

Open University

It has been announced by the Minister of Education that Bangladesh is to have an open university, probably soon. Academic opinion is not only not opposed to the idea, but has, as far as we are aware, welcomed the Minister's announcement as a step in the right direction. For it has long been evident that pressure on places in the existing universities has reached a point where the choice they face is often between turning away an overwhelming majority of the applicants or, by admitting a reasonable proportion of them, creating a situation in which nobody receives any education at all. To inject there to four hundred into class rooms meant for forty-five or fifty is obviously to promote conditions in which neither teachers nor pupils can attend to their real business.

While an open university is expected to reduce pressure on places we hope steps will be taken not to cheapen academic degrees by awarding them indiscriminately to whoever registers for a course and pays the necessary fees. An alternative to direct academic guidance must be developed such that those who join the open university are made to understand that higher education is not a mere matter of acquiring diplomas and degrees without work.

Open universities rely on correspondence courses and also on broadcast talks from which others also can benefit. But in order for such courses and guidance to be effective, a much larger than ordinary staff will be necessary. The teachers must be capable of correcting written work submitted to them by post, and that thoroughly and punctually. Were this neglected, the proposed open university will degenerate into a scandal much worse than any that we have so far known. Besides, the examination system devised to test the performance of the students must also be different from the methods in vogue in existing institutions.

We trust that the whole scheme will be planned carefully before the open university is launched. To say that academic standards in the country have declined alarmingly is only to state a universally acknowledged truism. We should be sorry to see an ill-hatched but well-meant scheme aggravating the situation.