

Expert: 'Focus on Diversity' Is Causing British Universities to Decline

Should university admissions be purely meritocratic, based on students' demonstrated academic ability? Or, should students with better academic profiles be passed over for admission in order to fill diversity quotas?

These are some of the tough questions that British citizens may be asking themselves after a controversial [article](#) in *The Telegraph* last week.

The piece reports that British universities have slipped in world rankings. On the prestigious annual [Times Higher Education list](#), Cambridge slipped from second to fourth place, while Oxford slipped from third to fifth. In addition, the number of British universities making the list fell from twelve to ten. (In comparison, U.S. universities occupy 43 of the 100 slots on the list.)

So what's the reason for the British universities' recent decline? According to Alan Smithers, director of the Centre for Education and Employment Research at the University of Buckingham, it's in part due to recent government pressure for increased diversity in admissions:

"Its current policies are causing universities to take their eye off the ball of recruiting the best to comply with Government demands to increase the proportions entering and graduating from state schools, ethnic minorities and postcodes from which, in the past, few students have come."

As background, *The Telegraph* explains:

"Top universities, including Oxford and Cambridge, have been

under huge political pressure to take on minority student after the Prime Minister, David Cameron, attacked them for racial bias and not working harder to broaden their student mix."

Some may argue that the British universities' recent decline in rankings—if partially due to the recent push for diversity—is a necessary sacrifice to eventually achieve greater educational, racial, and socio-economic equality in England.

But then there are the sentiments of those such as the famous Irish statesman Edmund Burke, who once wrote that "those who attempt to level, never equalize."