CORRIGENDA

1. The last issue of Vestes was incorrectly labelled "Vol. 27, 1983, No. 2": This should have read "Vol. 26, 1983, No. 2".
2. On page 55 of the last issue a letter appears from Associate Professor G. Curthoys and Mr R. Mackie who are described as President and Secretary respectively of the University of Newcastle Staff Association. It should be noted that Professor Curthoys and Mr Mackie were President and Secretary respectively during the events described in "Disruption and Due Process" (Vestes, Vol. 25, 1983, No. 1) in 1980, but do not now occupy those positions.
3. In the article "Women in Australian Universities 1945-80" in the last issue, an error in Table 6, p. 19 has been brought to our notice by the author. In that table, the figure for Women Staff as a percentage of Academic Staff in Australian Universities for 1975 should read 15%.

THE SRHE-LEVERHULME PROGRAMME OF STUDY INTO THE FUTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN BRITAIN

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During the 1970s higher education in Britain stagnated. The proportion of school leavers who went on to full-time higher education reached 14% in 1973 and has not yet risen above that figure. In 1978 the Department of Education and Science published a discussion document which drew attention to the prospect that from the early 1980s the size of the age group from which most students come would start to fall. In 1990 there will be about 30% fewer eighteen year olds in Britain than there are in 1983. A declining age group combined with a stagnating participation rate raises the spectre of excess capacity.

In 1980 a working party of the Society for Research into Higher Education reported that the fundamental problem facing post-secondary education during the next two decades is not demography but loss of confidence: loss of confidence by school leavers in the private benefits of higher education, loss of confidence by politicians in the social benefits and often a loss of confidence by academics in their own sense of purpose. These problems may be accentuated but they are not created by public expenditure constraints.

With the help of a substantial grant from the Leverhulme Trust, the Society for Research into Higher Education set up a comprehensive programme of study into the future of higher education which I directed. The aim of the programme was not to undertake new research but rather to focus recent research findings and the views of informed people on the major strategic options likely to be available to higher education institutions and policy making bodies in the 1980s and 1990s.

The programme of study resulted in nine specialist reports. A review of the programme by the Director and Deputy Director, and a final report signed by a distinguished team of individuals with a wide range of experience in industry, commerce, government and the academic world. In this considerable body of evidence, amounting to two thousand pages of published material and several times that amount of unpublished documentation, many patterns and priorities can be discerned. However, five themes emerged over and over again during the course of the study and form the central message of the final report. These are:

1. The relationship between academic institutions and the central government.
2. The adverse political environment likely to surround academic institutions during the next fifteen years.
3. The need for new patterns of courses.
4. Arrangements for maintaining academic standards.
5. The viability of mechanisms of finance that worked well during the period of expansion for the more stringent conditions likely to prevail in the 1980s and 1990s.

A central concern of British higher education policy during the next ten years will concern the relationship between higher education institutions and the state. How much external regulation of universities and colleges is appropriate in a system that is coping with the stresses and strains of adaptation without growth? Of course, governments have always been concerned with the universities.

A university is a trust founded by the state to ordain hands for the common interest of the nation: nor has it ever herebefore been denied that a university may, and ought, by the state to be to time to time corrected, reformed, or recalled, in conformity to accidental changes of relation, and looking towards an improved accomplishment of its essential ends.

This statement was made in 1853 not by a member of an embryonic ministry of education or university grants committee but by a respected professor of the University of Edinburgh, Sir William Hamilton. Long before that, of course, the Tudor and Stuart monarchs had taken considerable interest in the academic behaviour of Oxford and Cambridge Universities and before that the mediaeval church, which corresponded to the state, exercised a tight control over what was taught — the case of Peter Abelard being perhaps the best known example of academic freedom being kept in its place.

The debate about the relationship between higher education and the state in Britain, however, took on a new dimension after 1945 when central government became the dominant source of university funding. The issue of accountability for public funds was added to that of the social responsibility of institutions with considerable intellectual influence. What is the proper place of institutional independence in a modern publicly funded system of higher education? What is the proper balance between autonomy and accountability? Is it possible for autonomous institutions to conform to a more general national interest? The potential conflicts between autonomy and accountability, between academic and broad national interests were dem-
never have been in a better position to build on what has been accomplished and to begin a new phase of development.

In the face of these challenges, how can we ensure that higher education remains a vital and dynamic part of our society? One approach is to focus on the core values that have historically characterized higher education, such as the pursuit of knowledge and the promotion of critical thinking. By doing so, we can create a system that is both responsive to the needs of society and committed to the advancement of human understanding.

At the same time, we must also be aware of the potential pitfalls of relying too heavily on traditional models of higher education. As technology continues to evolve, it is becoming increasingly important to consider how we can integrate new tools and methods into our educational practices. This will require investment in infrastructure and a willingness to experiment with new approaches.

Ultimately, it is clear that higher education must be a priority for all of us. By working together, we can create a system that is both accessible and effective, and that serves the needs of society for generations to come.
developments in particular areas. There is clearly a question here, and this broad philosophical position is not seen as inconsistent with recommendations that in a time of financial stringency research funds need to be more clearly distinguished from resources for teaching than has been traditional in British higher education. It is suggested both that the UGC grant should contain specific guidance about the assumptions made about research activities of particular universities and also that each institution should establish a research fund from which departments and individuals can compete for resources.

While in general competition between autonomous institutions is seen as the best way of determining resource allocation in a time of financial stringency it is clearly recognized that the nature of the competition must be closely watched. In particular competition must be such as to increase the diversity of the student learning experience on offer but it must be so as not to prejudice the traditionally high standards of British higher education. My own position on this has shifted slightly since the publication of the report. Excellence in Diversity is based on the premise that competition in itself will encourage diversity. I am now not so convinced that this is entirely true. In markets where consumers are not well informed, established producers will be able to manipulate consumer demand to persuade people to purchase the goods and services that they want to supply. In higher education the funding agencies must always be on the look out for worthwhile claims of academic freedom and the independence of institutions safeguarded in a time of financial stringency. The largest amount of press comment and the sharpest hostility from academic interests has been aroused by the proposals about the structure of courses. The report suggests that two year pass degree courses might replace the present three year specialised honours degree as the linch-pin of the higher education system. The basic structure of higher education in Britain has changed very little during the past half century. Eighty per cent of the student load of universities and 60% of the full-time equivalent students in the public sector are on three or four year honours degree courses. Fairly generous grants are available for all students on degree courses, but for students on other courses at the discretion of local authorities and are usually much less generous. Grants are not available for students. It is hard to see how they can be justified. Therefore, that all students who are able to qualify for the full-time honours degree route. The report's proposals (with the exception of Sir Bruce Williams) did not think that this concentration on a single course structure was compatible with the diversity they were seeking to encourage. A separate line of argument criticizes the high level of academic freedom and the claims of selected governments to establish priorities and to require accountability for the use of funds. There is a compromise between the desire of institutions for guaranteed funds to enable them to plan rationally according to their own academic criteria and the wish of external funding bodies to use financial incentives to encourage particular kinds of response. Here as elsewhere the aim of the Leverhulme proposals is to establish a balance of influence between: (i) teachers and research workers with professional expertise, (ii) agencies responsible for the implementation of national local policy, (iii) students who are the main consumers of the teaching services of higher education institutions and (iv) employers of graduates and users of research. The report claimed that a balance between the pressures can best be achieved and the independence of institutions safeguarded if they receive their income through different routes. In broad terms, the proposals are that on average academic institutions should receive about half their income in the form of block grants from their main funding bodies. The other half should be made up partly from earmarked programmes of the main funding bodies, partly from full cost research grants, partly by grants from local authorities, partly from student fees (which following the Robbins report it is suggested that might contribute about 20% of the income of higher education institutions) and partly through earned income from industry, commerce and government.

Contrary to the claims of some critics the report explicitly rejects the notion of 'privatization' of higher education. Along with the British Robbins report and the Carnegie Commission report in the United States, however, the Leverhulme signatories take the view that academic institutions can be independently only if they obtain significant funds from sources other than monopolistic funding agencies. The fact that he (or she) who pays the piper calls the tune was discredited when resources were growing. When plenty of money is available many toes can be played. But in the past three years universities, polytechnics and colleges have found themselves very much at the mercy of a very small number of apparently not very well informed decision makers. A Leverhulme inspired higher education system in Britain would certainly be no bed of roses for the institutions. But it would encourage and permit responsible response to advances in knowledge and the rapidly changing needs of a high technology society. I am convinced also that the prospect of preserving all that is genuinely excellent in British academic life at the present.