

Exercises 2 and 3

Mark: Hello everyone. Thank you all for coming this afternoon. My name is Mark Evans and basically what I do is go round the world representing a British university – I won't say which one, but it's rather well known! – and encourage overseas students to come and study there. I'm joined here by Sue Hume, who helps organise overseas education fairs and events in Asia and the Middle East.

Sue: Hello.

Mark: We're going to briefly discuss the state that British education is in in terms of the global market, and then we'll open it up for questions and points from the floor. Sue, it's a time of massive change for higher education, isn't it? Universities have become terrifically popular in the last twenty years or so. In Britain almost half of all school-leavers now enrol in some form of higher education, but of course the downside is that tuition fees are rising and will almost certainly continue to climb for the foreseeable future. I'd say there are similar enthusiasms overseas for undergraduate education: many more young adults are extending their education both in other wealthy countries and also in emerging economies. It seems to me that British universities have always attracted foreign students, but they're increasingly keen to meet some of this demand by opening campuses abroad. Would you agree with that?

Sue: Yes, there's no doubt that Britain is a world leader in higher education, second in fact only to the USA in the number of foreign students studying here. But I would say that right now universities are not quite so good at setting up shop abroad as they'd like to be. American universities have a long tradition of operating in other countries: Johns Hopkins University, for example, opened a branch in Italy as long ago as 1955 and then another in China in 1986. They teach mostly in English and have both local and visiting students. At the moment American universities have 78 campuses overseas, including – did you know this? – four relatively new ones in Britain. Australian universities also have a strong presence abroad too, with campuses in Malaysia, Singapore and the United Arab Emirates.

Mark: Indeed, we were definitely slower to get going. Strange when you think of the brand recognition of say Oxford or Cambridge. I think it was the University of Nottingham that established the first large-scale campus abroad, in Malaysia in the year 2000. And then they opened a second one in China four years later. Today, British universities have set up only 13 international campuses, to my knowledge.

Sue: Yes, but – as you suggested – we are trying to catch up. University College London recently became the latest university to sign a deal to move into Qatar, where it will join six American institutions that are already there. Qatar plans to build a series of new museums housing Arab and Islamic artefacts and the new campus, which is funded I believe, by the Qatar Foundation and the Qatar Museums Authority, will offer courses in archaeology, conservation and museum studies to students, and also professional training to those people working in the galleries. UCL has also recently opened satellite operations in Australia and Kazakhstan.

Mark: Hmm. So where are we looking to for the biggest new market, do you think?

Sue: Well, for western universities that's likely to be India, and there's been a recent study into this by the British Council and the Economist Intelligence Unit, but legislation to allow foreign universities to operate there hasn't been passed yet. So, universities such as Middlesex, which has two foreign campuses now, are entering into agreements with Indian institutions to offer degrees validated by their British partner.

Mark: I suppose at the end of the day it's all about making as much money as possible, isn't it?

Sue: Well, the interest is definitely mainly in tapping into new revenue streams, although we should remember that British institutions do tend to make less money from their operations abroad than they do from charging foreigners high tuition fees if they come to Britain. But as the competition for university students increases worldwide, British universities can't rely on enough of them coming to our shores, to our institutions here. Expanding abroad might turn out to be an important – even an essential – means of survival for them.