

UNIVERSITY  
— OF CENTRAL —  
LANCASHIRE



**THE ONES  
TO WATCH**

**SEMINAR:  
SOCIAL DIMENSION OF THE EUROPEAN AREA OF  
HIGHER EDUCATION AND WORLD-WIDE  
COMPETITION**

**PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS  
MALCOLM MCVICAR  
UCLAN**



# WHAT DO WE MEAN BY “COMPETITIVENESS”?

- The meaning given to “competitiveness” will determine whether or not it is compatible with a public policy “social dimension”.





## Competitiveness within a defined area:

- For example, state funding can deliver basically equal funding for similar programmes irrespective of the institution in which they are delivered. Combined with a comprehensive quality assurance system, this should set a minimum standard of provisions at institutional level.





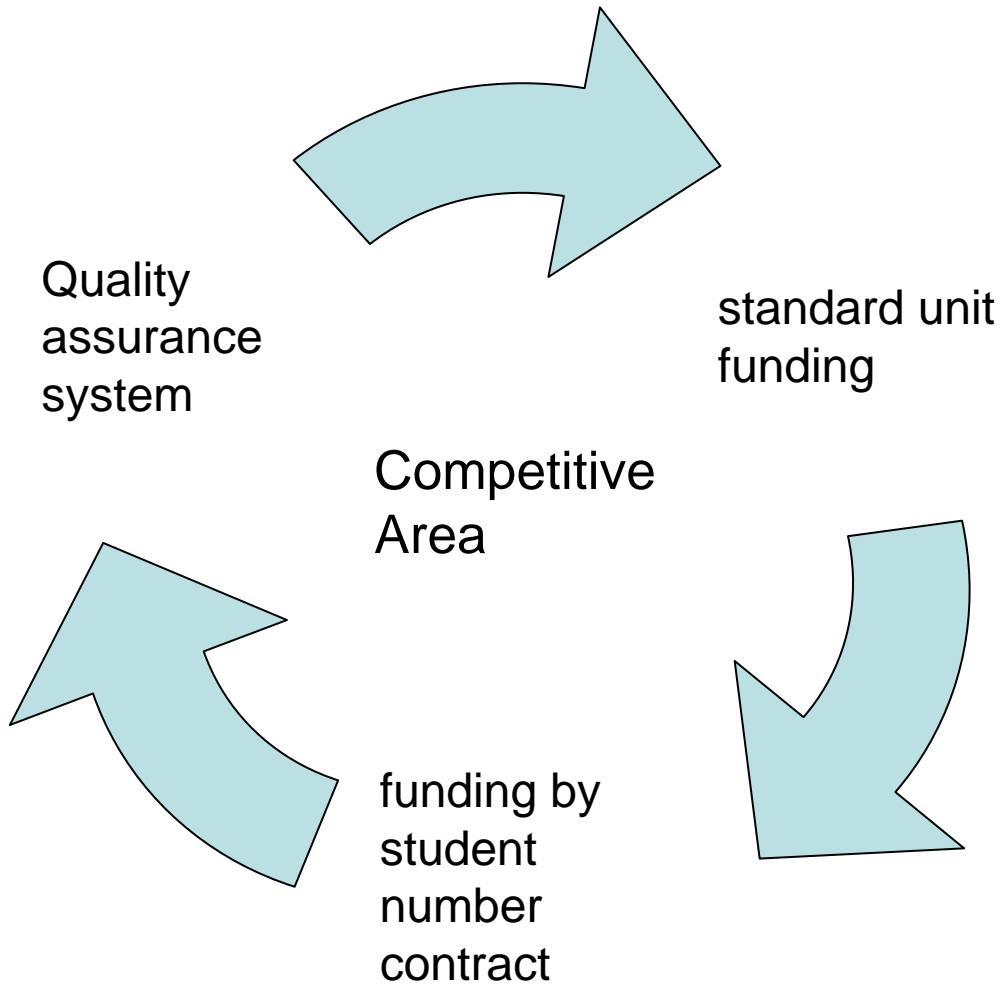
With funding based on student number contracts, (possibly differentiated by broad subject areas) and limits on market-led expansion, this creates a fairly stable geographical spread of provision.





- Within this defined area, competition can operate, for example, in:
  - research funding
  - widening participation
  - social inclusion
  - employability
  - teaching innovation





## BOUNDARIES TO COMPETITION





Without compromising institutional autonomy and academic freedom, Government can progress its social objectives by varying the criteria for competitive, (additional, marginal), funding.





But, competition as the mechanism for a market-based higher education system – as the basis for resource allocation – is much more difficult to combine with the social agenda.







Assume a system in which:

- Student fees are paid by the consumers of higher education
- State funding is roughly equal per student, per programme and does not **(cannot)** compensate for differences in fee income.
- Artificial constraints on growth are removed.





## Assume

- Growth in demand for HE is fairly static.
- Continued operation of a comprehensive quality assurance system





You then have a market-based resource allocation system which will lead to greater differentiation between institutions, a shift in student numbers (and funds) to “more popular” institutions, a downward spiral for “less popular” institutions.





A market leads to winners and losers – unless Government intervenes to constrain the market – losers mean a loss of geographical and institutional capacity.



This loss of capacity will disadvantage less affluent areas, institutions and students – particularly part-time, geographically immobile students.



By definition, these groups are more likely to be:

- Economically disadvantaged
- Minorities
- Found in certain areas – e.g poor rural, inner cities
- Experienced multiple deprivation in employment, access to higher quality public services, health service, schools etc.





Such potential students are least likely to have confidence in high income post-graduation and a greater reluctance to leave HE with large debts.



How does Government deliver its social objectives – bringing into higher education participants from groups with no tradition of entering HE?





Who has the responsibility for support systems to counter the negative impact of a market system?

The state?

The institutions?





Should quality assurance systems be used to assure on non-academic matters such as commitment to widening participation, social inclusion, achievement of social policy objectives?





**NO**

Quality assurance systems should be based solely on criteria for academic standards – academic **quality**.



## BUT

If the social policy objectives have political legitimacy and are generally accepted by the higher education system as not compromising the basic principles of HE, then it is reasonable to seek some separate assurance of achievement/commitment.





This could be

- as a condition of public funding
- as a social audit
- as a condition of licence

