Universities go to market

By Harriet Swain

There was a time when the only thing students worried about was their mock statistics paper and world peace. Money, though always 2 concern was rarely something to stir the passions. First, they had higher-minded things to think about. Then cash had a habit of turning up as soon as they left university and walked into lucrative jobs in finance or law.

No longer. In Germany and France students can queue for hours to find seats in a lecture hall. In Britain and the Netherlands grants barely cover the cost of basic food and accommodation, and young people are receiving more of their financing through loans, which must be repaid ones they find the jobs that are becoming ever scarcer on the ground.

Scenes of Parisian students marching down the Boulevard Saint-German last November sparked mutterings about 1968. But this time, the theme uniting young people across the European Union is not ideological but practical. The common fear is unemployment the common demand is for an education to keep them ahead in the European jobs market and for the money to pay for it.

The trouble is that there is less public money available. Budgets across Europe are becoming tighter as governments struggle to meet the criteria for European monetary union. At the same time, they see a highly qualified workforce as the key to competing successfully both within Europe and abroad. A large proportion of young people in the United States and Japan already leave the educational system with a degree.

Not only does university keep European youth away from the dole queue for longer, it also equips them with the more specialised knowledge essential when the number of blue-collar jobs worldwide is shrinking. Pumping people with technical knowledge into the economy is vital to achieve its expansion.

But it can be a case of Catch 22. In Germany, for example, a budget deficit of DM 6 billion ($ 4.6 billion) has squeezed every aspect of public-sector spending, including higher education. Berlin alone is being forced to reduce funded student places by 15,000 within 10 years, while the number of actual students will stay roughly the same. Nearly two bodies occupy every student seat in the average German university.

Thirty years ago. German university heads and politicians agreed to accept swollen student numbers temporarily, expecting them to have fallen back by this time because of fewer 18-year-olds. Instead, with more than a third of young people now wanting to go to university, the situation is worse than ever. Increasingly, courses are restricting intake, something which goes directly against the German principle of higher education being open to everyone who passes their school-leaving diploma (Abitur).

Recent money-raising ideas have included charging wealthy students tuition fees and demanding interest on loans. Both have sparked protests from young people, who late last year staged demonstrations in Bonn.

Meanwhile, in France the number of students entering higher education has risen by 83 percent over the past 20 years and government policy is to increase it still further.

But efforts to meet Maastricht criteria have left little public cash to pay for this expansion. Universities say they need millions to pay off existing debts, let alone employ extra staff, while students say packed lecture halls already make work extremely difficult. They want the kind of personalised contact with lecturers experienced by their British counterparts.

But in Britain itself this system is changing. The country has always had a tradition of high quality higher education for relatively few students, selected from the top of the academic pile. Over the last few years, however the government has made a concerted effort to widen the sector so that a larger proportion of the population gains qualifications.

Universities and colleges are now financed according to the number of students they attract. The results have exceeded expectations to dramatically that expansion has now had to be capped. Student numbers have doubled over the past decade to nearly 1.6 million. A target, set in 1989, of one in three young people entering higher education by the year 2000 was in sight within three years.

Panic has now set in at the realization that more students means more money to pay for them- cash which just is not available. Last November, the government announced a budget cut in higher education amounting to a 9.4 percent reduction in capital spending. Already the amount of money spent on each student has dropped by more than a quarter over the last 5 years.

Universities have begun to seek extra income from industry, commerce and from renting out their premises to summer schools. But vice-chancellors still warn that the famed quality of British universities is under threat.

Lecturers are having to take larger classes and the ratio of academics to students is falling in line with practices more common on the Continent. Students, meanwhile, fear their degrees are being devalued. While once they offered entry into an elite assured of employment, now they are no guarantee of avoiding the dole queue. To make matters worse, it has been suggested students may have to start paying a proportion of university fees – now paid by the state – and student grants are slowly evolving into loans payable once they start earning.

Next door, Ireland too is struggling with rapidly increasing student numbers. In 1980, 20 percent of the age cohort advanced to third level. This has now increased to more than 40 percent, about half of whom take degree level programmes.

The government is conducting a review to find out how it can maintain this expansion without starving other public services. It is encouraging private investment, particularly in combination with public money to cover capital projects. Like many other European countries, it sees developing closer links between universities and industry as the key to a thriving economy as well as a way of covering cost.

At the same time, it is trying to make entry to university more equal by phasing out tuition fees from this year and abolishing tax relief on education covenants to help pay for it. This is not equality for its own sake, but to improve employment prospects for Irish youth at home and abroad. Without an educated workforce, Ireland fears it will not be able to compete in European marketplace.

In Belgium, cuts in education spending have sparked continual strikes by lecturers over the last year. Many have been laid off with the merger of training colleges to reduce the ratio of lecturers to students. Job security is the main concern, with short-term contracts replacing many full-time posts. Worst hit is the poorer French-speaking part of the country, struggling to meet European economic criteria.

University overcrowding is also a problem since anyone with the correct school-leaving qualifications can enter higher education. And fees are relatively low, which makes the country attractive to foreign students.

In the Netherlands overcrowding is less of a problem, but unlike the French, the Dutch government is determined to reduce student numbers. In the 1970s, the Dutch government’s policy was to allow everyone the chance of going to university. Now it claims there are no longer enough jobs for graduates, and youth people should be encouraged to developed technical skills instead.

Opponents say it is simply a way of saving money. But it is not the only saving scheme. All students at Dutch universities now receive a grant of about 470 guilders ($115) per month if they live away from home, plus a loan. From September 1996, all grants will become loans that must be repaid, unless the student receives a high enough exam grade at the end of the year.

Conditions vary in Italy from the packed lecture halls of Rome’s La Sapienza University – with more than 150,000 undergraduates in an institution originally designed for 30,000- to the relative quiet of Ferrara. Like Spain, it is trying to reduce the length of university courses as a way of saving money, although students argue this will reduce their quality.

Italian education ministers have also tried to solve financial problems by encouraging more private investment, although this too has proved controversial with students fearing reduction in academic independence. Sit-ins have become a common feature of university life, with staff shortages, understocked libraries and over-full lecture halls the usual complaints.

These problems in individual countries and the varying attempts by governments at solutions can no longer be treated in isolation.

Governments throughout the union are torn between the need to meet financial criteria for European monetary union and their desire to produce enough educated people to cope with the competition once they get there. Their proposed solutions very, but most hit students, either financially or in their conditions for studying.

It is surprising that students are not making more fuss under the difficult circumstances that they face. Perhaps young people are so busy working to secure their own futures that they have little time left for protesting. In any case, the luxury of student years untouched by the practical concerns of the real world seems consigned to the past. (The Guardian)

Текст №3.

Было время, когда студентов беспокоили лишь их табель успеваемости и мир во всём мире. Несмотря на заботу о первых двух, деньги редко вызывали хоть какие-нибудь эмоции. Во первых, студенты имели более высокие нравственные ценности, чтобы думать о таком. Обычно, студенты получили деньги, когда после окончания университета поступали на высокооплачиваемую работу в сфере финансов или экономики.

Но сейчас всё не так. В Германии и Франции, студенты могут стоять часами в очереди, чтобы попасть на лекции. А в Великобритании и Нидерландах, гранты едва покрывают расходы на основные продукты питания и жилье, так студенты получают больше денег за счёт кредитов, которые позже необходимо погасить. Студенты всё чаще ищут работу из-за нехватки денег.

Сцены идущих вниз студентов по бульвару Сен-Жермен в ноябре 1968 года вызвали большой ажиотаж. Но на этот раз, проблема, объединяющая молодых студентов во всех странах Европейского Союза не, сколько идеологическая, сколько практическая. Общий страх – это безработица, которая устанавливает требования для образования,

Беда в том, что становится всё меньше финансовой поддержки со стороны государства. Получить бюджет в Европе становятся всё более трудным, поскольку правительства стран изо всех сил пытаются соответствовать критериям европейского валютного союза. В то же время, они рассматривают высококвалифицированные трудовые ресурсы как ключ к успешной конкуренции и в Европе и за границей. Большая часть молодых людей в Соединенных Штатах и Японии уже оканчивают образование с какой-либо степенью.

Мало того, что университеты не допускают европейских студентов к очереди за пособием по безработице, они также дают знания в узкоспециализированных областях, в то время как число рабочих профессий во всем мире сокращается. Переход людей с техническим образованием в экономику является жизненно важным для достижения её подъёма.

Но это может быть лишь случай Уловки-22. В Германии, например, дефицит бюджета в 6000000 ($ 4,6 млрд) сократил все аспекты государственного финансирования, в том числе и затраты на высшее образование. Одни только Берлин вынужден был сократить финансируемые места для студентов на 15,000 в течение 10 лет, в то время как число фактических студентов остается примерно таким же. В среднем, в немецком университете приходится по два студента на одно место.

30 лет назад, руководители немецких университетов и политические деятели временно согласились на принятие повышенного числа студентов, ожидая, что они откажутся от поступления к этому времени из-за меньшего количества 18-летних студентов. Вместо этого, с больше чем одной третью молодых людей, желающих учиться в университете, ситуация хуже чем когда-либо. Всё чаще,

Последние идеи, касающиеся повышения бюджета включали в себя требования оплаты за обучение состоятельных студентов и выплаты процентов по кредитам. Оба этих проекта вызвали протесту среди студентов, которые в конце прошлого года устроили демонстрации в Бонне.

Между тем, во Франции , число студентов, поступающих в высшие учебные заведения возросло на 83 процентов за последние 20 лет, и государственная политика всячески направлена на увеличение этой цифры.

Но усилия для удовлетворения критериям евро конвергенции оставили немного денег для общества, чтобы заплатить за это расширения. Университеты говорят, что им нужны миллионы, чтобы погасить существующие долги, не говоря уже о затратах на дополнительный персонал, в то время как студенты говорят, что забитые аудитории уже делают учёбу чрезвычайно трудным. Студенты хотят иметь личный контакт с преподавателем, с которыми сталкиваются их британские коллеги.

Но в самой Великобритании эта система изменяется. Страна всегда была приверженицей традиция качественного высшего образования для относительно немногих студентов, выбранных из числа лучших. За последние несколько лет, правительство страны прилагает активные усилия для расширения сектора образования, с тем, что большая часть населения получила квалификацию.

Университеты и колледжи теперь финансируются согласно числу студентов, которых в них обучаются. Результаты превзошли все ожидания,

Число студентов удвоились за прошлое десятилетие почти на 1.6 миллионов. Цель, установленная в 1989 году, из одной трети молодых людей, вступающих высшего образования, к 2000 году

Сейчас началась паника, связанная с тем, что больше студентов означает что за них нужно платить больше денег- наличные деньги. Которые просто недоступны. В прошлом ноябре правительство объявило о сокращении бюджета в образовании, составляющем сокращение расходов на 9.4 процентов. Сумма средств, потраченных на каждого студента упала более чем на четверть за последние 5 лет.