

A Forgotten Turning Point: The Universities' Delegation of 23 November 1918

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Landmarks in the development of higher education in the UK

1963 Robbins Report

1992 Abolition of the binary divide/devolution

1997 Dearing Report

What about 1918?

Universities before 1914

- Changes in Oxford and Cambridge
- Restructuring in London; establishment of Imperial College (1907)
- Emergence of University Colleges (eg Owens College, Manchester 1851; Yorkshire College (Leeds) 1874; Mason College, Birmingham, 1880; Liverpool, 1882; Reading, 1892)
- Aberystwyth 1872, South Wales and Monmouthshire 1883, Bangor 1884
- 1880 Establishment of the Victoria University; 1893 Establishment of the University of Wales
- Granting of University Charters (eg Birmingham, 1900; Liverpool, 1903; Leeds, 1904; Sheffield, 1905; Bristol 1906)

Pressures for Change and Development before the War

- 1870 Forster's Education Act and 1880 Elementary Education Act– free, compulsory education up to the age of 10
- 1902 Education Act – creation of Local Education Authorities – new secondary schools created demand for teachers
- Growing concern about competitive position – economic, military
- Pressure to increase opportunities for women

Universities before the War

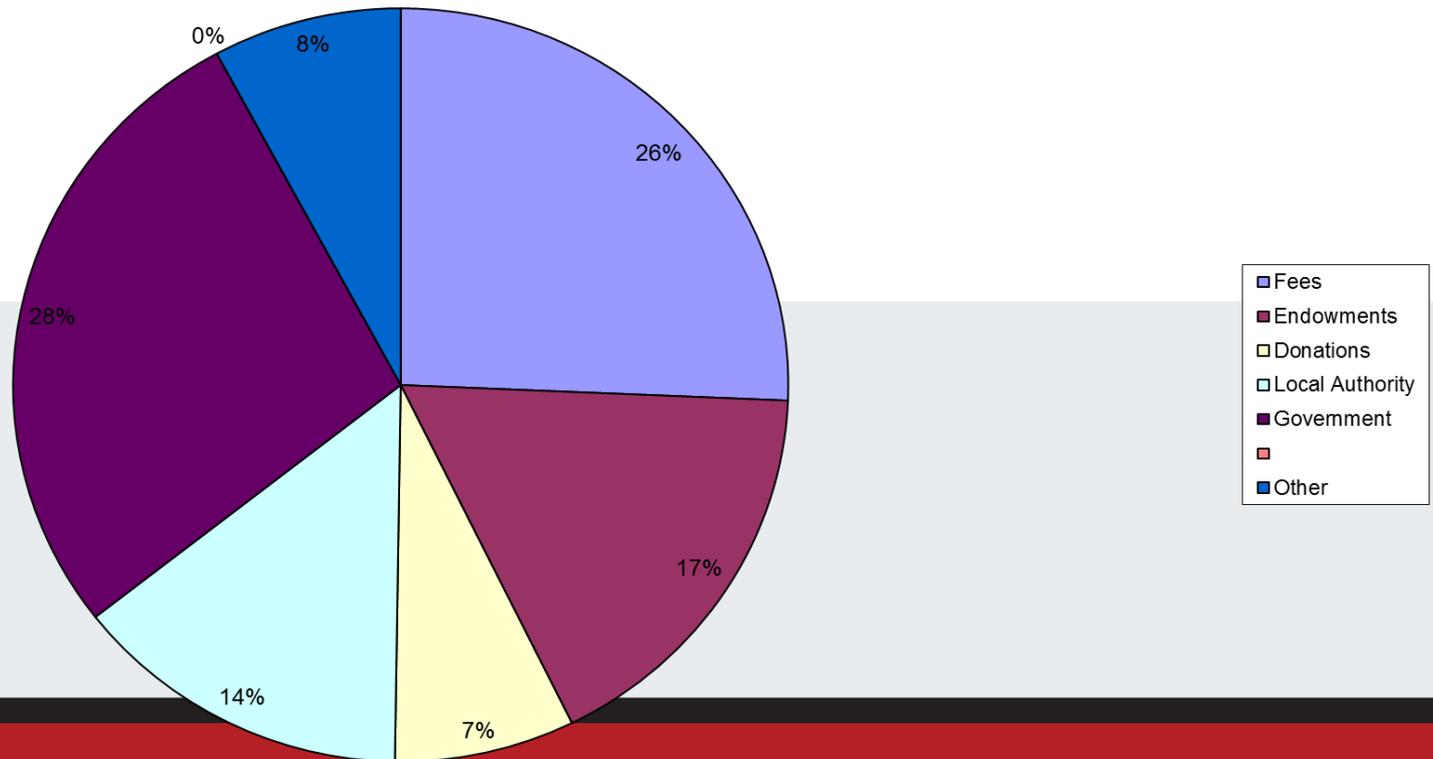
The University of Leeds in 1913-14:

- 1065 day students
- 95% undergraduate
- 62% full-time
- 81% men, but variations by Faculty
- Most were local, from Leeds and the West Riding
- Youngest students were 16 years old; about 40% were aged over 21
- Major commitment to extension classes, evening courses, preparation for professional examinations

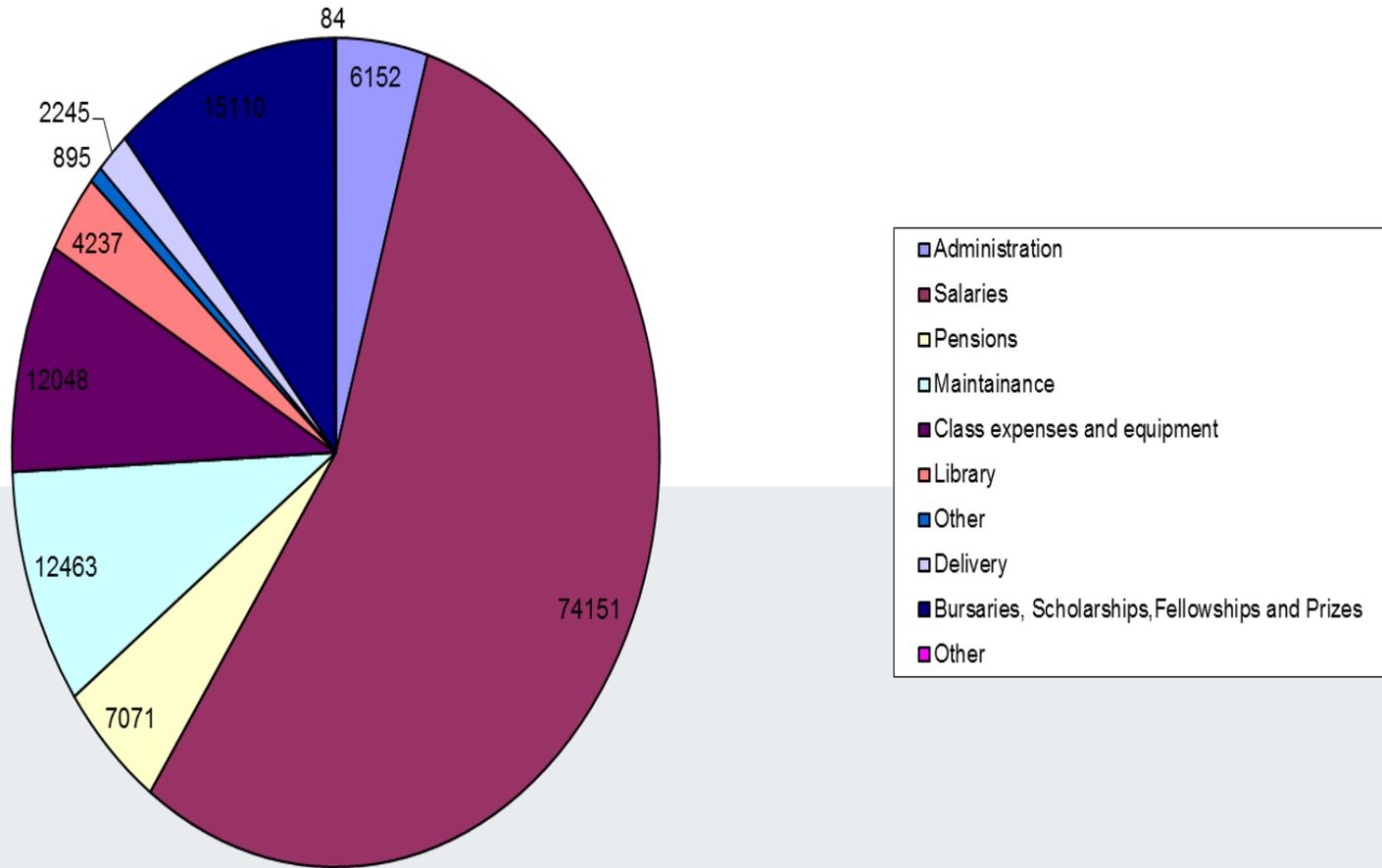
University Income

Income

Income to the University of Liverpool, 1913-14



Expenditure 1913-14 University of Edinburgh



Funding before the War

- Diverse sources of income
- Government funding:
 - (i) Exchequer Grant, introduced in 1889
 - (ii) The Statement Grant
 - (iii) Board of Education
 - (iv) Board of Agriculture
- 28% of total income at Liverpool; 23% Edinburgh; 26% Bristol
- Fees: 26% at Liverpool; 22% Bristol; 38% Edinburgh
- Endowments/donations/subscriptions
- Local authority grants
- Vulnerable to fluctuations in student numbers

Research

- Funding for Engineering – from Government departments and industry
- Conflicting responsibilities:
- J B Cohen, Professor of Organic Chemistry, University of Leeds: “The increasing demands in the way of University organisation (Senate, Board of Science and Committee meetings, meetings of governors of schools, the multifarious demands of a department which requires supervision, the ordering of apparatus and chemicals, all in addition to lectures, the examination of notebooks etc) make any kind of steady research work an impossibility ... The only chance, therefore, of carrying on systematic work of this kind depends on securing assistance.” (Leeds, 1913)
- Often depended on undergraduate students
- No co-ordination, limited funding, not an institutional priority

Universities and the War

- Two phases:
 - 1914– mid 1916 Crisis Management
 - Falling student numbers, funding issues
- Mid 1916 onwards
 - Coping with the War, relative financial stability
 - Growing confidence, looking to the future

Impact of the War: Phase One

- Shock to universities. No precedents. No preparation.
- Liverpool, total student numbers fell from 1,178 in 1913-14 to 845 in 1914-15 (28%)
- Liverpool, fee income in 1914-15 totalled £14,738 compared with £21,493 in 1913-14, a fall of £6,755 (31%)
- Total income at Liverpool fell from £83,721 to £77,274 (8%), almost entirely explained by the reduced fee income
- Given the high levels of fixed costs within their expenditure commitments, the outbreak of War represented a financial crisis. Fear of departmental or institutional closures.

The Reaction of the Universities

- Savings
- Staff vacancies unfilled
- Departmental grants reduced
- Maintenance suspended
- Reorganisation of teaching
- Debates over voluntary salary reductions

Appeals to Government

- Scottish Universities Memorandum to Government, January 1915
- “That, though every economy has been exercised, the necessary expenses in maintaining the efficiency of the Universities will, owing to the loss of the income from fees, materially exceed their available revenue during the current year.”
- “That, in view of their essential importance to the nation as institutions for professionalised and general training, civic and military, and in view also of the large contribution made from the ranks of their teachers, graduates and students to meet the country’s need for men to serve in the War, the Scottish Universities have in the present emergency a strong claim for special assistance from national funds.” (Edinburgh, 1915)
- Followed by similar appeals from the Northern universities and in London

The Reaction of Government

- January 1915: Advisory Committee on Grants for Universities:

• “The alternatives open to the Government appear to be either (i) to give during the War such special financial assistance as is necessary to maintain University Institutions as near to their previous level of efficiency as can be expected, or (ii) to defer action until the end of the War, and then to make special grants to enable the Institution to make good the injury which they have sustained. It is much more difficult to repair loss than to prevent its occurrence, and the Committee are convinced that the greater advantage both as regards economy and efficiency lies with the first of these alternatives and that **it is very important that steps should be taken now to provide for a sufficient measure of special assistance from the Exchequer towards meeting the losses experienced by the University institutions as a direct result of the War.**”

- “There is no doubt, however, that the main loss in income which the Universities and Colleges will suffer during the present year will be due to a shrinkage in fees, and the Committee believe that on this basis a rough estimate can be formed of the total loss in respect of which a reasonable claim on the national funds may be made out. After a careful consideration of all the factors before them, the Committee recommend that a sum of 100,000l should be set aside for a special grant in aid of those Universities and Colleges to which reference has been made, and that Grant out of this sum should be paid in accordance with arrangements to be approved by the Treasury. It is suggested that the Grants should be payable by the Treasury only on a definite recommendation of the Advisory Committee, who would certify in each case that they were satisfied that the grant proposal was reasonable. With a view to satisfying themselves as to the justice of each grant recommended by them to an Institution **the Committee would carefully examine the circumstances of that Institution either by personal visitation or by any other means that would enable them to obtain the information which they considered necessary.**”
- My emphasis

Some Implications

- The January 1915 memorandum is an important document.
- It emphasises the tension that existed between justifying additional grant and the need to make economies, and the importance in wartime of being seen to make economies.
- It also points unmistakably to the growing assumption within government circles that, in return for financial support, the universities would be subject to more intrusive scrutiny.
- The memorandum reflects a growing awareness of the broad contribution of universities and colleges to the war effort, including the applications of research.
- Finally, the memorandum already looks ahead to the role of universities in rebuilding in a post-war world.
- Each of these themes was to resonate further throughout the war.

End of Phase One

- Special Government grants to compensate for fee losses
 - Other sources of income are maintained
 - Expenditure reductions (but problems for the future)
 - Some universities actually show financial surplus
- Student numbers begin to recover
 - Universities actively involved in the War effort

Phase Two

- Changing attitudes – universities look to Government for support; Government accepts (some) responsibility for Universities; Government seeks increased accountability in return for support
- Growing recognition of need for Universities to work with business and industry
- Growing interest in higher education, especially science and engineering
- Universities “coming out from the shadows” – contribution to the War effort – munitions work, hospitals and public health, growing interest in social problems, agriculture and food
- New emphasis on research

Phase Two: Looking Ahead

- Alan Kidd, March 1918:
- “The position with which we have to deal includes the following main elements:
- The war has quickened , if not created, a general appreciation of the **benefits to be derived on the side of science and technology and subjects with a commercial value eg foreign languages; public interest has however also been aroused in the studies with a direct social and altruistic aspect** which should form part of a university training; and in some quarters, though not perhaps the most vocal, there is a **recognition of the need of the modern universities for a stronger emphasis upon subjects of a generally humanistic nature**. The popular demand is however at present mainly for science and technology, and, stimulated by the establishment of the new Research Department, **the great industries are not only coming to realise the value of higher education and research** in these subjects, but are themselves willing to assist in their organisation and equipment.

Looking Ahead

- There is accordingly a demand that university education should be made accessible to a much larger proportion of the population,
 - by providing scholarships and maintenance allowances to bring more students to the University Institutions already in existence, and
 - by adding to the number of university institutions or by extending the scope and raising the status of those now at work. The University Colleges at Reading and Nottingham wish to become independent Universities, the Technical College of Swansea wishes to become a University College, and there is a movement for a University of the South West of England.
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- It is realised that **if access to University education is to be made easier, the Institutions which give it must receive additional assistance so as to enable them to improve and expand their staffs and equipment.** There is thus a demand not only for an increase in the annual maintenance grants now given by the State, which go mainly to salaries, but also for capital grants to help in providing buildings and apparatus.

- Finally, there is a feeling that in addition to providing more money for the Universities and Colleges, it is necessary to get university status better organised so as to ensure that the fullest and most economical use is made of existing resources. This is a problem which not only concerns the relations of such federal bodies as the Universities of London and Wales, but applies also to the relation of the independent Universities to one another within **the national scheme in which all university education in this country should be included.**
- (My emphasis)

The Universities' Deputation of 23 November 1918

- Background – discussions on reconstruction
- Setting the agenda – funding, staff salaries, research
- Who should attend?
- Meeting – 11.00am Saturday, 23 November 1918

Key Players

- Andrew Bonar Law, Chancellor of the Exchequer
- Herbert Fisher, President of the Board of Education
- (Arthur Balfour, Foreign Secretary, not in attendance, but influential)
- Sir William McCormick, Chairman of the Committee on University Grants
- Alan Kidd, Secretary to the Committee on University Grants

- Sir Oliver Lodge, Principal, University of Birmingham, “leader” of the Universities’ Delegation
- Sir Alfred Ewing, Principal, University of Edinburgh
- Sir Donald MacAlister, Principal, University of Glasgow
- Sir Alfred Dale, Vice-Chancellor, University of Liverpool
- Sir Gregory Foster, Provost, University College, London

Some contributions

- “I hope that the country has now realised the vital importance of knowledge – knowledge of all kinds. Surely the importance of scientific knowledge has been brought home. And when there comes an emergency you cannot create that knowledge at once, you have to make use of it. And you find it in the Universities; these must be the houses of learning in the country. And when the country is thrown on its own resources and cannot depend on the learning of other countries, then we find the weak spots. We find also the strong spots. We find there is a great deal more than we might have expected, after the method of dealing with them hitherto. And I think that, on the whole, the country has discovered, or is beginning to discover, that scientific study pays the country over and over again. It is not a case of ten fold or even one hundred fold; it is often a million fold; there is no comparison between the outcome and the expenditure.”

Sir Oliver Lodge (Birmingham)

Some Contributions

- “In our opinion capital expenditure on buildings ought not to be included in a system of annual grants, but should be dealt with separately as occasion demands.
- In this matter I am speaking now for the British Universities, and they wish it to be understood that they are speaking with one voice. They feel that the old reliance on the pious founder for the development of a University in respect of capital expenditure is no longer anything like adequate to meet modern needs. They recognise that the development of the Universities, no less than their maintenance, is a national duty. It is a national duty, and it is a national benefit, for the Universities are national, they are not local. There is no other provision made in the British Isles for the really high teaching essential to national wellbeing.”
- Sir Alfred Ewing (Edinburgh)

Summary of Issues Discussed

- Changing attitude of Government towards universities, especially in the Treasury
- International comparisons; British universities compared with Germany and United States
- Funding of universities; capital funding
- How to increase student numbers; increasing opportunities
- Governance of British universities; role of lay members of Councils
- How to attract international students
- Staff salaries and conditions of employment; status of staff; career structure
- Opportunities to undertake research
- Importance of university research
- Links between universities and business
- Autonomy of the universities

The Response

- “I will however, say just two things with respect to the principles upon which I shall make those recommendations. I am convinced – and my conviction has been deepened by the impressive mass of testimony which I have heard today – of the necessity of a very much more liberal assistance from the State to the higher learning in the country (*this was greeted by cheers*). And I am equally convinced, from my long connexion with Universities, of the great value of preserving University autonomy (*more cheers*).
- With regard to the memoranda which are to come from the different institutions, I should be grateful, if it seems good to the representatives of the Universities in question to make them for any observations which they might choose to append to their memoranda upon the question of fees, which have been dealt with by Sir Alfred Dale and Professor Gregory Fisher, because I understand that there is a certain difference of opinion in Universities upon the subject.”
- Herbert Fisher, President of the Board of Education

The Importance of the Deputation

- Consolidation of changing attitudes – universities looking for Government support, Government recognising a responsibility to support the universities
- New funding arrangements – funding for maintenance, funding for capital, reduced dependence on fees, possible reductions in fees; led to the establishment of the University Grants Committee
- Attempts to broaden access to universities
- Recognition of the need to improve salaries and career structures
- Importance of research for economic development; links with business
- Expansion of postgraduate activity
- Ideas of a “national system”; Government funding but with accountability
- 1918-19 Foundation of the UGC, CVCP and AUT

Thank You

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