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# Fact sheets on Britain

## The Universities

British universities are self-governing institutions, academically independent, although about 70 per cent of their current income now comes from government sources.

University education has expanded very rapidly in recent years. Since 1945 the number of universities has increased from 17 to 44 (not including the Open University—see below). The student population in 1969–70 is estimated at 226,000 (including some 38,500 postgraduate students), more than double that of 1959–60. Over 7 per cent of all students are from overseas, more than half of them from other Commonwealth countries.

The English universities are: Aston (Birmingham) Bath, Birmingham, Bradford, Bristol, Brunel (London), Cambridge, City (London), Durham, East Anglia (at Norwich), Essex (at Colchester), Exeter, Hull, Keele (North Staffordshire), Kent (at Canterbury), Lancaster, Leeds, Leicester, Liverpool, London, Loughborough, Manchester, Newcastle upon Tyne, Nottingham, Oxford, Reading, Salford, Sheffield, Southampton, Surrey (at Guildford), Sussex (at Brighton), Warwick (at Coventry) and York. The University of Wales consists of the university colleges of Cardiff, Aberystwyth, Swansea, Bangor, the Welsh National School of Medicine at Cardiff, the University of Wales Institute of Science and Technology and St. David's College, Lampeter. The Scottish universities are: Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Heriot-Watt (Edinburgh), St. Andrews, Stirling and Strathclyde (Glasgow). In Northern Ireland there is Queen's University, Belfast, and the New University of Ulster, at Coleraine.

Work of university standard is also undertaken at the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology; at two postgraduate business schools, supported jointly by industry and the government—the Manchester Business School and the London Graduate School of Business Studies, associated with the London School of Economics and the Imperial College of Science and Technology; at Cranfield Institute of Technology (mainly postgraduate work); and at the Royal College of Art.

In order to make university education available to everyone who wants it, the Government has established the Open University, which received its charter in July 1969 and will start its courses, based on the calendar year, in January 1971. The university, which will award its own degrees, will provide degree and other courses using a combination of television, radio, correspondence and

residential courses together with a network of viewing and listening centres. The degrees awarded will be equal in standard to those of other universities, though no formal academic qualifications are required of those registering for the courses. The university is financed by fees and a grant from the Department of Education and Science.

## The Older Universities and University Colleges

The oldest universities in Britain, Oxford and Cambridge, which were founded in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, have contributed the college system to British university education; the colleges provide accommodation for students and teachers and are the focus of academic life. Three of the Scottish universities (St. Andrews, Glasgow and Aberdeen) were founded in the fifteenth century, and Edinburgh in the sixteenth century. The demand for higher education, stimulated by the industrial revolution, led to the foundation in the nineteenth century of a number of new universities, of which the first were Durham, which was modelled on Oxford, and London. London is Britain's largest university, with over 32,000 students, and also awards many external degrees. Like Wales, it has a federal constitution. The modern or civic universities mostly developed from non-residential university colleges, founded on local initiative, and originally prepared their candidates for external degrees of London University. They became full universities awarding their own degrees in the present century. The proportion of their students in halls of residence (which have no teaching functions) is about one-quarter of men students and about two-fifths of women.

## New Universities

Ten universities of completely new foundation have been established since the second world war. Keele was the first to open in 1949<sup>1</sup>, followed by Sussex in 1961 and York and East Anglia in 1963. Essex and Lancaster took their first students in October 1964, Kent (at Canterbury) and Warwick

<sup>1</sup>As a university college, but able to grant its own degrees. It received a charter as a university in 1962.



in 1965, Stirling in 1967 and the New University of Ulster, at Coleraine, in 1968.

The new universities are distinctive in being able to award their own degrees from the start, which has enabled them to experiment with the structure of courses and degrees (see below) to a much greater extent than the universities which originally worked for London degrees. They are also highly residential. York, Essex, Lancaster, Warwick and Kent have introduced a modified collegiate system: all students and a large number of staff are connected with college or hall units whether they are in residence or not.

The new universities aim to have 3,000 students each by the early 1970s but will probably have at least 6,000 students each by 1980. Ultimate student populations of 20,000 each are possible for the universities of Essex and Warwick.

Since 1963 another 12 universities have been created from existing institutions already engaged in higher education. Two of these, the universities of Newcastle upon Tyne, opened in 1963, and Dundee, opened in 1967, were former constituent colleges of the universities of Durham and St. Andrews respectively. The other ten—those of Aston, Bath, Bradford, Brunel, City, Heriot-Watt, Loughborough, Salford, Strathclyde and Surrey—were established between 1963 and 1967 by the conferring of university status on eight former Colleges of Advanced Technology in England and Wales and two Scottish institutions of similar type (known as Central Institutions). In addition, two other former Colleges of Advanced Technology have become constituent colleges of existing universities, one each of the universities of London and Wales.

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## Finance

The Government contributes about 70 per cent towards the current income of universities in Great Britain and about 90 per cent towards their capital programme. Money is given mainly in the form of block grants to the University Grants Committee (UGC) which then distributes the grants to individual universities. Members of the committee are appointed for their personal experience of university education and administration by the Secretary of State for Education and Science, in consultation with the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Recurrent grants for 1970-71 are estimated at some £182 million, over three times the amount for 1960-61. Capital grants paid out during 1970-71 are expected to be about £59 million, or three times the 1960-61 figure. In 1947-48 the total public expenditure, capital and current, on universities was £11.4 million. The Comptroller and Auditor General has access to the books and records of the UGC and the universities to check that the funds entrusted to the universities are efficiently administered. He cannot question policy decisions or decisions reached on academic grounds.

In Northern Ireland, Government grants are made by the Ministry of Education which usually first seeks the advice of the UGC. Recurrent expenditure for 1969-70 is estimated at £4.1 million, while about another £2.2 million is being provided as capital grants.

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## Entry to University

Admission to the universities for a first degree is by examination and selection; there is no religious test and no colour bar, and each university is free to decide which students to admit. In most cases, candidates apply in the first instance to the Universities Central Council on Admission (UCCA) which acts as a clearing house and passes on rejected applications to the next university of the candidate's choice. The only students who apply directly are Scottish candidates for the universities of Glasgow, Aberdeen, Strathclyde and Dundee. Overseas students apply through the council.

Women are admitted on equal terms with men for most subjects, but at Cambridge their numbers are limited by university statute. The general proportion of men to women students is nearly 3 to 1; at Oxford it is nearly 5 to 1 and at Cambridge over 8 to 1.

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## Scholarships and Cost to Students

It is national education policy that no able student should be prevented by lack of means from attending a university. A UNESCO survey has indicated that university students in Britain are drawn from a wider social background than those in any other western European country. About 90 per cent of the full-time university students in Britain are aided by scholarship or other awards; most of these are granted by local education authorities (except in Scotland where they are awarded by the central education department) and cover fees and a contribution to maintenance depending on the income of a student's parents. In addition, there are a number offered by the universities and colleges from their own funds. The cost of attending a university can vary considerably between faculties of the same university, and even more between one university and another. The average fee, however, is about £70 a year (though for overseas students it is higher). This only represents a fraction of the actual cost of the course provided which is about £1,050 per student annually.

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## Studies and Degrees

The academic year is usually divided into three terms, which run from about the beginning of October to the middle of December, from the middle of January to the end of March and from the middle of April to the end of June or the beginning of July. The University of Stirling has two long terms—mid-September to shortly before Christmas and mid-February to the end of May.

University first-degree courses generally extend over three or four years, except for medicine, where five or six years are required. The first degree of Bachelor (Master for arts degree in the older Scottish universities) is awarded for satisfactory examination results at the end of the course. Further study or research is required (except at Oxford, Cambridge and some Scottish





Above: The University Village of the University of East Anglia, comprising lecture rooms, laboratories, studies, restaurants and common rooms.

Left: Students' Union building at the University of Keele.



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Above: A physics laboratory at the University of Kent.

Left: The library and faculty offices of the Open University. These buildings are among the first of the new city of Milton Keynes.



Bottom Left: Students' common room at the University of Durham.

Below: A hall of residence at Edinburgh University overlooked by Arthur's Seat, a dominant Edinburgh landmark.





universities) for the degree of Master; it is required at all universities for the degree of Doctor. Actual degree titles vary according to the practice of each university; not all differentiate between the arts and sciences.

Although there are some broadly based courses the traditional honours course consists of three or four years' specialised study. However, the new universities are broadening the curriculum in nearly all respects. At Keele, students take a common first-year course and then have to take both arts and science subjects. Sussex, East Anglia, Essex, Kent, New University of Ulster and Warwick have schools of studies in which a number of subjects are related. At York students may choose between single-subject or combined-subject degrees. The technological universities, although concentrating on science and technology, are broadening their curricula to include social studies, geography, modern languages and other non-technological subjects. Frequently their courses are 'sandwich' courses, combining academic study at the university with training in industry.

The usual method of university instruction is by classes and lectures. At Oxford and Cambridge this has always been supplemented by individual tuition for at least one hour a week (the 'tutorial'). Tutorials, a similar form of small group teaching has been introduced to most universities in Britain.

Research is undertaken by most members of the academic staff and by postgraduate research students.

## Staff

Most of the teaching work of universities is done by full-time members of staff of whom there were over 26,000 in Great Britain in 1968-69, about 11.5 per cent of them professors. The ratio of staff to students—about one to eight—is one of the most favourable in the world.

## Government

The constitution of a university is laid down in broad outline in its charter and defined in more detail in statutes, which can be amended on the initiative of the university within the framework of its charter. The formal head of the university is the chancellor, a person distinguished in public life or in scholarship. The chief academic and administrative officer is usually the vice-chancellor or principal, who is responsible for the day-to-day running of the university. The governing bodies may include a court, often having some lay members representing local interests of various kinds, and a senate which controls academic matters. The framework of a university's government usually allows for a certain participation by its body of graduates and, in recent years, increased provision has been made for participation by undergraduates.

## Social Life

Universities' social life is characterised by the large number of societies and clubs which students organise for themselves. These cover a wide range from sport to cultural interests, including drama, music, modern languages, literature, science, religion and politics. (University political societies exist largely for the study of politics and for the cultivation of the arts of public speaking and debate.) In many universities there is a Students' Council or Union which has the oversight of all these extracurricular activities and which, in addition, provides cheap meals, common rooms, reading rooms, libraries, games rooms, and halls where dances, debates, concerts and lectures may be held for members and their friends. The governing bodies of universities in which such unions exist recognise their position and frequently provide them with premises for their activities.

## University Expansion

The expansion which has taken place in all branches of higher education in Great Britain—universities, colleges of education and other colleges for advanced work—was stimulated by the Government's acceptance of target figures up to 1973-74 and some other recommendations of *Higher Education*, the report of the Robbins Committee (Cmd. 2154, HMSO, 1963, 15s.).

The aim of 219,000 full-time students in university institutions in Great Britain by 1973-74 has already been attained, and discussions concerning future expansion in the university sector are now taking place between the Government, the UGC and other interested bodies.

In Northern Ireland the expansion, which has involved the creation of the New University of Ulster, is aimed at providing the 12,000 to 13,000 full-time university places required in Northern Ireland by 1980 as estimated in *Higher Education in Northern Ireland*, the report of the Lockwood Committee (Cmd. 480, HMSO, Belfast, 1965, 20s.).

## Reading List

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|--|----------|------|----------|
| British Council and the Association of Commonwealth Universities. <i>Higher Education in the United Kingdom</i> (biennial) | Longmans | 1968 | 10s. od. |
| Open University Planning Committee. <i>The Open University</i> .   | HMSO     | 1969 | 4s. od.  |
| Universities in Britain (COI Reference Paper R5520)  | COI      | 1969 | Free     |
| University Grants Committee. <i>Annual Survey, Academic Year 1968-69</i> . Cmd. 4261.                                      | HMSO     | 1970 | 4s. od.  |
| —University Development 1962-67. Cmd. 3820.  | HMSO     | 1968 | 19s. 6d. |

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