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Abstract

There is a great deal of discussion in the academic literature around how the current conditions in higher education frame students as customers. Observers are of the view that rankings and marketing, an increased focus on student satisfaction, and particularly tuition fees, encourage an instrumental, passive attitude towards a university education. Given the volume of attention directed towards this topic, it is perhaps surprising that there is relatively little scholarship that examines it empirically. Some who have addressed it presumed a customer/consumer orientation in students and have been somewhat—but not entirely successful—in generating evidence to confirm those assumptions. It appears that the expectations of this instrumental, passive orientation are being realised in part, but that this is also mediated by other dispositions. What could be considered to be missing from the analysis thus far is an exploration of how students make university-related decisions (not simply what choices are based on) and how they understand the respective roles of the student and university. This

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study begins to fill that gap, exploring the orientations towards university of undergraduates in Germany and England, two countries where the diffusion of market conditions in higher education policies has been somewhat contrasting. Distinctions between the German and English students did emerge, but these were less based on those countries' unequal engagement with tuition fees and rankings and more to do with other aspects of their university cultures and the world beyond their degrees. This suggests that how people approach their time as students is more complex than some of the literature assumes. Furthermore, at the very least, any consideration of this topic must include an analysis of how students themselves understand and experience their higher education and broader social contexts. (HRK / Abstract übernommen) Budd, Richard, E-Mail: buddr@hope.ac.uk