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**Author**

MCCOWAN, Tristan

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**Abstract**

Access to higher education in Brazil is to a large extent restricted to the higher socio-economic groups. Public universities have limited places and entry is determined by highly competitive exams, thereby excluding those who have not had a high quality secondary education or attended an expensive preparatory course. There has been considerable growth in the private sector to absorb the excess demand, but the majority of Brazilians cannot afford the fees. This paper develops a concept of equity in higher education in which, firstly, there should be sufficient places in the system as a whole and, secondly, all people should have a fair opportunity of attending the university of their choice regardless of socio-economic background. Recent efforts to expand access are analysed, including incentives for the growth of private universities, student loans and the new Prouni initiative, in which private institutions provide free places to low-income students in return for tax exemptions. While these initiatives have the potential to increase the total number of places, they will not lead to an equitable expansion, as disadvantaged students will still be confined to courses of lower quality or with lower subsequent value on the employment market. Initiatives aimed at the public sector such as

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the introduction of quotas and changes to entry examinations are also discussed. Finally, some implications for future policy development are outlined. (HRK / Abstract übernommen) McCowan, Tristan, E-Mail: [tmccowan@ioe.ac.uk](mailto:tmccowan@ioe.ac.uk)