

## **“Diploma mill” issues in the higher education system: the case of the United Kingdom**

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**Abstract.** In the article, the authors explore the evolution of the formation of higher education institutions in the UK, analyze the formation of the education system as a whole. In the course of the study, the authors concluded that the reforms that were carried out in the 1960s in the UK higher education system led to accessibility among the general population and massification. And this, in turn, affected the quality of the educational services provided.

An important fact in the reforms of higher education in the UK, was the lack of opportunities to compete with the “old” universities in terms of basic research and social prestige, “universities without pedigree” chose a different development strategy, in which the main role was given to the internationalization of learning. In order to avoid the emergence of “diploma mills”, the requirements for the activities of universities are being strengthened, and a number of measures are being taken.

The external examination of the university is carried out by the State Council for the Financing of Higher Education. Experts check universities once every five years, conduct surveys of students and teachers according to a formalized methodology, as well as check the specific results of educational and scientific work and make their recommendations. Expert advice from employers is also a form of external expertise.

One of the most important aspects of assessing the quality of a university is accreditation. Obtaining accreditation by the university is a prerequisite for the employment of its graduates. All the above-mentioned bodies conduct strict control and it is not profitable for universities to violate the requirements. All of the above measures have practically eliminated the problem of “diploma mills”.

**Keywords:** massification of higher education, quality of education, accessibility of education, “diploma mills”, private universities, reforms, experience of Great Britain.

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### **Introduction**

At present, the world is undergoing an economic revolution comparable in scale to the industrial revolution of the XIX century. Production methods are changing. In the new economy, it is the training and payment of highly skilled workers that accounts for the bulk of the costs. This puts the states, including Kazakhstan, in front of the need to provide a mass level of education that corresponds to the new economy.

In modern society, the goal and role of higher education, the development of the knowledge society and the problem of the quality of knowledge, which are associated with the massification of

education, the emergence and development of information and communication technologies, are still relevant.

The urgency is growing due to the emergence of the pandemic and its consequences for all spheres, especially for higher education. The need to develop distance education has come to the fore. Not all private universities can provide decent conditions.

Educational reforms are taking place in many countries around the world – in the United States, Great Britain, China, Eastern Europe, Southeast Asia and South America.

The authors' choice of the topic is not accidental, the goal is not just to study foreign experience, it is much more important to try to understand what makes these countries take on the rather difficult and expensive task of reforming education, and for this it is necessary to go beyond the current moment and try to see modern events in a broader perspective. Therefore, it is interesting to look at what is currently happening with higher education in the UK, whose education system is the oldest in Europe.

The purpose of the research is to study the history and causes of the “diploma mills”, to analyze the experience of Great Britain for implementation in domestic education.

Background of the issue.

In the 1960s, higher education in the UK remained a privilege of the elite, at the same time the country needed qualified personnel. Higher education in the UK needed to solve several problems:

1. To make higher education accessible to all segments of the population, the country's economy needed highly qualified personnel

2. The development of knowledge-intensive industries (which was emphasized at that time) required the “intellectual capitalization” of universities. The solution to this problem was seen by experts in the exit of British universities outside the country.

The above-mentioned objectives were achieved through the dramatic expansion of the university sector and the creation of the public sector of higher education as an alternative to the university sector. The measures taken have made it possible to preserve the traditional autonomy of universities and adapt higher education institutions to new challenges. During this period, there is a sharp doubling of the number of students. In 1970, there were 259,000 students enrolled in UK universities, and the total number of students increased to 45. Another important fact was the development of distance education and the creation of the Open University in 1969.

## Research methods

When writing a scientific article, there was used a historical method. This method revealed that in a particular historical period, the United Kingdom is making decisive steps in favor of the development of higher education. The authors also used a comparative analysis to study the experience of Great Britain in the fight against “diploma mills”.

## Discussion

The reforms that were carried out in the 1960s in the UK higher education system led to accessibility among the general population and massification. On the one hand, positive results were achieved, on the other hand, an experience was gained that had negative consequences, namely, the

funding of universities and paid tuition decreased (students were charged tuition fees). The most important problem that came in parallel with the availability of education is the quality [1].

There is certainly a connection between the mass character and the quality of education. It is difficult to guarantee quality with a large flow of applicants for higher education. If the "old" university functioned in a society where only 5% of people received higher education, today 50-60 and even 70% of the population study at the third level."

A significant increase in the number of universities, many provincial institutes became academies, universities, and numerous branches were opened. Unfortunately, many of them did not have the appropriate material and technical base and qualified teaching staff. This could not but affect the quality of training of specialists. An analysis of the practical activities of university graduates shows that most of them are able to perform their duties only after an internship in a certain position and have serious shortcomings in professional training.

In the conditions of not well-thought-out reform of higher education, and the entire education system, as well as due to insufficient funding and forced reduction of industrial practice, as well as practical classes, many universities have not been able to restructure the organization of training in special disciplines to provide a competence-based approach to training.

The current state and directions of development of the higher education system show that the change in the nature of the activities of specialists in modern economic conditions places increased demands on their professional training. It should ensure the transition from the reproduction of new knowledge to active and independent assimilation, focusing on the development of practical abilities, the formation of skills and abilities to quickly analyze information and make rational decisions at a high scientific and methodological level.

Therefore, the creation of a highly effective system of training specialists was one of the integral tasks in the process of further reforming the education system.

Another problem is that each state and university has its concepts of "quality of education". Nevertheless, the quality of education is on the agenda of all countries, their number is constantly growing. "Without any reservations, everyone is ready to recognize the importance of the problem of quality, audit, accreditation, evaluation, etc. We know how some higher education systems implement such an assessment process, and how work is being done to improve the quality of university education.

According to B. Kehm: "Along with the issues of institutional management and leadership, quality has been a topic that has been and continues to be largely at the forefront of analysis and practice discussed within the framework of the European Scientific Society for Higher Education".

The next important fact in the reforms of higher education in the UK, was the inability to compete with the "old" universities in terms of basic research and social prestige, "universities without pedigree" chose a different development strategy, in which the main role was given to the internationalization of learning. The so-called new universities have opened their doors to foreign students. The processes of internationalization have become large-scale.

The UK understood that the global education system was increasingly being transformed into a multibillion-dollar industry, one of the lucrative areas of which is the training of international students. The creation and development of a successfully functioning system of international education, attracting a significant number of foreign students is not only one of the opportunities to increase the university's budget and raise its prestige, but also a way to promote the politics, culture, economy, and

lifestyle of the host country to the student's homeland. It is also one of the opportunities to increase the competitiveness of the country's economy by employing the most talented foreign graduates.

In 1962-1963, 28 thousand foreign students were studying in the UK, which was 8% of the total number of students, in 2001-2002, about 225 thousand foreign students were studying in the United Kingdom. In addition to the rate on the training of foreign students who come from outside the EU and pay for their studies in full, the strategy of educational expansion has justified itself. Until recently, about 80 thousand foreign students received a British education outside the United Kingdom.

In 2002, the United Kingdom ranked second after the United States in the ranking of educational services exporting countries, receiving \$ 3,758 million from education exports, or 3.2% of total services exports.

In recent years, this figure has declined, but it is no longer the fault of the universities. In 2014, the UK's income from the training of international students amounted to 7 billion pounds. Universities UK (2014) [2].

In the 2018-2019 academic year, the total number of students increased by 2% and reached about 2.4 million. Among them, 10% of "foreign" students pay the full tuition fee, and only 2% of students from European countries pay the same amount for their studies as British citizens.

The number of non-European students at UK universities in 2019 was about 143,000, up from 139,000 in 2018, but remained at 6% of the total. Among students who are British citizens, the number of white students has not changed since 2014-2015 and was about 75%, while the number of black students has increased from 6% to 7%.

By 2030, the UK government plans to increase the number of international students to 600 thousand people. The Minister for Science and Higher Education, Chris Skidmore, said that leading British universities continue to attract "the brightest and best" [3].

## Results

Universities perform vital functions, both as institutions for the training of highly qualified personnel and as knowledge generators through research activities. Moreover, these two functions are interrelated, and when they are implemented effectively, universities make a significant contribution to the development of the economy. However, the main mission of universities remains the training of qualified personnel, although with the growth of knowledge-intensive industries, the importance of university research for the development of the economy increases. As the main supplier of such resources as qualified specialists and knowledge, universities contribute to maintaining the competitiveness of the national economy.

Although educational institutions in the UK are divided into public and private (independent), the state education Committee ensures that all educational institutions comply with the rules and standards of quality of education. All independent educational institutions offering higher education programs are required to register with the Education Committee. Their activities are monitored through regular inspections. The Commission reviews all aspects related to learning, from the curriculum and academic success of students, to extracurricular activities and living conditions. At the same time, if violations are detected, the commission may suspend one or more teachers, the management of the university, or even close the educational institution itself.

Britain's exit from the European Union and the coronavirus pandemic have dealt a double blow to British higher education. The UK's exit from the EU led to the fact that European students lost not only the right to preferential tuition, but also to financial loans.

According to the UK Higher Education Statistics Agency, more than 485,000 international students studied in the country during the 2018/2019 academic year. Of these, 143,000 are those who arrived in the United Kingdom from the European Union. Every year, international students brought the UK more than £5 billion. However, the forecasts for 2020/2021 are disappointing: the country may almost completely lose students from Europe.

According to the latest study of the educational platform Study.eu, 84% of students from EU countries are not ready to enter British universities after the abolition of benefits. According to the forecasts of the platform's experts, this year the UK will miss 120 thousand European students, or 25% of all foreigners who want to study at the country's universities.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the authors concluded that the positive success of the UK experience lies in the following aspects:

- consolidation, integration of universities into powerful educational and research centers;
- creating a unified educational space;
- improvement of the material and technical base, intensification and application of new training technologies;
- recruitment of universities with young scientific and pedagogical personnel;
- increasing the prestige of the profession of technical (engineering) specialties;
- providing targeted support to the best universities, bachelors, masters, postgraduates, doctoral students, teachers and scientists.

Even during the pandemic, UK universities have found an opportunity to develop. Since all research activity in the UK is carried out in educational institutions and in close connection with industries, the coronavirus has only highlighted the demand for what scientists do.

For example, Imperial College London was one of the first in the world to simulate the spread of the virus, Oxford University began to develop a vaccine, the University of Manchester — to study the impact of the virus on the lungs, and King's College London in partnership with NVIDIA announced the creation of a powerful supercomputer Cambridge-1 for medical purposes using artificial intelligence. All this is part of a large program to study the virus.

All of the above allowed the UK to achieve the main goal – to reach the quality of higher education, adequate to the requirements of the XXI century.

It is also important that the education of a large number of foreign citizens in British universities helps to create intellectual elites and maintains the status of

English as an international language in the cultural, economic and political spheres, which ultimately contributes to the preservation of Britain's influence in the international arena. In conclusion, it can be noted that in recent years “the government has called on universities to consider the development of international activities... as an essential condition for the long-term strengthening of the reputation of British higher education both in the UK and abroad”, and that 77% of UK universities include a special section on international activities in their strategic development plans [4;

p. 96]. This fact is confirmed by the data that in 1995 81,000 students from the European Union, 56,000 from Asia and Africa, and 13,000 from North America entered Britain [5; p. 86].

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### **Жоғары білім беру жүйесіндегі «диплом фабрикасы» мәселелері Ұлыбритания мысалында**

**Аңдатпа.** Мақалада авторлар Ұлыбританиядағы жоғары оқу орындарының қалыптасу эволюциясын зерттейді, жалпы білім беру жүйесінің қалыптасуын талдайды. Зерттеу барысында авторлар 1960 жылы Ұлыбританияның Жоғары білім беру жүйесінде жүргізілген реформалар қарапайым халықтың қол жетімділігіне және массификацияға әкелді деген қорытындыға келді. Бұл өз кезегінде білім беру қызметтерінің сапасына әсер етті.

Ұлыбританияның Жоғары білім беру реформаларындағы маңызды факт іргелі зерттеулер мен әлеуметтік беделге қатысты «ескі» университеттермен бәсекеге түсу мүмкіндігінің болмауы болды, «асыл тұқымды емес университеттер» басқа Даму стратегиясын таңдады, онда оқытуды интернационалдандыру басты рөл атқарды. «Диплом фабрикаларын» болдырмау үшін жоғары оқу орындарының қызметіне қойылатын талаптар күшейтіледі, бірқатар шаралар қабылданады.

Жоғары оқу орнының сыртқы сараптамасын жоғары білімді қаржыландыру жөніндегі мемлекеттік Кеңес жүзеге асырады. Сарапшылар бес жылда бір рет жоғары оқу орындарын тексереді, студенттер мен оқытушыларға формальды әдістеме бойынша сауалнама жүргізеді,



сондай-ақ оқу және ғылыми жұмыстың нақты нәтижелерін тексереді, өз ұсыныстарын жасайды. Жұмыс берушілердің сараптамалық кеңестері сыртқы сараптама нысанына да қатысты.

Университеттің сапасын бағалаудың маңызды жақтарының бірі аккредиттеу болып табылады. ЖОО-ның аккредиттелуі оның түлектерін жұмысқа орналастыру кезінде міндетті шарт болып табылады. Жоғарыда аталған барлық орғандар қатаң бақылау жүргізеді және университеттерге қойылатын талаптарды бұзу тиімді емес. Жоғарыда аталған барлық шаралар «диплом фабрикаларының» мәселесін іс жүзінде жойды.

**Түйін сөздер:** жоғары білім беруді массивикациялау, білім беру сапасы, білімге қолжетімділік, «диплом фабрикалары», жеке университеттер, реформалар, Ұлыбритания тәжірибесі.

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### **Проблемы «фабрики дипломов» в системе высшего образования на примере Великобритании**

**Аннотация.** В статье авторы исследуют эволюцию становления высших учебных заведений в Великобритании, анализируют становление системы образования в целом. В ходе исследования авторы пришли к выводу, что реформы, которые были проведены в 1960-х годах в системе высшего образования Великобритании, привели к его доступности среди простого населения и массивикации. А это в свою очередь сказалось на качестве предоставляемых образовательных услуг.

Важным фактом в реформах высшего образования Великобритании стало отсутствие возможности конкурировать со «старыми» университетами в том, что касается фундаментальных исследований и социального престижа, «университеты без родословной» избрали иную стратегию развития, в которой главная роль отводилась интернационализации обучения. Во избежание возникновения «фабрик дипломов» усиливаются требования к деятельности вузов, принимается ряд мер.

Внешняя экспертиза вуза осуществляется Государственным советом по финансированию высшего образования. Эксперты один раз в пять лет проверяют вузы, проводят опросы студентов и преподавателей по формализованной методике, а также выносят свои рекомендации на основе конкретных результатов учебной и научной работы. Экспертные советы работодателей также относятся к форме внешней экспертизы.

Одной из важнейших сторон оценки качества вуза является аккредитация. Получение аккредитации вузом является обязательным условием при трудоустройстве его выпускников. Все вышеперечисленные органы ведут строгий контроль, и вузам невыгодно нарушать предъявляемые требования. Вышеперечисленные меры практически искоренили проблему «фабрик дипломов».

**Ключевые слова:** массивикация высшего образования, качество образования, доступность образования, «фабрики дипломов», частные университеты, реформы, опыт Великобритании.

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