education (CSHE at the University of California-Berkeley) and by OxCHEPS (the Oxford Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies). The Symposium explored the issues of:

first, **access**

- *for whom?* (socio-economic groups, racial and ethnic minorities, male/female, urban/rural groups, etc)
- *to what?* (research-focused university, teaching-only university, college of F/HE-community college)
- *for how long?* (3/4-year u/g degrees, 2-year foundation degrees)
- *in what mode?* (f/t, p/t, easy transfer between the two)
- *with what chance of completion?* (variation by socio-economic group, type of HEI) and
- *to what effect?* ('graduateness' and employability, rates of return);

and, secondly, **access and funding**

- *at whose expense?* (taxpayer financed/subsidised, payment of tuition fees by student/his or her family, availability of grants and loans to cover such fees, alumni donations, the HEI's endowment and other earnings, employer sponsorship of students/courses, etc).

Summing up the three days, it was noted how the access/ widening-participation/social equity theme (and its major sub-themes such as affirmative-action in admissions, retention rates, social and personal rates of return, grants/loans) inevitably clashed with the funding theme (and its major sub-themes of cost-control, financing flagship HEIs, infrastructure replacement, student financial aid). At their point of conflict lay the issue of 'cost-sharing' and a world-wide shift towards the student/family paying more and the taxpayer less of the cost of HE: an issue which in turn gave rise to sub-themes such as the level of tuition fees and their variability amongst HEIs and also for courses within HEIs, HEI pricing policies and tactics (especially discounting and 'freebies'!), student financial aid based on need and/or on merit ('bring your A and 2 Bs to us and we'll give you a scholarship'), student consumerism (and 'Mum Power'), and HE as a consumption good and screening device versus its value as a public good in terms of human capital enhancement. (Detailed Papers to be loaded; short versions will be in a 2005 edition of Perspectives; for more material on the comparative aspects of access see Tapper & Palfreyman, Understanding Mass Higher Education (detail at Resources Page of this site), covering UK-USA-Australia/New Zealand-France-Germany-Italy-Poland-Holland-the Nordics.)