BLUE SKIES

New thinking about the future of higher education

A collection of short articles by leading commentators

UK 2014 edition

Edited by Louis Coiffait

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80 Strand
London, WC2R 0RL
+44 (0)20 7190 4330

References

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Contents

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The authors

Maryanna Abdo is Director of Emerging Markets Education at The Parthenon Group.

Ashwin Assomull is a Partner in the International Education Practice at The Parthenon Group.

Dr **Graeme Atherton** founded and leads both AccessHE in London and the National Education Opportunities Network (NEON) in England. He is also Visiting Professor in Higher Education & Social Mobility Practice at London Metropolitan University and the Chair of the World Congress on Access to Post-Secondary Education.

Liam Byrne is Member of Parliament for Birmingham Hodge Hill and the Shadow Minister for Universities, Science and Skills.

Louis Coiffait is Head of Research at Pearson. You can follow him on Twitter at @LouisMMCoiffait or read his blog at http://thepearsonthinktank.com/category/blogs/louis-coiffait/ for education policy comment, research and analysis. He is the Editor of Blue Skies, a growing collection of new thinking about the future of higher education. He also researches a range of other topics including enterprise and entrepreneurship education, careers services and open education data. He is Chair of Governors at an outstanding school in Hackney and runs the social enterprise www.workandteach.co.uk.

Lisa Colledge is the Snowball Metrics Programme Director.

Penny Egan CBE is Executive Director of the US-UK Fulbright Commission.

Dr **Mike Finn** is Post-Doctoral Teaching Fellow in the History of Education at Liverpool Hope University. He was previously Research Fellow in History at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford and Bye-Fellow in History at Magdalene College, Cambridge. He was Kennedy Scholar in History at Harvard University in 2002-2003. He has taught widely in universities, and was head of department in two leading boarding schools. A Fellow of the Royal Society or Arts, he is co-editor of The Coalition Effect (with Anthony Seldon) which will be published by Cambridge University Press in 2015.

Dr **Paul Gentle** is Director of Programmes at the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education.

John T Green is Chair of the Snowball Metrics Steering Group.

Dr **Vicky Gunn** is the Director of the Learning and Teaching Centre at the University of Glasgow. She has been closely involved in the work of the Quality Enhancement Themes. Her research focuses on the organizational dynamics of student learning, teaching excellence, and the development of graduate attributes. In her spare time she maintains a small teaching profile in Church History and practical theology.

Paul Harris is the Strategy Director for UNITE Group plc. Paul has worked across a range of private and public sector industries in a variety of roles covering media relations, internal communications, branding and marketing. He was part of the team working on the corporate rebranding of Abbey and sale to Banco Santander. Senior roles at Laing O'Rourke and Smiths Group preceded a role with the South West Regional Development Agency, where he worked closely with government departments on economic development issues. Paul is also Chair of the UNITE Foundation.

Nigel Healey is a Professor and Pro-Vice-Chancellor (International) at Nottingham Trent University. He is a board member of the UK Council for International Students Affairs (UKCISA) and represents international students on the UCAS Council. He chairs the organising committee for the QS-APPLE international education conference in the Asia-Pacific. His current research interest is the internationalisation of higher education, including transnational education.

David Kernohan is a blogger and commentator on higher education and technology, writing at "Followers of the Apocalypse" (http://followersoftheapocalyp.se/) and "Wonkhe" (http://www.wonkhe.com/). He writes here, by invitation, in a personal capacity.

Patrick Krassén is an Education Policy Analyst at the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise.

Emran Mian was the head of the civil service team supporting the Independent Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance in 2009/10 and is now the Director of the Social Market Foundation.

Johnny Rich is a media and higher education specialist with various roles as Publisher of brands such as Push (the leading independent resource for prospective students), Real World Magazine, the Recruiters' Guide to Courses & Campuses and the Oxbridge Students' Careers Resource. He is also a director of the Higher Education Academy. He appears regularly on television and radio as a specialist on students and higher education issues.

Michael Russell is Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning in the Scottish Cabinet.

Jenny Shaw is the Head of Higher Education Engagement for UNITE Group plc. She is responsible for the company's strategy relationships with the higher education sector, and for analysing HE sector trends and developments. Jenny has spent most of her career in the HE sector, mainly in the fields of widening participation and business engagement. She has worked for the universities of Hull, York St John and Middlesex, and has provided research and consultancy to SPA, the HE Academy and the Equality Challenge Unit.

Sonia Sodha is Head of Public Services and Consumer Rights at Which?

Ashley Sweetman is Technology Co-ordinator for the Mile End Group having previously completed his MA in Modern & Contemporary British History as a Mile End Group Assistant.

Tom Tobia is a designer, and co-founder of Makerversity, a making and learning space at Somerset House, London. He works with people, groups, organisations and institutions to design and explore ideas for social change. In particular, his interests lie in alternative education, building resilient populations, digital manufacturing, technology, food and how they all interconnect.

Andy Westwood is Chief Executive of GuildHE and President of the OECD Forum for Social Innovation.

The Blue Skies project

Louis Coiffait

Blue Skies is intended to provide a non-partisan platform for debate, presenting a wide range of different opinions about the issues and priorities that matter to the future of higher education, both within national boundaries and beyond.

There is at times disagreement about priorities and methods, but common themes do seem evident. Most of our contributors are people and organisations you might expect to hear wise words from about the future of higher education – however some are less well-known, but equally well-placed to comment.

Blue Skies is a deliberate attempt to fundamentally broaden the conversation about higher education, completely re-framing some issues, and to propose a few bold and innovative solutions. By focussing on the future this book forces attention upon the crucial 'so what' questions.

Above all, this book (and the wider project) aims to paint a positive picture for the future of higher education. It draws out the many strengths within the sector, showcases some of the best thinking available, demonstrates the breadth, passion and expertise of the authors, and hopefully provides some hope for the future.

Approach

This publication involves a targeted call for contributions, working with leading thinkers in the field to invite short, focussed articles under broad banner of 'new thinking about the future of higher education'. Editorial influence has been kept to the bare minimum. Views from relevant individuals within Pearson are sometimes included but have been given no special emphasis over others.

Going global

This is the UK 2014 edition of Blue Skies, adding 19 original new articles to the growing collection. One particularly exciting new development is the addition of a Spanish (and English translation) of a new Latin American edition for 2014. Over time it is hoped that different editions will come out of other regions and in different years, creating a unique global collection of new ideas about the future of higher education. Changes to pearsonblueskies.com will mean that all of this content, including different languages, can be hosted in one place. This possibility of achieving truly global scale is one of the most exciting and unusual features of Pearson, please take a look at the site and share your views.

A note on language

Higher education, HE, HEIs, universities, college, the academy, tertiary education, academia, higher-level learning, Level Five/Six – call it what you will, in most non-technical uses, these words mean the same thing to the majority of people; courses with typical durations of three to four years, preceded by 13 years of education, including the completion of upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education. Often those using these different words don't appreciate the subtle differences between them. The etymology of the word 'university' reveals its heritage in the classical Greek concept of a 'universal' education, covering a broad array of what we would now call subjects, and often including different types of learning. The word then became more formalised as a type of organisational structure; a corporation, community or association of students, teachers and researchers. More recently, the concept has been broadened further beyond what is studied and where, to who is doing the studying, as demonstrated by modern preoccupations of moving higher education from an elite to a universal service, widening access and driving social mobility. However the issue of language is not a trivial one, for as many of the articles within this collection show, the sometimes simplistic and anachronistic concepts and assumptions used when considering higher education deserve to be challenged at times because they can limit both our understanding and the future opportunities available.

How to read Blue Skies

Blue Skies can be read in a number of ways. Cover-to-cover it provides a diverse and thought-provoking tour around the major challenges and opportunities facing the sector. Alternatively the reader can focus on the individual authors and article topics of interest. This year the articles are simply presented alphabetically rather than in different sections, the many cross-cutting and over-lapping themes are grouped on the website using simple tags. Readers are encouraged to visit pearsonblueskies.com as it features even more free content – with summary videos from the authors, comment and share functions, all of the book content in an online format, editions in other languages and from other regions, plus a downloadable PDF of each edition.

Although Blue Skies is always very much 'of the moment' it is also intended to provide lasting value in the future as each edition marks a reference point at a time and place of major change.

1

A Vision for the Future of HE

Liam Byrne

It was Ronald Reagan who said: 'it's true that hard work didn't kill anyone but I figure why take the chance'.

The President was of course being charming. But the truth is that the lack of good jobs today, means that it is harder than ever to make a living simply by working hard. Working people in the UK are on average £1,600 worse off a year since the 2010 general election; a family today has to work an extra two hours a week, just to make what they did four years ago.

That's why Labour has said we will put an end to low pay by looking at higher sector-specific minimum wages, and by encouraging businesses to offer the living wage. It's why we've said we will freeze energy prices, and it's why we'll extend childcare provision.

But for the long term, there is only one real way out of this mess: and that is to grow our knowledge-intensive sectors; that part of the economy that accounts for one third of output, one third of business, but just 19% of jobs. If it was a third of jobs that would be an extra 2.4 million better paid jobs to go round. Right now, those jobs pay 40% over the national average; that's a weekly pay-packet of £161 more.

But here's the challenge: global science is now out-pacing UK skills. Our teaching is not keeping up with either the trade or the technology that is rapidly re-shaping the world around us. Competitors like Germany, Korea and Israel are all growing science spending faster than us. Our spending on science is falling in real terms by £100 million a year.

Meanwhile, new science powers like China are growing science spending at 36% a year as they shift from being an intellectual property (IP) copier to an IP creator. Chinese firms such as Xiaomi and BGI are showing that they can beat the world in the invention business.

And others are not simply inventing things, they are making things. At the Rolls Royce-Hindustan Air plant In Bangalore, I recently saw first-hand that production quality is simply world-class. Rolls Royce and its partners have 850,000 engineering graduates every year to choose from. But salaries for people of the quality that Rolls Royce needs in India are between just £3,000 and £5,000 a year.

In this world that is coming, if we're to prosper, if we're to build a bigger knowledge economy, it's critical that we find ways to teach creative, practical intelligence, not just to some but to all.

The decline of routine jobs is accelerating as technology advances: indeed, economists at the Oxford Martin School now estimate that 47% of jobs in our economy may be automated over the next two decades. The world-class education system of tomorrow will therefore not just have one, but many ways to rise. Today, our universities draw on a talent pool that is simply too small. We do well at helping students on an academic track go on to higher education. But we do a terrible job at helping those on an apprenticeship track make the same journey to higher skills.

Here's what the OECD said about the problem last year: 'The weak articulation between level 4 and 6 programmes and university bachelor programmes is a serious problem'. There are now something like 200 apprenticeship frameworks – but just 13 of them stretch up to higher level skills. Just 6% of apprentices go on to bachelor's degree level skills. We have just 6,000 apprentices training for level 5 qualifications.

Yet that's the choice young people want. Earlier this year, I was in a different Rolls Royce plant in Derby and I asked some apprentices there why they'd chosen Rolls Royce. 'It's easy' said one 'We're told in our first week here that the sky's the limit. It's the chance to go all the way, to go up to a degree level skill – but get paid along the way'. Right now, it seems, 94% of apprentices do not get that Rolls Royce experience – and as a country I don't think we can afford that in the years to come.

Priorities for action

So what do we need to fix?

First, we have to protect our world-class science base. We have to ask ourselves whether we can sustain a world-class system if research capital is distributed by ministerial diktat, often going towards shiny new projects rather than where the money is needed. This is especially the case at a time when science spending is falling in real terms by £100M a year.

Second, if we're to stay world-class we have to stop those measures that are shutting us off from the world. Where the signals read by students in countries like India, are please don't come. Of course we need stronger checks on short-term student visitor visas. But when I met several hundred students at Delhi University last week, I was struck by how hard it was to convince people that the UK genuinely wanted them to come. It is simply ridiculous that students are today inside the UK's net migration target.

Third, we've got to create a system with equal access for A-level students and apprentices; what you might call an 'earn while you learn' revolution. The government is boasting that its 'uncapping student places'. But it's only uncapping places for half of our young people who happen to be on an academic route. What about the other half who'd like to be doing apprenticeships? To deliver this, we've got to look at how we create a proper system of tertiary education, where our great further education (FE) colleges are more inter-connected with our universities. Colleges will become the mission-critical partner in transforming the apprenticeship system, so we need close ties between FE and HE if we're to help those on an apprenticeship track move up through the system.

And we've also clearly got to look at the situation now faced by post-graduate students who are finding it harder and harder to get access to Career Development Loans, yet face a jobs market which increasingly expects post-graduate qualifications.

Conclusion

Higher education was crucial for me in the journey from behind a fry-station at McDonalds in Harlow, to the Harvard Business School, to representing Birmingham Hodge Hill.

But just 30% of my constituents enjoy the chance to get into Higher Education, and I want to transform that. If we're to build a bigger knowledge economy we need higher education to be stronger; but for me a key part of developing a stronger, bigger system is ensuring that there are many ways to rise.

***Liam Byrne** is Member of Parliament for Birmingham Hodge Hill and the Shadow Minister for Universities, Science and Skills.*

2

Seizing the international student opportunity

Maryanna Abdo and Ashwin Assomull

Whether private or public, for-profit or non-profit, universities around the world are under pressure to manage costs and increase revenues. In the face of cuts to public funding and increased competition, most universities are reviewing their approaches to research budgets, scholarships, and faculty appointments.

However, too often, universities focus purely on cost savings – typically by investing in major overhauls such as streamlining back-office systems, re-negotiating contracts, or upgrading technology. However, what many seem to neglect are strategies to increase their 'top line'.

Perhaps the single most important strategic issue for universities currently aiming to increase top line revenues is **internationalisation**. This is not only an area where universities can increase enrolments and revenues; internationalisation can also positively affect institutional reputation, influence, and ranking - valuable factors in long-term institutional health and growth. In what follows we explore the internationalisation opportunity and address specific and practical ways that universities can take advantage of globalisation in education.

Western degrees still dominate

The first observation is that at present Western, Anglophone universities are the option of choice for most internationally mobile students, and can therefore take most advantage of this opportunity. Many students are seeking English-language degrees to access education relevant to international business and government. Western-style education is often also valued by both students and their future employers because it is seen to offer the critical thinking and problem-solving skills that are so valuable in today's global economy. Even in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which is a major site of branch campuses for Western institutions (with 35 branches as of January 2014) the most popular degrees are from private Western universities, which have grown at 18% in enrolments p.a. between 2009-2012.

In 2012, fee-paying international students comprised 2% of students enrolled in the US, 14% in the UK, and 19% in Australia.[1] Together these three nations are the world's

[1] OECD

largest destination countries for internationally mobile students. The US has roughly 30% of this market, the UK 17%, and Australia 15%.[2] Canada is increasing its efforts to recruit transnational students, with 11% enrolment growth from 2007-2011.[3] Other English-speaking markets, such as GCC countries, Singapore, and Malaysia, also have strategies to develop as education hubs. However, there is little threat that the key destination countries will be unseated given their strong market position.

Asia offers significant opportunities for international student recruitment

Our second observation is that universities should start by looking to Asia as the engine of their internationalisation strategy. While students from all over the world are increasingly mobile, the top destination countries currently receive most of their students from Asia. Nearly half of US international students, a quarter of UK international students and more than 60% of Australian international students are from Asian countries. Between 2005 and 2011, overseas enrolments of students from China, India, South Korea and Malaysia increased by 9% year-on-year.[4]

Moreover, the opportunity should continue to grow, at least in the short-term. According to Parthenon's analysis of the market opportunity, Chinese student flows overseas are expected to grow at ~13-15% p.a. until 2018.[5] This growth is driven by the increasing affordability of higher education for Chinese students due to their country's rising affluence and economic growth. Chinese students choose to study overseas because of better quality education in foreign universities (just two domestic universities are currently in the global top 200). Furthermore, seats in Chinese universities are limited, with four applicants for every Bachelor's place, intensifying undergraduate competition.

Young, aspirational, and internationally mobile, Asian students are likely to continue to lead their international peers in their desire to study abroad. This trend is also supported by rising affluence levels across Asia, smaller family size (correlated to higher spending on education per child), and a shortfall of university seats. For example, at current rates of college capacity growth India will have more college-uneducated adults in 2020 than it does today; domestic higher education growth has not kept pace with aspirations and population growth.

[2] Parthenon analysis of multiple data sources including OECD, AEI, HESA, and IIE.
[3] OECD
[4] Parthenon analysis of multiple data sources including OECD, AEI, HESA, and IIE.
[5] Growth projections were modelled based on study abroad penetration in comparison countries, analysis of growth drivers, and analysis of historic growth.

Engaging with study abroad agents is key to driving international enrolments

A third point about internationalisation is that study abroad agents play a vital role in student decision-making about international study, and successful universities will have a clearly defined strategy for engaging such agents. Particularly in Asian countries, study abroad agents are an important part of the higher education landscape, supporting families in the university selection and application process. Recent Parthenon research indicates that 50% of Chinese students pursuing international education use agents in their study abroad decision-making process. This figure has remained stable over the last few years.

Our surveys also reveal that for both students and parents, agents are among the main information sources and influencers. Because agent counsellors are incentivised on the basis of their success in placing students, the more familiar they are with university brands, the more effective they can be in identifying appropriate options for the students that they advise.

One of the challenges that universities face is the need to deliver ongoing and frequent training to the counsellors that advise students and parents. These counsellors are typically in their mid-20s, and the vast majority will not have visited the destination countries (let alone the universities) that they will be describing to families. Moreover, turnover is high, with 40% of counsellors at any one time having less than one year of experience. This means that counsellors require continuous training to build familiarity with university brands. They also value support at fairs and exhibitions as well as access to good marketing materials to advise students. The most effective universities will also visit agents in their network regularly to build familiarity and rapport, refresh training, and provide information on the university offering.

Developing partnerships with pathway providers can support internationalisation

The fourth key area for internationalisation is the opportunity to engage with Pathways providers. These make up a vital part of the internationalisation landscape, providing one-year 'bridging programmes' for international students enrolling overseas. Pathway programmes are offered at the destination country campus, often within university buildings and sometimes sharing faculty. They support international students to access the foundational knowledge and skills required to begin their first year at the destination university. For universities, pathways providers are partners who can help them secure a guaranteed number of qualified students from target geographies and ensure that they are prepared to a standard that supports them to be successful when enrolled.

What about branch campuses?

Finally, branch campuses are an increasingly important area for internationalisation. Many institutions are setting up branches abroad. For example, NYU Shanghai opened in August 2013, Duke is opening a joint venture campus with Wuhan University in Kunshan, China, and Yale-N.U.S. College in Singapore opened in July 2013. Foreign branch campuses allow universities access to a wider segment of students who may not be able to afford to go abroad but value a foreign degree. These branch campuses will have lower tuition fees than the home campus, but will typically still have higher fees than local institutions. Successful branch campuses tend to offer employability-related courses and result in higher salaries post-graduation (relative to local competitor offerings).

Conclusion

Internationalisation can confer significant financial benefits to universities by driving enrolments and revenues. Furthermore, international students tend to bring in higher marginal profits per individual relative to domestic students. However, there are a number of other benefits related to internationalisation like enhanced institutional reputation, improved ranking, and a more diversified student body that should also be considered.

Institutions that invest resources behind creating a clearly defined strategy will be able to escape the cycle of cutting back-end costs and instead focus on re-investing top line revenues in areas that allow them to achieve their core mission.

Maryanna Abdo *is Director of Emerging Markets Education at The Parthenon Group.*
Ashwin Assomull *is a Partner in the International Education Practice at The Parthenon Group.*

The Parthenon Group is the leading advisor to the education sector globally, having completed over 900 education sector projects across more than 70 countries in the last 10 years.

3

The Social Mobility University

Graeme Atherton

There is a battle for the soul of higher education in the early 21st century. There are those who want to return the university to the purity of a mid-20th century golden age, and those who want to make it more 'entrepreneurial', 'edgeless' or 'borderless'. But there are few voices in academia willing to articulate and advocate the 'social mobility' university and this presents a major problem. There are a procession of politicians from across the party spectrum, who want to place higher education (HE) as the engine of social mobility. But is it really geared up to do this and does it even really want to play this role?

You don't become an academic to raise social mobility

The quote above comes from the English Minister for Higher Education and Skills, David Willetts. He is right.[1] The majority of people enter academia primarily because of a research interest in their subject. They also progress in academia on this basis too. Promotion in higher education is based firmly on research output, then teaching. There is no category for advancement based on social mobility impact. This is not to say the majority of those working in HE are not sympathetic to the goal of greater social mobility, however fuzzy it is defined. But it would seldom get in the way of research or teaching.

How social mobility is understood also presents a major challenge. It is associated with the promotion of access to higher education by groups presently under-represented in it, which in England has particular reference to those from lower socio-economic groups. There has been significant progress in this area in the last 20 years and a community of those both inside and outside academia, committed to taking this goal forward, now exists. But the growth of widening participation work as a field has also enabled it to be either annexed off from the core work of higher education institutions, or conversely submerged within the institution. A commitment to social mobility is expressed through work in this area which is usually taken forward by small teams, positioned within the administrative or recruitment functions of the institution. Conversely, it is argued that the commitment has become 'mainstreamed', and is best

[1] Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) (2011) Ron Dearing lecture: Universities and Social Mobility London: BIS (https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/ron-dearing-lecture-universities-and-social-mobility)

conceived not as what a small team in the institution does but as something the whole institution itself does. This is equally problematic however, as no coherent definition of such mainstreaming exists, nor is there a metric to ascertain when it has occurred or not.

The final major barrier is an unintended consequence of the widening participation agenda. Some access-focused elements of the regulatory regime in England are looked at enviously by some other countries, where access might not even be remotely on the radar of universities. But this has also helped consolidate the pre-existing idea that access work is something universities have to do, rather than want to do. This can clearly be seen in the case of those institutions who admit higher numbers of learners from under-represented groups. They argue with complete justification, that they are doing the 'heavy lifting' where access is concerned. But few ever express a desire to admit more. They have 'done their bit' and are often more concerned to improve their academic standing so they are not perceived as an 'access university'.

Building the Social Mobility University (SMU)

If social mobility is ever going to be truly part of the battle for HE's soul then the mission and purpose of HE is where we should start and end. There is a 'poverty of the imagination' where the university is concerned[2] (Barnett 2013). Willets' observation above, that no-one becomes an academic to raise social mobility, should be challenged head on. Why should this not be a core part of what an academic is and does? The tussle over the soul of HE is as much about what its public role should be. It is entirely appropriate it should be conceived in terms of social mobility (it is at least as preferable as being a handmaiden to economic growth). In practical terms, this would also mean the institution enabling its staff to express a commitment to social mobility and being recognised for it. This means making engagement in social mobility work a compulsory part of what all academics do, from (and including) senior management down. It also means ensuring that staff are given time in their schedules to do this.

The practical expression of the social mobility values should begin with engagement of children at primary level and finish when the students are in the labour market. Research from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) in 2013 showed that students from non-white ethnic groups and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, even after controlling for prior attainment and institution attended, were still less likely to complete their courses, obtain a first/upper 2:1 degree or to get a graduate job within 6 months than the average student.[3] A commitment to social mobility means a whole student lifecycle approach – in HE terms from cradle to grave. It also means confronting some inviolable cultural norms in HE. The disparity

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[2] Barnett, R. (2013) Wanted: New visions of the university University World News: 16th March 2013

[3] HEFCE (2013b) Higher education and beyond Outcomes from full-time first degree study Bristol:HEFCE

in outcomes by social background in compulsory education in England has led to a concerted focus on the needs of learners from lower socio-economic groups, with funding via the 'pupil premium' to be spent specifically on these needs. The view in HE in England has always been that when you enter you leave your identity at the door: the way to improve the performance of students from under-represented groups is to improve learning and teaching for all. The social mobility university should revisit this assumption. The HEFCE research shows you do not stop being working class when you enrol in HE. A true SMU should work with their students to develop and pilot specific interventions to support learners from different social backgrounds.

Policymakers can support the SMU by investing their resources carefully. Creating a student premium to replace the student opportunity allocation as the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) recently recommended, would support a more targeted approach to supporting students through HE and into employment[4] (IPPR 2013). This should be coupled with investment in the mission-building that is at the heart of SMU. The best way to do this is to support the professionalisation of social mobility in HE, by seed funding a National Academy committed to providing staff development in social mobility across the student lifecycle. The National Academy would do what HE does best; grow a body of research-based knowledge and practice that can benefit society.

The SMU is not a utopian ideal. Nor is it an especially radical one. It is as valid an identity for HE as the entrepreneurial, borderless or edgeless university and probably more so. The most important word in 'higher education' is 'education'. This is what universities were created to do. Being a SMU is returning universities to the mission of their foundation. But realising this vision requires leadership. As Martin Hall, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Salford argued in 2012, achieving the changes in HE necessary to address inequality involves '*the substantial challenge of changing organisational culture*'. (Leadership Foundation for Higher Education 2012).[5] In the war for the soul of HE, social mobility needs its generals. Only those with bravery, vision and imagination need apply.

Dr Graeme Atherton *founded and leads both AccessHE in London and the National Education Opportunities Network (NEON) in England. He is also Visiting Professor in Higher Education & Social Mobility Practice at London Metropolitan University and the Chair of the World Congress on Access to Post-Secondary Education.*

[4] Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR) (2013) A Critical Path: Securing the Future of Higher Education in England London: IPPR

[5] Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (2012) Inequality and higher education: marketplace or social justice? London: Leadership Foundation for Higher Education

4

Bridging the gap: Managing undergraduate expectations in the humanities and social sciences

Mike Finn

The background - why expectations must be managed

Within British independent secondary schools, the phrase 'expectations management' is ubiquitous. These institutions have had the cash nexus[1] at their core at least since the major expansion of the UK's public schools in the mid-Victorian period; they have huge institutional memory when it comes to dealing with the expectations of those who are paying considerable sums of money for their education.

British universities, by contrast, have almost no institutional memory in this regard; witness the near-panic with which academics and university administrators have faced the post-2010 cohort of 'demanding', 'needy' and 'pushy' student 'customers' who seem to expect quite a bit more bang for their buck. Nowhere is this more true than in the humanities and the social sciences, where the oft-heard complaints over the low contact hours on some courses reflect an underlying tension between the 'delivery' of these undergraduate courses and the way in which the natural sciences are taught (or even the same course at a different institution). In the eyes of the new student-consumer, the latter seems to offer better VFM.[2]

What's clear is that disgruntled and defensive responses won't do. Academics can and must be far more pro-active than they have been up to this point in addressing the changing expectations of the new student-consumer. If academics truly believe in the quality of what they deliver (and there is growing evidence that they should[3]), then they must ensure that students understand why their course is taught in the way it is. So what can be done to ensure a healthier set of expectations on the part of humanities and social science undergraduates?

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1 The relationship constituted by monetary transactions.

2 J. O'Connell, 'Changing student expectations' in L. Coiffait (ed.), Blue Skies: Fresh thinking on UK higher education (London: Pearson, 2011), p. 116.

3 Judith Burns, 'Social science graduates have best job prospects', BBC News online, 28 October 2013 [accessed at http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-24707507, 30 October 2013].

Outreach and integration with schools

Universities must do far more to inform potential applicants at the secondary level as to the nature of what their courses will involve and what an undergraduate education actually is. As any armchair hack knows, economics is fundamentally about the accurate ascription of value, and thus the dissemination of the correct information by which consumers may make 'informed choices'. This last was the title of the Russell Group's much-vaunted publication on subject requirements for entry for particular courses.[4] Speaking as an educator who has worked both in university admissions and in schools preparing candidates for university, I can only echo Stefan Collini's comments that there are few consumers in the world as ill-informed as the 17-year-old university applicant.[5] Often they only have a hazy idea of what 'uni' is about, they do not know how to evaluate the quality of different sources of information, and they are certainly (by and large) not 'rational' in the sense most economists would understand.

Universities need to help here, because schools are struggling. The revolution in higher education means that those teachers who graduated a decade ago, who are now likely to be Heads of Sixth Form and thus responsible for supervising university applications, are often horrendously out-of-date in terms of their knowledge of the system and what is on offer. If universities wish to avoid disgruntled students it places the onus on them to get the right students in the first place. Hitherto the main focuses of recruitment have been on widening participation and bums-on-seats in the wake of the demise of the humanities teaching grant. In both cases, honesty has not always been integral to marketing strategies. This has to change. Students need a realistic appraisal of what their potential institution's academic culture is like; it is not enough to refer students to prospectuses and open days, which often sweeten the pill. A large scale rollout of school-university partnerships where sixth-formers spend a day attending university classes (akin to the Cambridge masterclass system[6]) could make a real difference here, and could be an area where the university mission (lobby) groups take a lead. Universities *must* involve themselves more on a continuous basis with schools. With schools now increasingly taking the lead on initial teacher education, a reflexive arrangement might be developed where, as CPD, university academics in teaching posts were able to spend a term in a maintained school every four years. Teachers in maintained schools would also be eligible to apply to return to university departments on the same basis, either for further study or as visiting fellows. Shared knowledge and practice would do much to improve the information given to potential applicants. This would be a task where, as with the Informed Choices document, university mission groups might reasonably be expected to take a lead.

[4] Russell Group, Informed Choices (London: Russell Group, first edition, 2011).

[5] S. Collini, 'Sold out', London Review of Books, 24 October 2013.

[6] 'Subject masterclasses', University of Cambridge [accessed at http://www.study.cam.ac.uk/undergraduate/events/masterclasses.html, 29 October 2013].

Contracts and integrated assessment

Student contracts are vaguely despised by many academics who believe themselves to have been reared in the old world (which never really existed) of purer motivations for study, but they are becoming increasingly common.[7] Oxford's introduction of contracts in 2006 was principally aimed to limit the university and its colleges' liabilities in relation to delivery[8], but contracts can be used in a much more sophisticated way to educate students into the ethos of undergraduate education. If they haven't done the reading, there can be sanctions; theoretically of course, such sanctions already exist, but are seldom enforced. This is related to the issue of integrated, continuous assessment. Continuous assessment is commonplace in schools, but rare in many universities in the UK. In the United States, where the student-consumer is an accepted historical reality, continuous assessment – 'teaching to the test' – is endemic.[9] There is a middle way. In the US system, despite the much-vaunted defences of 'liberal arts', it is often the case that students graduate with a smattering of vocabulary from a variety of disciplines and an underdeveloped critical faculty. However, in the UK system, an adoption of contracts linked to continuous assessment would enable academics to more coherently set the terms of what and when students should learn. The alternative is simply to accept widespread plagiarism and grade inflation in the end-of-term/year assignments.

…and finally, delivery

It is a *sine qua non* of the above recommendations that the basics of teaching delivery must be met. Students might be overly-simplistic in thinking that more contact hours must be better, but they are not wrong when they react negatively to cursory feedback on assignments, assignments which are inappropriate to the course, lack of structure to undergraduate modules (which *despite* the Quality Assurance Agency, still happens) and unstructured teaching sessions. Indeed, much of the resistance within the academy to increasing the student workload is due to the fear that this will generate more marking, more danger of interaction with 'pushy' students demanding guidance. This won't do. If academics in the humanities and social sciences are serious in their own complaints that students are engaged in insufficient personal study (the recommended private study times for most module courses are a joke in most senior common rooms) then they must be prepared to show leadership in reorienting student attitudes, not least for the fundamental ethical reason that only then will students truly get the best out of their courses, and themselves.

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7 'NUS alarmed by one-sided student contract', Times Higher Education, 13 July 2007.

8 J. Meikle, 'Students told: Turn up or face explusion', Guardian, 11 September 2006.

9 L. Cheseldine, 'Do students need more teaching hours and tests?', Guardian Online, 6 February 2013 [accessed at http://www.theguardian.com/education/2013/feb/06/american-universities-continous-assessment-contact-hours, 29 October 2013].

Conclusion

A critical aspect of humanities and social sciences education in the UK as it has been traditionally understood has been the student's own voyage of self-directed discovery, where the student takes ownership of his/her educational trajectory through the course of their undergraduate degree. In today's marketised society, this is all-too-often disparaged as simply laziness on the part of academics and a failure to provide what is paid for. Yet critical reflection and extensive self-motivated reading are critical aspects of the best of what a British undergraduate humanities education has to offer. Nonetheless, the nature of the world in which this education is being offered has changed. If scholars want students to understand the value of the kind of humanities education which has traditionally been provided in this country, if they want students to more firmly take responsibility for their own learning, then they must come part of the way. They can do this through taking a lead in expectations management, and taking ownership of their own curricula. Only then can the best of the old world be preserved for the benefit of the new.

Dr Mike Finn *is Post-Doctoral Teaching Fellow in the History of Education at Liverpool Hope University. He was previously Research Fellow in History at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford and Bye-Fellow in History at Magdalene College, Cambridge. He was Kennedy Scholar in History at Harvard University in 2002-2003. He has taught widely in universities, and was head of department in two leading boarding schools. A Fellow of the Royal Society or Arts, he is co-editor of The Coalition Effect (with Anthony Seldon) which will be published by Cambridge University Press in 2015.*

Liverpool Hope University *is the only ecumenical university in Europe, founded by the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches as a symbol of cooperation in post-sectarian Liverpool. After some years as a university college, it achieved full university status in 2005. A teaching-led, research informed university, it has particular strengths in Educational Studies, drawing on its heritage in teacher-training and the academic study of pedagogy and practice.*

5

We need courageous leaders

Dr Paul Gentle

Given the scale and pace of change anticipated over the next few years in higher education, the importance of effective, engaged leadership appears to be growing exponentially. A fundamental challenge is set out in the IPPR's report 'An Avalanche is Coming':

> *'University leaders need to take control of their own destiny and seize the opportunities open to them through technology… to provide broader, deeper and more exciting education. Leaders will need to have a keen eye toward creating value for their students.'*[1]

There is considerable diversity in the range of interpretations that UK HEIs are currently making about the task in hand. At one end of the scale, academic leaders report growing challenges from students as to the cost per hour of the tuition they receive, and their perceived entitlement to a high degree classification. At the other end of the spectrum are leaders in institutions which are re-examining the very paradigms of university education. In all cases there needs to be a clear understanding of the distinctive purpose of the institution and how to make this authentic in the lived-out experiences of students and staff.

There is no room for complacency. Research on scenarios for global higher education by 2020 indicate several key weaknesses endemic in the UK system, namely that it is characterised by: pursuing opportunistic goals rather than remaining consistent with university missions; obsession with results; dominance of national policy interests; hierarchical models and structures; and tensions between needs for change and for democratic participation within universities.[2]

The Leadership Foundation is in a privileged position in its ability to learn from senior leaders across all types of institutions in the UK and beyond. A common observation by those on Senior Management Teams (SMTs) in universities is that the realities of working in such teams present serious constraints as to their ability to act in the ways suggested by the IPPR report.

[1] Barber, M. et al (2013) An Avalanche is Coming (London: Institute for Public Policy Research).

[2] Lawton, W., Ahmed, M., Angulo, T., Axel-Berg, A., Burroes, A. and A. Katsomitros (2013) Horizon Scanning: what will higher education look like in 2020? (London: Observatory on Borderless Higher Education/ Leadership Foundation for Higher Education)

Leadership development has a key role to play in bringing about change in the practices employed by SMTs. Provision such as the *Top Management Programme* make space in which individual leaders can reflect confidentially with their peers and consider how to strengthen their respective contributions to the executive teams on which they serve.

Discussions often begin by considering the extent to which SMT meetings focus on the strategic as opposed to the operational, and on external issues rather than internal ones.[3] Such conversations soon lead to people asking themselves questions such as *'What can I do to change how we work?'*, questions in which the implied challenge varies considerably according to the word upon which stress is placed. This raises all sorts of questions as to where agency for change resides, and about working cultures, processes and so on.

On further examination, it becomes clear that behaviours in and around many SMTs are influenced (and often constrained) by issues concerning power relationships, fear of failure and a tendency to be driven by the macro-economic and macro-political environment. This clearly militates against taking control of one's own destiny. The manifestations of these behaviours can be seen in the different levels of deference shown by participants in meetings, and by relatively limited repertoires for using questions to shape the tone, content and flow of conversations. Cognitive and political intelligences are often to the fore, leaving little space for the application of social and emotional intelligences, which might lead to more effective collective commitment.[4]

The design of a successful leadership development programme should emphasise the impact which participants – and their university sponsors – intend it to make on their immediate and sustained practice in their university. While retreating into a safe space for discussion with peers is attractive and arguably beneficial in itself, its full effect can only be realised if it motivates and supports leaders in their determination to bring about strategic and cultural change in their respective workplaces.

A beacon of hope is offered in the *Horizon Scanning* report, in the opportunity which it identifies for leadership which is "decisive, values-based, adaptable and light touch"[2] – a set of characteristics which seems to appeal to practising leaders and to speak to what they perceive as the expectations being placed on their SMTs by those in the wider university workforce.

So how might leaders develop these characteristics? A key enabler seems to lie in increasing the confidence and skill of leaders to seek and to give feedback on specifically-evidenced behaviours, and on the impact of those behaviours on others. Building in authentic opportunities for feedback into the design of leadership

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[3] Kennie, T. and S. Woodfield (2008) The Composition, Challenges and Changes in the Top Team Structures of UK Higher Education Institutions (London: Leadership Foundation for Higher Education).

[4] Gentle, P. (2014) Engaging Leaders: the challenge of inspiring collective commitment in universities (Abingdon: Routledge).

programmes is therefore crucial[5], and entirely feasible where the design highlights challenging experiential activities, such as undertaking a collaborative task in one's own or another organisation, making a video to convey a strategic message, or running a simulated university.

Linking the learning about leadership from a programme to the real challenges faced by leaders in their own university seems critical. In order for leaders to bring about the changes in universities which they and their institutions require, it is essential to identify and tackle the barriers which impede solutions being implemented.[6] The opportunities afforded by using the techniques of action learning[7], applied within a clear context of planned, measurable impact for the institution, are considerable – and these have led to the focus of the design of the *Top Management Programme* around activities for small clusters of diverse individuals, conceived as Impact Groups.

By encouraging individuals to support and challenge one another to be courageous and imaginative, we believe that leadership development can enable leaders in higher education to be more proactive in shaping the future of higher education.

Dr Paul Gentle *is Director of Programmes at the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education.*

The Leadership Foundation for Higher Education *was set up in 2004 to provide a dedicated resource of leadership, governance and management advice to higher education institutions throughout the UK. It regularly has close to 90% of the publicly funded universities and higher education colleges in membership. The LF designs and delivers leadership development interventions and consultancy services for its members. Everything the LF does is devoted to supporting those who aspire to be better leaders, and inspiring leadership.*

[5] King, S.N. and L.C. Santana (2010) 'Feedback-Intensive Programs' in Van Velsor, E., McCauley, C.D., and M.N. Ruderman (eds) A Handbook of Leadership Development (San Francisco: Jossey Bass).

[6] Tourish, D. (2012) Leadership development within the UK higher education system: its impact on organisational performance, and the role of evaluation (London: Leadership Foundation for Higher Education).

[7] Revans, R.W. (1982) The Origins and Growth of Action Learning (Bromley: Chartwell-Bratt).

6

Where next for university teaching improvement? What the Scottish example of quality enhancement has to offer.

Vicky Gunn

Just before the cataclysmic First World War, a former University of Iowa president, George Edwin MacLean, visited Great Britain. His goal was to observe the impact of university reforms in England and Scotland, and to identify beneficial suggestions relevant to the improvement of American universities (1). Whereas many twenty-first century commentators erroneously conflate the (now) different UK university sectors (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) this is a criticism that cannot be said of MacLean. Indeed, he was quite clear that the Scottish higher education sector had a unique identity. For him, this was expressed through certain 'national characteristics', including: a four-year degree cycle that mixed specialism and generalism; an education as much focused on the pragmatics of social mobility and work as the loftier ideals associated with the writings of Cardinal Newman; and with a sense of collective, national endeavour rather than a dominant emphasis on individual prowess. This perception of a 'democratic intellect' seemingly running through Scottish higher education is something in which the sector has maintained pride, at least in public rhetoric (2). Yet, it has changed in ways directly comparable to the rest of the UK. Of particular relevance here are: the identifiable implicit and explicit institutional clusters, and the growth of multiple academic career pathways through the diversification of employment contracts.

What stands in stark contrast to England, however, is Scotland's continued commitment to a quality process focused on enhancement rather than just assurance of learning and teaching. This is superior as both:

- an institutionally relevant programme of action (which respects cluster differentiation and institutional autonomy);
- and as a collaborative improvement venture across the whole sector, rather than just an audit process which overly privileges procedural checks.

For Scottish quality approaches, the orientation has been towards prioritising activities of a specific, nationally determined, educational nature, with assurance providing a ubiquitous 'back-story'. Since 2004, higher education institutions (HEIs) have been directed to a schedule of enhancement themes including employability, integrative assessment, research-teaching linkages, graduate attributes, flexible learning, and developing the curriculum (3). To foster a collaborative culture, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for Scotland facilitates a steering group with representatives from each of the Scottish HEIs. This reports directly to the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC), which is composed of Vice-Principals of teaching and learning as well as student representatives from all of the Scottish HEIs. Arguably, this approach to pursuing national quality enhancement provides:

- Firstly, a gentle, practical, but effective restructuring of standardised and often reductive audit cultures (and, in this sense, a counter-cultural challenge to neoliberal interpretations of education);
- Secondly, a horizontal driver of learning and teaching that cuts across the verticality of disciplinary specificity (which has grown increasingly dominant as a result of changes to the scale, generation and dissemination of research);
- Thirdly, an enforced context of collaboration between institutions in an environment where competition within and across clusters has become an apparent norm.

In this it is the functional successor, at least in aspiration if not universality, to the ideological heritage of Scotland's 'democratic intellect'.

The trouble is, the themes now seem too localised and disconnected from wider demands on our institutions. Put together, escalating complexity in disciplinary/subject knowledge creation and curation; heightened awareness of student needs both domestically and internationally; and the potent paradoxes created by globalised higher education, necessitate a mixed enhancement 'ecosystem' that brings local teaching arenas into conversation with the bigger picture. These trans-institutional issues cultivate a sector-wide tension. Effectively, they require some integration of research, teaching, community service (knowledge exchange and social cohesion), and leadership at the same time as specialised careers emerge to enable universities to fulfil the demands now being made of them.

The nature of the enhancement themes raises the profile of worthy topics within general education. It is, nevertheless, hard pushed to confront growing polarities in the various cultures which create the universities' inner dynamic. As structured oppositional positions emerge, tensions created by these will promote pragmatic (and not always systematically planned) resolutions. These resolutions may well close some of the contradictions, but will likely be achieved through concretising hierarchies of status within the institutions. This is especially the case in relation to academics as being either individual elite researchers or members of scholarship-informed teaching teams. In cultural capital terms at least, within our universities educational enhancement is likely to become the preserve of the latter group which will parochialise it further.

Some of the bigger concerns now needed to underpin quality enhancement themes are:

- The relationships between research, education and fostering social cohesion in increasingly inter-cultural arenas – particularly how teaching and learning can be enhanced to encourage productive harmony between these links;
- Joined-up thinking between practitioners and scholars doing and researching institutional graduate attributes' advancement through disciplinary study, and researchers informing our understanding of both learning cities and rural regeneration;
- Moderating the tendency for universities to see student representation in the functioning of our universities as best achieved through identifiable 'student experts' rather than a process centred on inclusion across all aspects of learning, teaching, research and organisational management;
- Teaching as a location for cultivating Scotland's next generation of leaders as well as fostering an export market of our students, predominantly but not exclusively, to the South East of England;
- Building robust systems for driving transnational education enhancement imperatives that manage the tensions of a national agency overseeing development in other nations.

It is clear Scotland's experience with enhancement themes offers the global university sectors something of depth and strength, but to truly grow, the process needs to mix both local institutional needs and global priorities.

References

1. MacLean, G.E. (1917) *Studies in Higher Education in England and Scotland: with suggestions for universities and colleges in the United States*. Dept. Of the Interior Bureau of Education Bulletin, 19717, no. 16. Reprinted by General Books LLCTM, Memphis, USA in 2012.
2. See Foreword by Lindsay Paterson to Davie, G. (2013, 3rd edition) *The Democratic Intellect: Scotland and her Universities in the Nineteenth Centuries*, Edinburgh University Press.
3. See the Quality Enhancement Themes website for case studies, outputs and presentations: http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/ . For critical reflection on the QET see: Land, R. & Gordon, G. (2013). 'To See Ourselves as Others See Us': The Scottish Approach to Quality Enhancement. In *Enhancing Quality in Higher Education: International Perspectives*. Land, R. & Gordon, G. Routledge.

***Dr Vicky Gunn** is the Director of the Learning and Teaching Centre at the University of Glasgow. She has been closely involved in the work of the Quality Enhancement Themes. Her research focuses on the organizational dynamics of student learning, teaching excellence, and the development of graduate attributes. In her spare time she maintains a small teaching profile in Church History and practical theology.*

7

Home for success: the under-realised potential of student accommodation

Paul Harris and Jenny Shaw

Student accommodation is a surprisingly neglected aspect of the student experience, especially in the UK. Since the 1980s it has, in national policy terms at least, been seen as simply a hygiene factor rather than an area offering the potential to add value. There is very little in modern UK research literature about the impact of accommodation on the student experience, and virtually nothing on the relationship between student accommodation and student success. This is not the case in other parts of the world, particularly the US where a number of large scale quantitative studies show interesting correlations between accommodation and positive outcomes for students. Nor was it the case 50 years ago, when the seminal Robbins Review of higher education placed an emphasis on student accommodation as an integral part of the whole university experience.

Student accommodation has the potential to influence academic success in a number of different ways, from the most fundamental needs such as sleep and personal safety, through to the positive effects of learning with and from other students. For those familiar with Maslow's hierarchy of needs this will come as no surprise. Humans cannot turn their attention to higher order tasks if their fundamental needs are not being met. Study, being a form of self-actualisation, comes right at the top of the hierarchy and can be affected by any of the levels that come below, many of which are in-turn strongly affected by students' accommodation.

In December 2012, UNITE worked with popular student website 'The Student Room' to conduct a survey with 1,062 applicants and 525 first year students.[1] Respondents were studying in, or applying to UK institutions, and the characteristics of the sample were representative of the wider student and applicant populations. Of the students who responded to the survey, 72% believed that their accommodation affected their academic success. This article draws on that research to discuss the relationship between accommodation and success among students in the UK, which may offer insights to other nations.

[1] UNITE (2013) The Next Generation http://bit.ly/16IBaoo

A good living environment

Most applicants who responded to the survey took for granted that their basic needs would be met through their accommodation, whereas for some current students this had not been the case, with a consequently negative impact on their studies. Both applicants and current students talked about *a good living environment* which facilitates study and feels safe. Conversely, *a bad living environment* is distracting and may contain real or perceived threats to personal safety:

> *"I think if I was staying in a place where I didn't feel secure and safe then I wouldn't be able to fully concentrate on my studies and would be generally unhappy at the university"* ***Applicant***

A good living environment is very much about the way students experience and respond to their setting, and this of course contains subjective as well as objective element. While it encompasses material factors such as room size, heat, light, cleanliness and location, factors linked to living with other students were most prevalent in the responses of both applicants and students. *Feeling safe* arose as a theme in the responses, and this reached beyond physical safety, encompassing the need to feel safe in the company of others.

Living in a student community

The majority of students in the UK do something that very few of us will do at any other time in our lives. They move away from their homes into vast, temporary communities of complete strangers. The demand for this experience is as strong as ever, with 92% of applicants in the survey expressing a preference for some kind of halls of residence.

A word that came up many times in survey responses was "happiness", echoing another UK study which concluded that happiness with other students is important to student wellbeing in relation to their accommodation. Living in a student community can be a double-edged sword that could cause happiness or unhappiness depending on whether other students became a support system or a source of conflict and stress.

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[2] AUDIN, K., DAVY, J. and BARKHAM, M., 2003. University quality of life and learning (UNIQoLL): an approach to student well-being, satisfaction and institutional change. *Journal of Further & Higher Education*, **27**(4), pp. 365.

Staying the course

The extent to which students are able to develop a supportive network of peers can be an important factor in student retention, as a number of researchers in the US[3] and a recent UK[4] study have concluded. Student accommodation was seen by survey respondents as an obvious opportunity to build a network that would make them feel safe, help them with their studies and provide personal support. Having to move away from home and develop such a network for themselves might also challenge students to develop their social and life skills.

> *"You can study together, consult one another when need be, hold discussions and motivate each other."* ***Student***

Some respondents believed that a halls of residence environment could be an important factor in their ability to develop these networks. For some applicants, however, this could be an area of apprehension. Moreover, a small number of students had had bad experiences living in student accommodation, experiencing bullying or isolation that negatively affected their studies and in some cases their mental health.

Learning from diversity

Living with people from different backgrounds can offer an opportunity for personal growth and learning, but conversely can challenge the ability to feel comfortable and relaxed in a student flat or corridor, even leading to social isolation.

Research in the US[5] has found that interactions with diverse peers led to a number of positive outcomes for students, including enhanced critical thinking and employability skills. The Global Graduates project by the UK's Council for Industry and Higher Education (CIHE) underlines the importance to employers of many of the skills that can be developed through such cross-cultural interaction, such as "an ability to work collaboratively with teams of people from a range of backgrounds and countries" and "an ability to embrace multiple perspectives and challenge thinking".[6]

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3 For example Pascarella E and Terenzini T (2005) How college affects students: A third decade of research (vol 2). Jossey-Bass

4 Higher Education Academy (2012) Building student engagement and belonging in higher education at a time of change http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/retention/What_works_final_report.pdf

5 For example HU, S. and KUH, G.D., 2003. Diversity Experiences and College Student Learning and Personal Development. *Journal of College Student Development*, **44**(3), pp. 320-334

6 DIAMOND et al (2011) Global Graduates into Global Leaders. CIHE http://www.cihe.co.uk/global-graduates-into-global-leaders/

However the US research demonstrates that these benefits do not come about simply by students from different backgrounds occupying the same space, but through purposeful interactions. This has some obvious parallels to student accommodation, suggesting that the diversity of students in a hall of residence could be a valuable learning resource, but that simply mixing students from different backgrounds across the accommodation is not enough and could lead to difficulties for some students. This is an area that would warrant further research.

Summary

Student accommodation has the power to make an impact on students' wellbeing, academic success and employability, yet that power is not yet being fully harnessed, especially in the UK. Students in England are required to pay an increasingly significant contribution towards their tuition fees and therefore expect greater value from their student experience; yet surprisingly few institutions are developing or communicating the positive benefits of their approach to student accommodation. We believe this is an area that affords plenty of scope for further research and development, and for a sharing of research on an international basis. Students and universities can only benefit from a renewed focus on this much neglected area.

Paul Harris *is the Strategy Director for UNITE Group plc. Paul has worked across a range of private and public sector industries in a variety of roles covering media relations, internal communications, branding and marketing. He was part of the team working on the corporate rebranding of Abbey and sale to Banco Santander. Senior roles at Laing O'Rourke and Smiths Group preceded a role with the South West Regional Development Agency, where he worked closely with government departments on economic development issues. Paul is also Chair of the UNITE Foundation.*

Jenny Shaw *is the Head of Higher Education Engagement for UNITE Group plc. She is responsible for the company's strategy relationships with the higher education sector, and for analysing HE sector trends and developments. Jenny has spent most of her career in the HE sector, mainly in the fields of widening participation and business engagement. She has worked for the universities of Hull, York St John and Middlesex, and has provided research and consultancy to SPA, the HE Academy and the Equality Challenge Unit.*

UNITE *is the UK's largest operator of purpose built student accommodation, providing homes to 42,000 students across 23 cities in England and Scotland, and working in partnership with over 60 higher education institutions.*

8

Does higher education plus globalisation equal transnational education?

Nigel Healey

For most of its relatively brief history, mass higher education in the UK has evolved along a quasi-Stalinist, command economy path. Post-Robbins, the report that paved the way for mass higher education in 1963, a university education was deemed to be a public good, with the benefits to society maximised by offering a place to 'all who were qualified for them by ability and attainment'. Public subsidies, in the form of grants (later subsidised loans) to students and tuition subsidies to universities, were designed to promote social inclusion and increase participation rates.

Because the government paid the subsidies, it not only set the unit price (total revenue to universities per student) but also the quantity (an enrolment cap). In addition, paying the piper empowered the government to call the tune in other areas of higher education, including widening participation and universities' engagement with business.

The first crack in the command economy came, predictably, from the Thatcher government in 1980, when it baulked at paying tuition subsidies for large numbers of international students. A little remembered fact is that, during the late 1970s, UK universities enrolled large numbers of international students, who paid only a nominal administration fee and helped less popular universities fill their enrolment quotas.

The phased withdrawal of tuition subsidies for this group led to a collapse in international enrolments in the early 1980s. This was gradually reversed by the early 1990s, as universities realised that the price and quantity controls on international students had vanished and that, if they shifted their recruitment energies away from developing countries towards the fast-industrialising countries of South-East Asia, there were thousands of students willing to pay full-cost for a world-class education.

In hindsight, the Thatcher government's decision transformed UK universities into hybrid beasts, with a domestic core that was part of the command economy and a growing international periphery that was marketised and unregulated. Along with Australian universities, which experienced a similar policy shift, UK universities rapidly became a market leader in global student recruitment, with international students accounting for 17% of total enrolments by 2011.[2]

[1] http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/robbins/robbins1963.html

[2] OECD (2013), Education at a Glance 2013: OECD Indicators, OECD Publishing

This shift of UK universities into export education has led, in turn, to further waves of even more ambitious internationalisation. Like global businesses, many universities have franchised their products (degrees) around the world, either licencing private providers to teach their curricula or 'validating' partners so that they can deliver their own qualifications with a UK university's badge. A smaller number, notably Russell Group universities like Nottingham, Liverpool, Newcastle and Southampton have established international branch campuses offshore.

This so-called 'transnational education', namely providing degrees to students in their home markets, has excited the attention of UK policymakers. Taking education to students avoids the need for them to travel to the UK, allowing universities to expand overseas without becoming entangled in the immigration debate. Transnational education also enables UK universities to reach a much bigger market than through exports alone. The lower costs of in-country provision make a UK transnational education accessible to those who cannot afford to study in the UK, as well as those who, for cultural or practical reasons, do not want to leave their home countries. To support the growth of transnational education, UK Trade and Investment (UKTI) has set up an Education UK Unit, to help win transnational education contracts abroad.

It is very seductive to view transnational education as an inevitable next step in the globalisation of higher education. Isn't this the parallel to the globalisation of business where, to paraphrase Herbert Hoover, the world now has a Toyota in every garage and Big Mac on every plate? Doesn't franchising and validation represent the 'McDonaldization of higher education' for the mass market, with international branch campuses akin to the offshore subsidiaries of global corporations like BMW and Apple?

An alternative, darker view – in which the globalisation of higher education is no more unstoppable – is that transnational education represents a 'new academic colonialism', spreading the UK's liberal scientific traditions around the world and, like the old colonialism, reaping the commercial benefits through the exercise of 'soft power' and the creation of foreign elites whose loyalties are tied, through their alma maters, to the UK.

There is another possibility, however. The present spread of transnational education may be a transitory phenomenon, driven by an alignment of passing forces: decades of UK higher education policy which have encouraged universities to look for expansion overseas rather than at home; governments in fast-growing developing economies desperate to satisfy the burgeoning demand for higher education by beckoning in foreign universities to mop up the excess demand; opportunist mercantilism by some host governments, encouraging foreign universities to set up in special educational hubs with the aim of earning export revenue from fee-paying students in nearby countries.

In this version of events, countervailing forces may be building that resist and eventually choke off the recent growth of transnational education. In the UK, academics and trades unions have become increasingly concerned that investment is offshore ventures may starve the home campus of sorely needed resources and management attention. In many key markets for transnational education, the local higher education systems are expanding and maturing. The new local universities may compete students away from UK franchises or, more usually, the franchise partners may be upgraded by their national regulators, acquiring degree-awarding powers and weaning themselves off their erstwhile UK 'mothers'. International branch campuses are under constant pressure to 'localise' and the resulting pressure for secession may see them going the way of subsidiaries of earlier federal universities e.g. the Universities of Wales and London.

This alternative interpretation of events does not mean that higher education is not globalising. But the UK's Premier League may provide a more compelling vision of the future than global corporations. Football is the ultimate meritocracy. A talented player, regardless of nationality, linguistic background or ethnicity, can rise to the top. The Premier League has players from every corner of the world and games are broadcast to 212 countries and territories, reaching an estimated 4.7bn fans.[3]

For soccer players, now read talented academics in a scientific world made 'flat' by the common medium of English. Similarly, for fans, read students. UK higher education is already one of the most internationalised in the world – 17% of students from outside the European Union (EU) and 21% of academics (40% of researchers) are of non-UK nationality. For the premier league of UK higher education – Imperial, UCL, LSE – these percentages are much higher. Like the Premier League soccer clubs, the high wages and brand value that attracts the best and brightest from across the world to these universities is bound up with the location, the physical infrastructure, the history and academic culture created over generations, the legacy of past geniuses. These intangible assets cannot be easily reproduced in an overseas venture.

Interestingly, it may be that professional soccer has more to teach us about the future globalisation of higher education than global business. And so far, transnational soccer has yet to be coined as a term.

Nigel Healey *is a Professor and Pro-Vice-Chancellor (International) at Nottingham Trent University. He is a board member of the UK Council for International Students Affairs (UKCISA) and represents international students on the UCAS Council. He chairs the organising committee for the QS-APPLE international education conference in the Asia-Pacific. His current research interest is the internationalisation of higher education, including transnational education.*

Nottingham Trent University *dates its origin to 1843, when the Nottingham Government School of Design opened its doors. This academic year, NTU's School of Art and Design is*

[3] http://www.premierleague.com/en-gb/about/the-worlds-most-watched-league.html

[4] www.international.ac.uk/media/2416084/intfacts2013.pdf

marking its 170th anniversary with a series of exhibitions of the work of alumni and present and former staff. Today, NTU has 28,000 students (including 3,000 international students) in Nottinghamshire and over 5,000 transnational education students studying with overseas partners, many for joint and dual degrees.

9

"The detail, the colour, the tone, the air, the life": Academia in, against and beyond the University

David Kernohan

For all the extras that a modern institution can offer prospective students, the unique proposition of university life is regular interaction with academics and para-academics. It is the one thing that cannot be offered elsewhere, and the one thing that now seems too expensive to offer in universities.

This, obviously, is just one aspect of a larger socio-political issue, linking to wider contemporary workplace trends like deskilling and casualisation. But here is not my place to make these links. Instead I simply want to ask why universities, in turning away from Newman's famous "idea", are systematically undermining themselves both as intellectual enterprises and as businesses.

The modern university began in medieval times as groups of independent tutors banded together to support and defend their interests in an education marketplace that was expanding and diversifying. There was much in common with a guild, or a trade union. As these groupings solidified, then came the roots of early institutional management – one tutor would spend time supporting and promoting the work of the guild, focusing on administration rather than scholarship.

He might buy or arrange services from others. Perhaps he would start with arranging accommodation for students and tutors. He might attempt to secure the patronage of royals or other wealthy or powerful families. He would be visible within ecclesiastical circles – as the main employer of educated men was initially the church. He might purchase or commission books. And he would ensure that students paid regularly, and that tutors got paid.

All this was done by academic staff, for academic staff. Academic leadership was a way of ensuring that the interests of staff were protected. But it also preserved the uniqueness of what was offered, and the university became a by-word for academic quality and an attractive proposition for those seeking to learn. At the time the "degree" had comparatively little cachet, and students would often leave when they felt their education was complete.

The blunt logic of the market determined what was taught, and how. Students would travel across Europe for particular approaches that only certain institutions could offer. The market, of course, also distorted academic practice – creating essentially two parallel systems… one for the children of the super-rich, who would carouse and eat well and pay academic wages, and one for the "scholars" (itself, once a term of abuse) who would be the bright but poor – there to learn as much as they could. Again, the academic management of this system allowed what we would now call cross-subsidy.

As a growing industrial base and global civil service cried out for people with "trained minds", new British institutions like Manchester and Birmingham sprung up to meet these new employer needs. Government funding – systemised as late as 1919 in the UK – brought with it a pressure to prove that public money was being spent wisely. And this, on balance, was useful to academia – the old benefactors (and the church) were far less conducive to academic freedom than the aggressively even hand of the government.

But in terms of access to education we have moved only from *Jude the Obscure* to *Brideshead Revisited* – existing money and status was still a huge determiner of access, no matter how equitable conditions were inside the cloisters. The 20th century was characterised by a huge ongoing expansion of the system – the much-loved Robbins Report of 1963 making this growth exponential and offering for the first time access to higher education for all that could benefit.

But in terms of the actual practice of academic instruction little had changed since the introduction of a key "disruptive technology" – the printed book. Students still sought entry to university to become a part of a scholarly community, and it was the contact with and support of academic staff that characterised this. The institutional offer was situated in the quality and commitment of these staff – who still managed institutions, though with a growing army of supportive administrators who ensured that requirements attached to state funding were met.

In the last thirty years the pendulum has begun to swing back to a market-regulated system of higher education. But with one key change – the managers of universities now have more in common with commercial CEOs than academics, and use administration as a tool for financial rather than collegiate benefit. State funding, now following student rather than societal needs, still supports the majority of the sector – but commercial logic controls the way this funding is allocated and spent.

Students (or at least the aggregated marks of the National Student Survey) are now at the heart of the system, and institutional managers are the leaders of huge export businesses. The employer voice is demanded in the design of every course, with professional bodies and, often, legal requirements adding further to the curriculum. Huge systems of quality assurance, documentation, and measurement pass through layers of administrators to reassure – who? – that everything is just as it should be, and to direct increasingly shrinking pots of funding.

Meanwhile the challengers to the dominant institutional model – I'm thinking here of MOOCs and private HE - do so by omitting a major cost-base. Every other part of the higher education system appears to be rounding on the terms and conditions of academic staff.

It is now normal for the academic staff that undergraduates face to be paid an hourly rate on a seasonal contract. It is now expected that undergraduate marking and pastoral care is carried out by someone who is not a permanent part of the community of scholars that an institution still claims to be. It is now required that the shrinking number of staff who do have long-term employment spend at least as much time on preparing materials for administrators than they do at teaching or research. And all the while, terms and conditions are under attack, burn-out and mental illness is common, pay is frozen and the threat of redundancy and closure looms over all.

The 2014 "offer" for students is focused on a smooth transition to employment, and some beautiful new buildings. But the university as it is currently constituted is not the smoothest or most efficient way of achieving this – and with oncoming rapid changes to wider society the current needs of employers are probably the least useful barometer of what needs to be taught.

Academics are again banding together and taking action to look after the interests of wider collegiate society, and are increasingly seeking the support of students in doing so. The years since the latest shift to a commercialised higher education have been marked with industrial unrest, occupation and the rise of alternate models of learning. But it is increasingly clear that the modern university is no longer the centre of collegiate life, and it is doubtful whether we can say it supports the interests of academia.

David Kernohan *is a blogger and commentator on higher education and technology, writing at "Followers of the Apocalypse" (****http://followersoftheapocalyp.se/****) and "Wonkhe" (****http://www.wonkhe.com/****). He writes here, by invitation, in a personal capacity.*

Further reading/listening

"*In Our Time: The Medieval Universities*" (BBC R4, Broadcast 17 March 2011) http://goo.gl/jj79lT

Wright, Thomas, "*Circulation: William Harvey's Revolutionary Idea*", (Chatto&Windus, 2012) [the earlier chapters on Harvey's educational experience are particularly germane here)

Newman, Cardinal John Henry, "*The Idea of the University*", (http://goo.gl/ZKlYa7)

Anderson, Robert, "*British Universities Past Present and Future: Convergence and Divergence*" in "Pearson Blue Skies" (Pearson, 2011): (http://goo.gl/rCCr03)

Thompson, EP, "Warwick University Ltd", (reprinted by Spokesman, 2013)

10

The importance of the signalling mechanism in higher education

Patrick Krassén

The value of education to the individual can be measured in several ways. The most commonly used method is the 'human capital theory', in which education increases the abilities, skills and knowledge – summarised as human capital – of the individual, and thus of the society at large as well. High levels of education in a society also correlate with other positive factors, such as better health, higher life expectancy and more civic engagement.[1]

Education, however, has another important function: signalling. More specifically, signalling certain features that you have as a person – and in the context of education and skills, primarily signalling those features towards employers (with admissions tutors being another important group). This effect was originally identified in 1973 economics research by Nobel laureate Michael Spence.[2] The model was subsequently developed further by (fellow Nobel laureates) Kenneth Arrow and Joseph Stiglitz.[3] It builds on theoretical research regarding asymmetrical information; in this case, the asymmetry in information between the employer and the applicant regarding the applicant's true skill level. As employers wish to hire as able employees as possible – especially for well-paying positions – this signalling mechanism can play an important role in accurate job-market matching.

Education – and this is especially true for higher education – signals that you are capable of handling and analysing information, sometimes in large quantities (studying); that you are able to complete tasks (passing exams); that you can work with others (group assignments); and that you are able to follow a schedule and can function in a social setting (attending, and showing up in time for, class). Many of these abilities are of course well-developed in high/upper secondary school. But in higher education, entry demands are higher, and the responsibility for passing lies more heavily upon the individual. Completing university and attaining a tertiary-level degree says something about you as a person for potential future employers – regardless of the subject you have studied.

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1 Desjardins, R. and Schuller, T. (ed.), *Measuring the Effects of Education on Health and Civic Engagement. Proceedings of the Copenhagen Symposium*, OECD, 2006

2 Spence, A. M., "Job Market Signaling". *Quarterly Journal of Economics* (The MIT Press), 1973, 87 (3): 355–374. Cf. also Spence, A.M., *Market Signaling: Informational Transfer in Hiring and Related Screening Processes*, Harvard University Press, 1974

Apart from this, there are also a number of other factors that signal that you are highly productive and have features that employers look for. Good grades for example, but more importantly when it comes to higher education, what degree you have and at which institution you studied.

But, might one ask, doesn't having a degree from an elite university show that you have attained the actual skills needed to perform the job in question? Yes – perhaps. An employer cannot be certain of this ex ante when reviewing applicants – and hiring an employee who lacks the skills needed can prove costly. Likewise it is both time-consuming and resource-intensive for employers to perform tests on all applicants that will show to a sufficient degree whether they have the skills or not, or even to interview all applicants.

To lower the timeframes and costs when searching for new employees, employers look for certain features in applications where applicants stand out. Have they studied at a 'prestigious' university? Did they also work whilst studying – and if so, was it work that had some degree of qualification, showing that the applicant is highly capable at managing both? Have they studied anything aside from their main degree subject? What extra-curricular activities were they involved in? Have they received any particular honours? Do they have trustworthy and high-level referees?

None of the above points really say anything concrete about the applicant's ability to perform the tasks required for the job. But they work as signals – telling the employer: "This person is high-achieving, has taken steps to show that they do more than just study, or has studied more than their peers. They do this to signal to employers that they stand out from the rest, and should be hired." Those applications that actually stand out are the ones that go through to the next round, and are maybe called for an interview.

Signalling thus functions as a remedy to the inefficiency caused by asymmetrical information. If the employer had full information about every applicant's skills, signalling measures would not be necessary. Some, but not all, students know this – often through anecdotal evidence, such as stories from peers, family or alumni. Therefore, they try to show these signals in their résumés when applying for a job. And, taking it a step further back, some may even have these issues in mind when choosing which university to go to and which degree to pursue.

To summarise: Education increases the student's human capital – but it also functions as a signalling mechanism.

[3] Arrow, K.J., "Higher education as a filter", *Journal of Public Economics*, 1973, 2(3):193216; Stiglitz, J.E., "The Theory of 'Screening', Education, and the Distribution of Income", *The American Economic Review*, 1975, 65(3): 283-300.

Now, to the problem. Public investment in education is based largely on its presumed returns to society, in the form of increased human capital. But if education beyond a certain point only has a signalling function in most situations, then investments in education beyond that point will not yield returns to society. There is at that stage a risk of 'over-education'. If education is subsidised at higher and higher levels for yet more and more students, then employers will have a harder time distinguishing those applicants that really do have higher productivity. The signalling effect becomes distorted, and graduates risk winding up in jobs with skill requirements they are over-educated for – or studying longer than necessary, to regain the signalling advantage. This has negative effects for society (since the marginal returns are weaker than intended), for the individual (who may have invested more time and money in education than necessary, or who is not receiving the expected returns to his or her level of education) and for employers (when the signalling mechanism is distorted, the costs for finding employees to match job requirements increase).

With this in mind, it should be noted that it is of course difficult to assess the exact proportion of education that functions as signalling. It is also difficult to measure which individual returns to education are based on signalling rather than actual skills. This perspective also, of course, only looks at the financial benefits of education; there are many other benefits.[4] For policymakers, however, the signalling effect perspective is important to keep in mind, for several reasons. There is an opportunity cost to investing in education, and the negative effects of over-education – through lower marginal returns, distortion of the signalling mechanism, and the "bumping-down" effect on lower-educated job seekers[5] – can be highly problematic from an economic perspective.[6] There is, however, little empirical evidence available on what role signalling plays in job application and hiring situations. For some sectors, the 'diploma effect' (sometimes called the 'sheepskin effect'[7]) is especially significant; the marginal financial reward of having finished a degree are substantial. Having a degree becomes a minimum requirement to even be considered when employers are looking at job applications in such fields (i.e. law). The existence of so-called 'fake universities' or 'degree mills'[8] might in itself be viewed as evidence of the role of the signalling mechanism. The same goes for university rankings, which fuel reputation as a differentiation tool – an obvious kind of signalling.

What are the relevant policy implications? Broadening participation in higher education is a much-embraced goal for governments across the world – and in many cases education is important for economic growth.[9] But more education is not always the answer, and there needs to be awareness that the marginal returns to education can be weak, or even negative. Over-education, 'bumping down' and skills mismatch effects

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[4] Oreopoulos, P. and Salvanes, K.G., "Priceless: The Non-pecuniary Benefits of Schooling", Journal of Economic Perspectives, 2011, 25(1):159-184

[5] Nicaise, I., "The Effect of Bumping Down on Wages: an Empirical Test" in Borghans, L. & de Grip, A. (ed.), The Overeducated Worker?, Edward Elgar Publishing, 2000

[6] Cf. i.e. OECD, Trends Shaping Education 2013, OECD Publishing, 2013, p. 60-61

need to be taken into account when considering the quantitative expansion of higher education, as well as the opportunity cost, prevailing signalling effects and, not least, the quality of the education being offered. In Sweden, as in many other comparable countries, a focus on significant quantitative expansion of university places during the last decades has led to a weakened focus on the quality of education provided and the actual learning outcomes, as well as the level of knowledge of students entering university.[10] If university education fails in providing students with the skills needed in the job market, the solution should perhaps not be looked for in yet more and longer education, but in reforming existing education systems.

Patrick Krassén *is an Education Policy Analyst at the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise.*

The Confederation of Swedish Enterprise *is Sweden's largest and most influential business federation representing 49 member organizations and 60,000 member companies with over 1.6 million employees.*

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[7] Jaeger, D.A and Page, M.E., "Degrees Matter: New Evidence of Sheepskin Effects in the Returns to Education", *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 1996, 78(4):733-740; cf. also i.e. Martorell, F. & Clark, D., *The Signaling Value of a High School Diploma*, RAND Education working paper WR-780-UFLA, 2010

[8] Contreras, A. and Collin, G., "The Real and the Fake: Degree and Diploma Mills", *Change*, March-April 2009

[9] Cf. i.e. World Bank, *The Road not Traveled*, 2008, pp. 40-43

[10] Cf. i.e. Arum, R. and Roksa, J., *Academically adrift. Limited Learning on College Campuses*, University of Chicago Press, 2011

11

The consequences of growth

Emran Mian

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) in the UK estimated the value of the country's human capital in 2010. What they were trying to capture in the calculation is "the knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes embodied in individuals that facilitate the creation of personal, social and economic well-being". Since then, they have consulted on the methodology and recognise that the estimate can be improved. The size of the estimate is startling: £17.12tn, or two and a half times the value of the country's physical assets. Incidentally the revisions to the methodology will probably mean that the estimate increases.

Another more significant driver of future increases can be more investment. Certainly when it comes to higher education, that additional investment is coming. At the Autumn Statement in 2013, the Chancellor George Osborne announced that there will be 30,000 additional places in higher education this year; and the number of places in the following year will be uncapped. While subsequent funding announcements have meant a small reduction (£125m) in the resources available to higher education, the new policy on student places means for the first time that there is the opportunity for the supply of higher education to grow constrained only by demand.

What is likely to happen is not only that the number of places in total will increase – early application figures for 2014 entry suggest record or near-record applications numbers - but that there will be strong increases larger than the overall trend in particular institutions. This is bound to attract comment within the sector and more broadly.

Some of this will be motivated by snobbery, an attitude already evident in recent months with the increase in the role of new and so-called private providers. I write so-called because even 'traditional' universities are classified to the private rather than public sector in the UK, so the use of the word 'private' to describe new providers tends to be pejorative rather than purely descriptive. In any case, if many of the institutions showing strong growth in future years are non-traditional, either entirely new to the UK market or established in the last ten or twenty years, there will be concern expressed that they are providing low-quality education, a lower return in human capital for the investment being made than higher quality providers would provide. That criticism will be given added force by reference to the fees being paid by students: are they being taken for a ride?

Looking beyond the snobbery, there are some data issues here as well as a risk of moral hazard. When it comes to established institutions and courses, there is now long-run data on the employment and earnings outcomes of graduates. There is also a looser, more informal web of recommendations and warnings provided by teachers and alumni. Sometimes the information is incomplete, out of date or shaded by nostalgia, but when it comes to newer providers, there is much less information; and what there is has for the most part been generated by the providers themselves. There will be providers who take very deliberate steps to deliver high quality courses; and there will be some that don't. The moral hazard arises because at least in the early stages of the unconstrained market for students, the lower quality providers may be able to grow just as strongly as the premium ones.

The main bulwark against unproductive growth will be students themselves. They can by their choices determine who succeeds and who has to adapt or die out. Even over the last two years, while some student number controls have remained in place, student choice has already shaped a very wide range of performance across the sector with some universities (e.g. Aston, UCL and Exeter) growing by more than 30% over two years and others declining by a similar margin. While it's unfair to suggest just on two years' evidence that the universities that are shrinking are doing so because they provide poorer quality education, at the very least it's striking that the universities showing strong growth are often also associated with high quality.

But while students may be making good choices about which institutions to apply to, they may also be favouring courses that are perceived as being easier rather than those that make the greatest contribution to their own intellectual development or provide the skills needed by the economy. Hence a market shaped by student choice may still fail to deliver substantial improvements in human capital.

In this regard, again the data provides a positive outlook. Looking at the 2013/14 academic year, courses in the biological, physical and computer sciences, as well as engineering, all saw above-trend growth in applications. Courses such as hospitality and leisure are often criticised by those advocating a more traditional model of higher education. Although these criticisms are overblown perhaps they are having some effect with demand for the courses in this category down, and the number of applicants for the category taken as a whole (also including sports, tourism and transport) smaller than that for mechanical engineering alone.

What is more worrying is that application numbers for languages courses are down as well. Many of these courses will have strong returns in human capital, there is always room for people with knowledge of languages other than English in any globalised economy. But these courses also seem to typically fall within the category of higher education which promotes the individual's cultural and social development, rather than solely their earning potential.

This is one of the limitations of the human capital way of thinking about higher education, but it isn't clear that the human capital view dominates students' choices. While application numbers for language courses are falling, those for anthropology (up 15.7 per cent in one year), geography (up 10.2 per cent) and comparative literature (up 14 per cent) are not.

If those courses are growing at the same time as sciences and engineering courses, then the simple dismissive story (that always seems to get some airplay) about student choice creating a race to the bottom on quality – doesn't work. We might be enabling student choice, creating a broad, diverse culture of higher education, and driving up the value of human capital – all at the same time. I happen to believe that this is true, and that the evidence entitles us to be optimistic about the future of higher education in the UK, but that optimism about the system as a whole has to co-exist with a pessimism about the prospects of some institutions. As the cap comes off next year student choice alone will determine which institutions grow and which contract, rather than the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) keeping the system in equilibrium. This will force hard choices in some institutions and ultimately a harder choice for government itself: when the first university reaches the brink of failure, will it be better to intervene or not? One intervention will create the conditions for many more. Refusing to intervene will take political courage.

__Emran Mian__ was the head of the civil service team supporting the Independent Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance in 2009/10 and is now the Director of the Social Market Foundation.

__The Social Market Foundation__ is an independent, non-partisan think tank based in London.

12

The Brain Drain

Penny Egan

Apparently there is a brain drain of bright young students to the USA.

This seems to be the storyline that the British media has taken ever since the Laura Spence affair, where the former comprehensive school student accused Oxford of elitism for not admitting her despite being qualified and happily accepted a place at Harvard Despite many efforts to get the other side of the story aired, the UK's 'third estate' doesn't seem inclined to print a more balanced view of the situation.

Running a trans-Atlantic organisation, I can see the flow of students in both directions across the ocean but feel that the person in the street, not privy to the information that I see, is getting a rather one-sided view.

It is indeed true that there is heightened interest from British students to study in the US. Anecdotally we can see this interest manifesting itself in the numbers of enquiries we get at the Fulbright Commission, our website hits on the pages of information about studying in the States, attendance at our undergraduate and postgraduate events, and the huge interest in our annual College Day Fair. This year we had 170 US universities exhibiting and over 4,500 attendees pass through the fair over one and a half days. This compares to 89 universities and 2,500 attendees over one day in 2008. Why this increased interest? Firstly, £9,000 tuition fees begin to make some of the US state universities seem eminently affordable. The Ivy league institutions and other leading US universities have often more generous financial aid packages and scholarships to offer than their UK counterparts. Sometimes British students studying in the USA can come out of a four year degree with hardly any debt. Our new collaboration with the Sutton Trust on a social mobility-focused form of the US Programme has been enormously successful in obtaining significant undergraduate funding for state-educated, low to middle income British undergraduate students at top US universities. See **http://www.suttontrust.com/students/us-programme** for details. And then there is the attraction of the American liberal arts degree and the increasingly persuasive research which demonstrates that study abroad enhances your chances of securing a good job.

So there is no doubt that there are more British students heading to the States to study. The figures bear this out, last year 9,467 British students went to the USA, this includes the greatest year on-year increase in undergraduates (5%) for the past 10 years. But what the figures – from HESA and UCAS – also bear out is that there are many more American students coming to study in the UK. The total figures include

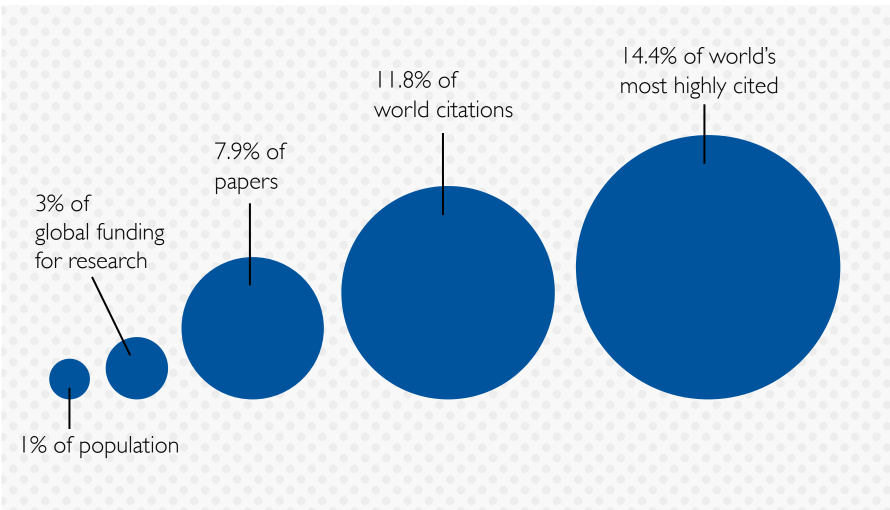
16,233 US students who actively pursued full degrees in the UK in 2012-13, plus a whopping 34,600 Americans who came to these shores for a short-term exchange. These figures are understandable, the population in the US is much bigger and so there are many more students and so proportionally you would expect that in overall figures. However the trend for US undergraduates studying here also shows an increase of 4% in academic year 2012-13. Furthermore UCAS are reporting an 8% increase in US applicants for 2014-15, showing a significantly growing upwards trend. The UK is the top destination for US students pursuing a full degree abroad (Institute of International Education Project Atlas 2012) and the top destination for short-term study abroad. But I bet the American press isn't running stories bemoaning the brain drain to the UK!

So what does attract them to the UK? Key factors include the strong reputation of British higher education, the shorter length of the degrees and increased competitiveness in the job market. Additionally, unlike their British peers, American students are able to use their US Government student loans to complete full degrees abroad.

So let us for a moment recognise that there is a good story to be told. And that if we don't consciously value what we currently have that makes our universities so attractive, we may not continue to invest, and our current position of second only to the US in global league tables, could well be in jeopardy.

So what should we be celebrating? Bahram Bekhradnia made a very convincing argument in the annual Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) lecture last year (slides available here http://goo.gl/I4PPQW). He proved that research is probably the most successful aspect of our higher education system and one where the UK is indeed punching above our weight, as this graph used by Bekhradnia in his lecture illustrates.

Strength of the UK research base



As he said:

> *"One of the reasons why we perform well is because of the presence in this country of gifted scholars from other countries. That is not to detract from our success – it is a tribute to the openness of this country's university system that we have been able to draw in so many gifted academics from overseas."*

For those of you who have not read it, I commend its analysis as reason for some celebration, but also as a wake-up call to those who are either complacent or who would further hinder the sector through damaging immigration rules; lack of investment in research; lack of loan facilities beyond undergraduate study, lack of portability, and reduced teaching contact time, etc.

We have a wonderful export in UK higher education. Let's for once recognise our success and do a bit of crowing, I hope the media will help us.

Penny Egan *CBE is Executive Director of the US-UK Fulbright Commission.*

The Fulbright Commission *was created by treaty on 22 September 1948. The Fulbright Programme aims to foster mutual cultural understanding through educational exchange between the US and the UK. It achieves this through a wide range of postgraduate and postdoctoral scholarships for US and UK citizens and through its Advisory Service.*
For more information visit ***www.fulbright.org****.*

13

Snowball Metrics: creating global research benchmarks that institutions actually want to use

John T Green and Lisa Colledge

All researchers aspire to achieve international acclaim, and to make a difference, through innovation and excellent research. Research institutions drive their own success through the performance of these individuals, and through striving to attract excellent researchers and to retain their high flyers. They measure their success both by the outcomes of research and by the quality of their teaching,

Research success can to some extent be illustrated by measures such as: number of awards received; volume of scholarly output such as peer reviewed publications; and counts of citations received from other academics. Financial return-on-investment can be demonstrated by indicators such as licensing income, spin-off activity and societal impact. However, a useful understanding of success can only be gained by looking at an institution's performance within the national and global context of their peers, numbers in isolation are extremely difficult to interpret.

Ideally institutions should have all of this information available in a strategic 'dashboard' that provides a menu of the latest available figures, providing insights into key activities. Many institutions do generate figures to track their performance in some areas, and their methods have typically evolved to suit the data they have available, the data structure, and the systems that the data happen to sit in. Sometimes, the selection of one approach over another may even have been influenced by a desire to make the performance look as good as it can possibly be for various external reporting or regulatory requirements. However, data, structure, and systems differ widely between institutions. How then does this line up with the need to look at an institution's performance in relation to others? Even where they do exist how useful are these dashboards without this context?

The answer is that this multitude of different measures used across institutions makes it impossible to rigorously benchmark performance with others. Any attempt to harmonise at least some of the measures across institutions would vastly increase the usefulness of strategic dashboards. The current state of affairs prevents institutions from using all of the data and information which are available to them – that is, their own institutional data as well as data held by government, commercial companies and other third parties – to properly understand their strengths and weaknesses. This hampers them from developing truly market-aware strategies to achieve their potential. This situation is worsened by a feeling within universities that the data they collect, and the metrics they calculate, are driven by the external needs of government and funders to whom they are accountable and must return reports, rather than through a consideration of their own needs and ambitions.

What could be a solution? The Snowball Metrics initiative is a collaboration of eight highly successful research universities, including Oxford and Cambridge, with a vision to remedy this situation on a global scale. The aim is to use all sources of data available for benchmarking, within every area relevant to the strategy of an institution. What this means is that the representatives from these eight universities have agreed a single approach of generating the metrics they consider important to provide strategic insights.

This may sound simple, but in practise it is extremely challenging. These eight universities need to find a single way in which their distinct data sources, held in different systems, can all be combined with commercial and third party data sources, and used to generate consistent metrics. It is also critical to test whether the desired metrics can be calculated from real data, and this test is performed by the commercial project partner, Elsevier under the direction of the institutions. Clarity, consensus and practicality are essential to ensure that it makes sense to compare metrics between institutions, that any differences truly represent a difference in performance and not a difference in interpretation or calculation, and that those responsible for setting and tracking the institutional vision are confident in taking decisions based on this intelligence.

The vision is to be able to benchmark in this way on a global scale, so it is clearly not enough for just these eight universities to use the Snowball Metrics. To this end, the agreed and tested methods are published free-of-charge in the Snowball Metrics Recipe Book, available at www.snowballmetrics.com/metrics. None of the project partners, neither the institutions nor Elsevier, will ever charge for these recipes, and anyone is free to implement them in their own systems for their own purposes. It is intended that, from a small start with these eight institutions, this approach will "pollinate" other institutions around the world, and that the initiative will "snowball" to a global scale.

This form of fertilisation will not happen overnight, nor will it happen on its own. The initiative is taking a two-pronged approach towards giving the snowball a push, so that it will eventually keep rolling on its own. Firstly, it is encouraging suppliers of research information to implement the Snowball Metrics recipes in their tools. Elsevier is the first supplier to implement these recipes in its global tools, and it is hoped that many others will follow. Secondly, it is forming similar clusters of institutions in other high research capacity nations, to date the United States and Australia / New Zealand, to follow in the footsteps of the original UK group and ensure that the recipes can be generated from all the data sources available in different national contexts.

This is a long-term, difficult and ambitious initiative, which has often been met with a degree of scepticism, especially due to the involvement of a commercial supplier. So why are the project partners involved? The appeal of being in one of the driving seats of a consensual, democratic process that aims to generate an international language of metrics is very strong. There is also a chance to influence governments and funders, who have had such a large influence on the data collected and metrics generated within institutions, to adopt the Snowball Metrics standards. This would result in enormous efficiency savings that could be invested back into the core businesses of universities: research and teaching.

You can hear the personal perspective of Dr Malcolm Edwards, Head of the Planning and Allocation Office at the University of Cambridge, by watching the accompanying video.

***John T Green** is Chair of the Snowball Metrics Steering Group.*

***Lisa Colledge** is the Snowball Metrics Programme Director.*

14

Innovation in Higher Education - more than a MOOC?

Andy Westwood

We all want more innovation. It's a holy grail for politicians, businesses, consumers and increasingly for public services too. We want to do things differently and we understand the value of doing things differently. This is equally true in the delivery of new technology as it is in manufacturing, science, the arts, retail, health or education. Well-functioning markets and competition depend on it and recent reforms to English higher education are designed to create more of both, although neither may be going quite as planned. The Office of Fair Trading (OFT), soon to be the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA), are likely to investigate the perceived lack of competition between universities, but they might do better to think about a lack of innovation instead.

Because innovation may well be the lacuna at the heart of higher education reform. That's not to say that universities don't spend a lot of time thinking about innovation, researching or teaching it, as well as bidding for innovation funding to do new things. There's a growing evidence base – the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) is successful, but very small. Andrew Witty in his recent review, recommended its significant expansion. But it doesn't really stimulate innovation as such – rather it supports universities that work with businesses and communities and that gain significant income from such activities. That's not quite the same thing. More significant perhaps has been the Catalyst Fund – also operated by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) to support institutions who are looking at changing what they do. This too needs to be much bigger.

Because we don't turn our growing innovation expertise in on ourselves enough, we still largely deliver a traditional higher education experience, designed primarily around traditional students. The new funding system – which is innovative too – preserves rather than challenges this orthodoxy. Indeed, the big policy question for the next few years already appears to be how the increasing costs of further preserving and expanding such a model can be met.

In 2011 the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) Vince Cable, in what has become a rare intervention on HE policy, said: 'I expect to see, in a university sector faced with the onset of more competition and more demanding students, a ferment of creative thinking on how to redesign course structures and manage major change among staff so as to promote higher quality but lower-cost teaching. I may be missing something, but I haven't seen much evidence of this.'

He hasn't made many speeches on Higher Education since. At that time Cable may have been primarily concerned with the lack of price competition rather than innovation in delivery. But let's give him the benefit of the doubt for a moment. How much innovation can really be seen in what we do and how we do it? Co-creating services? Users driving an innovative curriculum or student experience, new research methods or funding, new ways to teach? What about new forms or pricing for part-time, intensive or mixed mode learning? The British system tends more to the monolithic than most other Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, where diversity across institutions, ages, modes of study and institutional focus is typically much broader.

Is that a good thing? Should we be concerned? Well, yes. Concentrating so heavily on the three year degree, largely studied by school leavers living away from home, is pretty expensive whether you deliver funding through grants or loans. Economically it's also a bit too 'linear' in that it places most people's consumption of higher education at the point in their lives between school and entering the labour market full -time.

This potentially restricts relationships between universities and the labour market and increases the chances of mismatched supply and demand in both learned and utilised skills, as well as in graduate and employer expectations. In a system based on a graduate premium and repayment only after reaching a wage threshold, it also threatens the funding settlement itself.

Most strategic plans adopted by universities to confront a perfect storm of new policy, as well as social, economic and technological change, rely on a combination of increasing market share (mainly amongst school leavers), rising up favoured league tables, recruiting a few more international students and investing in the student experience. All valid and important of course, but there doesn't seem to be much variation beyond these basic ingredients or ambitions.

It doesn't take a genius to work out that not every institution can succeed if they are aiming at the same things. League tables and school leaver recruitment markets are zero or less than zero sum games. In the first year of new number controls even Russell Group universities noticed this in the scrum for students with AAB A-level (or equivalent) grades. With a rapidly declining cohort of 18 year old–s – falling by some 14 per cent between now and 2020 – this might cause concern in all types of institution. All in all, we are specialising in a traditional HE model – a 'rite of passage' between school and working life. We don't put anywhere near as much thought into part-time or even to post-graduate education. It is a worrying gap in our strategic thinking. As a sector we have defended our autonomy 'at all costs', but in reality might we also have been defending our long-standing model of delivering higher education?

We shouldn't lose the traditional model. But ultimately it may prove to be a costly mistake if we try to concentrate an overwhelming majority of our resources – as well as our student experience –through such a route. Traditional education values and models have their place. It is after all, what the Secretary of State Michael Gove aspires to recreate and reinforce at his Department for Education (DfE). He wants to create new institutions to stimulate innovation and competition, but he also can't help dictating the content of qualifications and the curriculum, as well as teacher training practice along the way. And whether his reforms are right or wrong, it's clear from his exchange with the DfE Select Committee in 2012, that he doesn't quite grasp averages or rankings:

Chair: If "good" requires pupil performance to exceed the national average, and if all schools must be good, how is this mathematically possible?

Michael Gove: By getting better all the time.

Chair: So it is possible, is it?

Michael Gove: It is possible to get better all the time.

Chair: Were you better at literacy than numeracy, Secretary of State?

The most common thing that comes to mind when we think about innovation in HE (especially disruptive innovation) is the MOOC. It may ultimately prove to be so, but British universities have been lukewarm in their welcome for the concept – even those signing up for Future Learn. The Open University – perhaps the most notable exception to many rules – had a number of critics when it was launched. Wouldn't the money have been better spent on existing institutions asked leaders and commentators at the time?

'I have worked on many different areas of the public sector over the past 30 years. The biggest lesson I have learned is that the most powerful driver of reform is to let new providers into the system. They do things differently in ways none can predict. They drive reform across the sector. It's the rising tide that lifts all boats.'

The Higher Education Minister David Willetts, in this 2011 speech to Vice Chancellors may have been thinking the same as both Harold Wilson and Lionel Robbins at various points in the 1960s – the idea that we may need to do things differently and to innovate in the way we deliver higher education. Particularly if now as well as then, we want many people to go to university or to get degrees. But David Willetts and Vince Cable have overseen an even greater concentration on the dominant full time undergraduate model as part-time and post-graduate enrolments have dropped sharply since 2010.

Placing so much emphasis on the full-time undergraduate experience – and so much funding through it – has reduced political, institutional and individual thinking about anything else. There are some exceptions to this rule – institutions that are thinking and doing things differently – but not very many. The time is right for more universities to think about how the study of innovation might apply to them. How innovative can they be? How innovative must they be? More than at present.

Andy Westwood *is Chief Executive of GuildHE and President of the OECD Forum for Social Innovation.*

GuildHE *is a UK representative body for higher education.*

15

Elite-level employability at the heart of higher education

Ashley Sweetman

Combining academia, business and government to inform cutting-edge teaching and research is at the core of the Mile End Group (MEG) ethos.

For students of contemporary government and politics there is nothing more useful than meeting the individuals they are studying. And this is exactly how MEG innovates. What better way to learn about New Labour than to be tested against Tony Blair, Ed Balls or Peter Mandelson? Or to learn about the civil service from Sir Jeremy Heywood, the Cabinet Secretary, or Sir Nicholas Macpherson, Permanent Secretary to the Treasury? Discussing issues with these individuals in a way akin to conversations expected deep within Whitehall, truly represents practical learning. The students on Queen Mary's undergraduate 'Cabinet & Premiership' and postgraduate 'New Labour in Government' courses, taught by MEG Director Dr Jon Davis, experience this first hand.

Being exposed to these individuals during their degree lets students get into the mindset of working in government and the civil service. They gain an understanding of how government really works. These fast-paced and immersive lessons engage students from the outset. And they can often get away with asking questions that others can't.

Learning in this way seems logical. It makes sense that you should question those who have actually done the jobs that you are studying. Contemporary history of British government is particularly well-suited to this style of teaching, but more generally universities should explore offering students the chance to extend their classroom learning into practical application. This is especially so in history where, as opposed to courses such as medicine, there is no clear employment path aside from the tiny percentage of students who become historians.

Part of running MEG depends on three Masters students per year successfully competing for their degree to be sponsored by Hewlett-Packard, thus benefitting from a close relationship with the company whilst working for the MEG as Assistants. This MEGA program equips these students with the skills required to gain employment following their degree. In previous years MEGAs have helped co-ordinate projects with Number 10 Downing Street and the Treasury, giving them a unique insight into the workings of the machinery of government and the chance to liaise with the individuals working within it.

All of the MEGAs have gained employment following their MA, in part because of their knowledge of the workings of government, but also because of their capacity to communicate clearly. Having been exposed to and required to provide elite-level delivery alongside their study, they understand what is required in any future career. An internship at Hewlett-Packard in Government Relations also forms part of the process, a unique employer partnership for this field of study.

This 'MEG Apprenticeship' also serves as a model for combining rigorous academic study with employment. An academic capacity to analyse vast amounts of information and summarise it no longer suffices on its own. Being able to communicate that information in a confident and professional manner are equally, if not more, important. MEG allows students to become rounded individuals who are ready for the professional world when they graduate.

Employers like Hewlett-Packard and BP, along with the Lord Mayor of London, have recognised that MEG graduates leave their degree with a set of skills that allows them to excel. High expectations and the realities of employment during their study ensures that they are equally competent in taking the minutes for a meeting as hosting it or welcoming participants at the door.

This kind of exposure should become the norm in higher education, be it for students of economics, philosophy, business studies, languages or sciences.

Our example is focused on the specific area of Whitehall and Westminster, but the values in the MEG's approach can be employed throughout academia. As flexible, free, open, online courses continue to entice users by highlighting the possibilities that the internet offers higher education, and the dreaded discussion of tuition fees mainly concerns the prospect of the fee cap being eliminated, universities must respond. Providing an overall learning experience, in contrast to weekly sessions of 'information dropping' in the hope that students pick up enough as it falls, is now paramount.

Universities have to face up to the reality that they are failing huge numbers of students. An education that stresses the importance of academic study in conjunction with preparation for the world of work through innovative teaching and practical application, needs to become the new norm. A clear 'result' of employability must be offered.

Students, more so than ever, want to see a tangible return on their investment. Embarking on a degree is accompanied by an expectation of being equipped with the skills needed to successfully compete for the most sought after jobs in the country.

Elite-level employability skills must be embedded at the core of the university system if certain courses, especially in the humanities, are to survive.

Ashley Sweetman *is Technology Co-ordinator for the Mile End Group having previously completed his MA in Modern & Contemporary British History as a Mile End Group Assistant.*

The Mile End Group *is Queen Mary University of London's forum for government and politics. MEG undertakes projects with government departments such as Number 10 Downing Street and HM Treasury as well as hosting a series of events with individuals from politics, the civil service and the media.*

16

Achieving value for money from higher education

Sonia Sodha

An assumption in the UK Government's higher education reforms is that students will behave as savvy consumers, making informed choices that will drive up quality and value for money in the market. However our research shows that, as is the case across other markets, students are not the rational decision-makers that economic theory suggests. Two years into the higher fee regime and we are already seeing signs of a problem, with a third of students saying that they may have made a different choice if they knew what they did now, and evidence highlighting concerns about the quality of the academic offer in places. The Government's announcement in the Autumn Statement that it will lift the cap on student numbers by 2015 may deliver more choice. But without the necessary quality safeguards in place there is a danger that quality could suffer. In this article we set out the problem and some of the solutions that we will be exploring further over the coming months.

Is the higher education market delivering value for money?

The Government's perspective

When the Government introduced the higher fee regime its expectation was that fees over £6,000 would be the exception rather than the rule and that the market would become more responsive to student demands, which would in turn increase the quality of the academic offer, but also produce more innovation with respect to the type of degrees on offer (for example, two-year degrees).

So far, there is little evidence that this is the case. Fees average £8,500 this year and, in terms of the academic experience, a Which?/HEPI survey of 26,000 students identified considerable variation in what students receive, raising questions about value for money and academic quality. For example:

- Size of teaching group: students on average received four hours per week in groups of fewer than 15, but some students received only 30 minutes of teaching time per week in groups of this size.
- Who is doing the teaching: some students were receiving just half of all their teaching

from an academic member of staff rather than a research assistant or PhD student; whereas for others this was as high as 97 per cent.

- Feedback: while three in ten students said that they normally received feedback in person, a significant minority (15 per cent) said they normally received a grade with no written feedback. In some institutions this rose to 38 per cent of students.
- Assignments: whereas the average student was set five assignments to be marked in the last term in some cases students were only set one assignment. 53 per cent were told to do mandatory work during the holidays whereas 43 per cent were not.
- Total workloads: while total workloads could be more than 50 hours a week in some universities, in others they were as low as 15 hours. The average student was working for, on average, 900 hours a year - that's 25 per cent fewer hours than the 1,200 assumed in official quality guidelines and in some cases much lower, with some students working as little as 460 hours per year[1].

Changes to the student academic experience since 2006[2]

	2006	2007	2012	2013
Scheduled contact hours	13.75	13.91	13.98	14.04
Private study hours	12.81	12.45	14.37	14.13
Total workload hours (scheduled contact hours + private study)	26.55	26.36	28.35	28.17
Total study hours	N/A	N/A	15.05	14.96
Time spent in small teaching groups (0-15)	3.64	3.85	3.52	3.85
Proportion of time in small groups with academic member of staff	N/A	83%	82%	N/A

There is also no sign that universities have improved the quality of their offer during the period that fees have increased, with scheduled teaching time and size of groups remaining largely unaltered. There are particularly concerning trends in flexible provision: the number of part-time places has declined, and there is no sign yet of any innovation away from the traditional three-year model, including a lack of expansion of two-year accelerated degrees.

1 Youthsight on behalf of Which? surveyed 17,090 full-time undergraduate students in their first, second, third and fourth years at UK institutions. The fieldwork took place between the 26 February and 21 March 2013. When we combined this year's results with last we achieved a sample of 26,000 students.

2 Which?/Hepi, The Student Academic Experience Survey, May 2013

The student perspective

If you considered the very high satisfaction scores within higher education it seems that, even in the context of higher fees, students are pretty happy with their lot. But dig beneath these numbers and there is some cause for concern. Two thirds of students in the survey said that their course didn't meet their expectations in some way, with the main reasons being that the course was poorly organised, teaching hours too few, that they didn't feel supported in their private study, or that the size of teaching groups were too large. One third of all students we surveyed said that they may have chosen a different course if they knew what they did now and, among first year students paying higher fees, one third thought that their course was poor value for money.

In some respects concerns about value for money are not surprising given the higher fees students are paying and that, in contrast to what students might think, from a university perspective this was largely income replacement for government funding rather than additional funds flowing into the system. However, even when fees were just £1,000 16 per cent of students thought that the course was poor value and the HESA longitudinal survey of graduates finds that 14 per cent of those graduating in 2008/09 thought so. This means quite significant numbers of graduates might have made different choices with more information. In a survey we conducted of recent graduates one quarter said that, in hindsight, they would have conducted more research into their institution or course and nearly one fifth said that they would have given more consideration to options other than going to university.

What's the problem?

An imperfect market

Part of the problem is that the market is imperfect in higher education, with one of the biggest challenges being the complexity involved in understanding the quality and value of a degree. Price is not a good indicator of quality and people apply to university for a range of reasons, and the relative importance of these can change over time which means that its true value may not be understood until later in life.

There is a lack of information on the quality of the academic experience: this is not provided by the quality regulator (QAA). The QAA regulates on the basis of process rather than the quality of the teaching, which means that their assessments of individual institutions relate to the QAA's confidence that they have the right processes in place rather than saying anything specifically about the quality of the teaching.

This lack of information means that employment prospects and reputation are drawn on as proxies, but these are not without their problems. The former, while important, is arguably a better reflection of a students' underlying ability, rather than a measure for the quality of the university, and reputation is often based on league table rankings which are often a reflection of research rather than teaching excellence.

The only information that exists in a comparable format on the teaching experience is the proportion of time a student can expect to spend in private study versus teaching, and the balance of assessment between coursework and exams. But without the actual numbers of hours or essays it is difficult for students to actually see what this will mean in practice.

Universities are often not providing this information themselves – and even if they did, it would take a very engaged student to review numerous prospectuses. A review that we conducted of twenty institutions' websites and prospectuses, looking in particular at information provided about English courses, found that:

- Only two provided comprehensive information on the total number of contact hours per week but even then this was not broken down by lectures or tutorials.
- Only two of the twenty gave an indication of the amount of private study that was required.
- Six out of twenty gave an idea of the size of the seminar/ tutorial class.

No single institution provided information on all of these things. This chimes with what students tell us about information provided by institutions. A fifth of students (21 per cent) thought that information provided by universities was vague and one in 10 (9 per cent) thought it was misleading.

So the decision-making process is complex, making it more difficult to make a informed choice. And yet the wider features and limitations of the market make making the right choice all the more important: students generally cannot switch easily without losing their credits and demand at present outstrips supply.

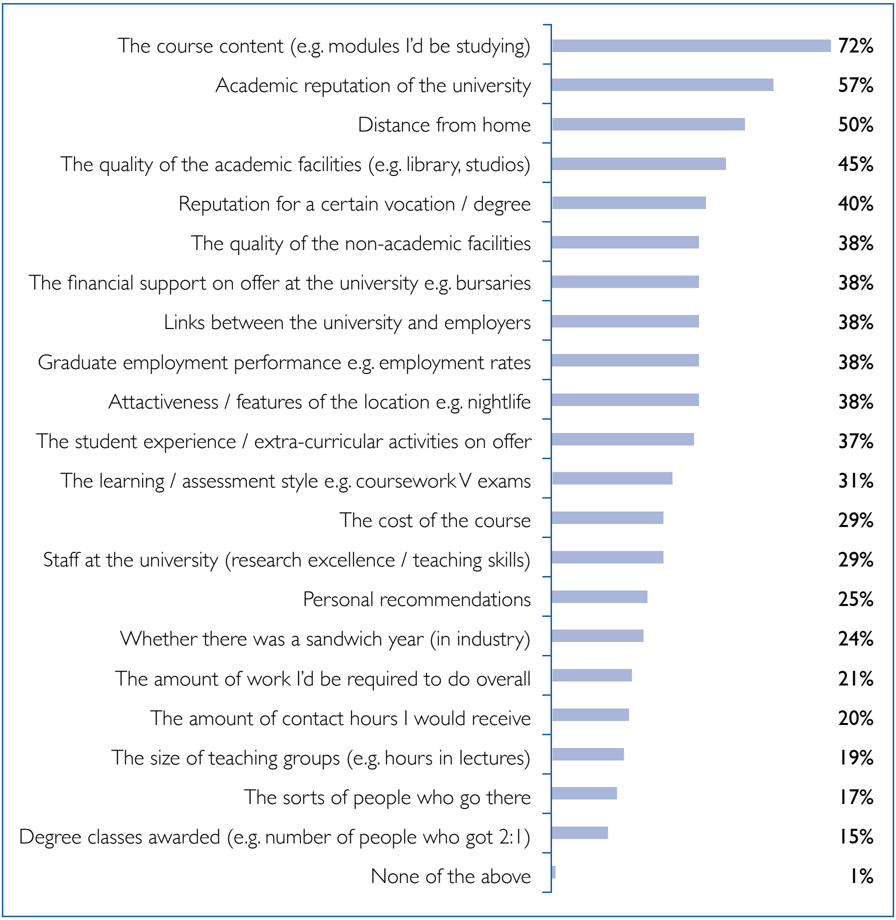
It was in recognition of this that we launched Which? University in September 2012, to support students to make the right choice for them. It draws on official data as well as a survey of 17,000 students to get real life views on what it is actually like to be a student at that institution. The site has achieved nearly three million visits since then. But we recognise that supporting student choice is no easy feat – a degree is a complex experience and qualification - and we are continuously exploring how we can support students in this process.

Students are not savvy

The system also relies on students being 'savvy' users who have clear preferences and use the existing information to ensure that they are making the best possible choice. But as we know from our experience of supporting people to make decisions in other markets, this isn't the case. When we asked prospective students what factors they researched at the time of making their choice just 38 per cent said that they had considered the employment performance of students who had taken that course, despite employment being the main driver for going to university, and around three in ten had considered factors related to the academic experience such as who was doing the teaching or the learning and assessment style. 23 per cent hadn't been to an open day.

Factors that students research at the time of making their choice[3]

When you consider that many had not received any advice at the time of making their choice this is less surprising: only one third had received one-to-one advice from a careers adviser when making their choice. When we conducted qualitative research with students to understand why they had not considered the academic experience of the university when making their choice, many said that they didn't know that there



[3] Youthsight, on behalf of Which?, surveyed 1003 UK applicants intending to start university in September 2014, online between 7th and 24th February 2014. Data were weighted to be representative of the applicant demographic.

would be variations, and they were not always sure what their preferences were in any case. They needed advice and support to work this through.

What needs to change?

Part of the problem is the lack of information and advice available to young people to help them make informed choices. On the former, this is critical but also under threat given the £200 million cut in careers funding and the transferral of this function to schools. On the latter, while pinning down the right indicators of quality is challenging, the tendency for the debate to get bogged down in whether outcomes are more important than inputs, and what these might be, has resulted in little useful information being provided at all. And the current information on employment earnings, which may not indicate the quality of the university but is still useful, is limited to earnings information six months post-graduation. We think this needs to change.

But information alone will not result in the wider changes in the market that both the Government and Which? would like to see. This means looking again at the way the sector is regulated, how universities collect and respond to feedback and complaints, and how switching – which still remains very difficult – can be made easier. Which? will be exploring these in the coming months.

Sonia Sodha *is Head of Public Services and Consumer Rights at Which?*

Which? University *is a free website designed to help students make more informed decisions about their higher education choices.*

17

Education in the time of the third Industrial Revolution

Tom Tobia

The common challenge in context

Education systems were built to serve the first and second Industrial Revolutions. Neither education nor production models have really changed, until now. The third Industrial Revolution is upon us – people can access and create content anywhere, any time and increasingly this also includes manufacturing/making capabilities. How can we develop new education models to reflect this and to enable increasingly flexible, experimental and fairer learning environments, that help build a more resilient and confident workforce for the future?

The first and second Industrial Revolutions have dictated the way we manufacture and consume everything, from products and spaces to food and information, for over one hundred and fifty years. Education models that were initially designed to create a workforce fit for a burgeoning industrial sector have changed little over the same time period.

As we see the birth of the third Industrial Revolution, and the resultant shift in producer-consumer relationships (towards mass-customisation and domestic manufacturing) what does an educational model for the future look like, and how can it mirror this shifting dynamic to increase the role of learners in shaping the content, location and ways in which they learn?

The first and second Industrial Revolutions

People today have access to an extraordinary range of products and services. For several decades it has been possible to buy and consume almost anything imaginable. During this time the vast majority of production has been built around the models of the second Industrial Revolution i.e. remote mass production, freight and sale. Wherever possible consumer and product are kept apart until the point of purchase.

Therefore, while we the consumer have seemingly infinite choice, we are mostly choosing between a range of products designed to be manufactured at scale and to be consumed by as many people as possible. You could also describe these products as designed to be the least-worst option for millions, as opposed to the best option for any given individual. The impact of this can largely be summed up as relationships built on trust. In this context trust equals reliability. We see this not just in consumption of products, but services such as rail and health too. Generally, the consumer is happy when they trust the reliability of the product or service they are using. Trust breaks down very quickly as the product or service breaks down.

The first Educational Revolution

As has been well documented by eminent brains such as Sir Ken Robinson, state education systems were also created on a model of mass consumption and production, though in this context the 'consumption' is knowledge and the product is a suitable workforce. Universally available free education is a relatively new concept and dates to exactly the time that rapidly industrialising nations were seeing the necessary growth in GDP to invest in such macro-projects; the 1800s. Logically, the birth of these systems mirrored the hugely successful industrial growth of the era. Schools and schooling were built as factories of education, with the primary aim being to produce a 'workforce' of people to fit the burgeoning production lines of the industrialising world.

The third Industrial Revolution

While the first and second Industrial Revolutions happened sequentially, almost concurrently, since then we have seen over 100 years of stagnation when it comes to the broad principles of economic development and manufacturing. That is not to ignore the huge developments in technologies and production during that period, but rather to recognise the relatively minimal shift in methodology, particularly since the first production of Henry Ford's Model-T in 1908 spawned the birth of mass-production of consumer products.

Now through the rise of digital manufacturing we are starting to see the idea of mass-customisation as opposed to mass-consumption coming to prominence. Technological and ideological developments have seen producers able to offer even more choice to consumers via their input before the point of purchase i.e. during production. Equally, consumers now demand more involvement in decision-making than ever. However, most current mass-market examples such as Nike ID still rely on existing models of production, and therefore consumption, creating an illusion of customisation more than a reality. Nike mass-produce shoe parts, and allow customers to assemble them in whichever fashion they choose, but the range of choice is still restricted by predetermined factory output at mass-production scale.

However, the birth and growth of digital manufacturing and associated software is now starting to afford consumers the opportunity for the creation and manufacture of truly customised and high quality products, parts and even edibles in small spaces such as the comfort of one's home or classroom. Techniques such as 3D printing create the potential to 'manufacture' whatever we need or want, when we want it and to be able to customise more freely. This sees us at a rather Gladwellian tipping point, where the ideologies of the industrialised world can be challenged and a shift in power from producer to consumer could come into existence at mass-market level.

This in turn raises some interesting questions. If a consumer can play a much greater role in the production of goods, then how does their relationship with said products change? Do we see a greater sense of ownership developed, an increased sense of value and therefore interest in preservation and maintenance, even celebration of possessions? Do we therefore see a change in the volume of consumption or in the value of objects to their owners? Does producer-power change? Does the paradigm of trust equalling reliability shift towards trust equalling belonging? That is to say, if the consumer has involvement and control over the production of goods, do they feel they belong to the object and the object belongs to them? Could these same approaches be applied to services, such as education?

The second Educational Revolution

Preceding the third Industrial Revolution was the birth of the digital age. We are now able to consume information on any topic in a manner which suits us. The impact this has on learning is profound, with infinitely more information on any given subject available at the click of a button than could ever be disseminated by a teacher or textbook. There is an argument that this negates the requirement for formal 'teaching' in the traditional sense. Why would you 'teach' a subject when immediate access to the world's information is omnipresent and accessible through an increasing range of devices?

Therefore should we see a shift from traditional notions of a teacher-pupil relationship, to one with the onus on educators to facilitate free-learning by becoming catalysts, enablers and inspirers for accessing information, as opposed to conduits for prescribed and predetermined nuggets of information often presented as subjective?

A Continued link – Mass Customisation.

As we look towards the potential of new economic models and understand that the lines between consumer and producer will continue to become more blurred, is it prescient to consider the future divisions between learners and educators in the same fashion? Can we mirror developments in mass-customisation of products in the way we learn?

Perhaps it is now possible to consider loosening the framework of a curriculum to enable more exploration and applied learning, more learning through making? Equally, how do technological developments, particularly those with a physical output, afford learners the opportunity to shape the environment in which they learn as well as the content they are learning? Are we seeing a shift away from institutions being the dominant providers of structured learning (and other public services) in the same way we might with products and producers?

As accessing content has become immeasurably easier in the past decade, so too has creating content, both physically and digitally. If accessing content that interests a learner allows for the mass customisation of a curriculum, imagine the possibilities of open creation to sit alongside this. If learners have access to information about what interests them, and the tools to challenge, develop and experiment with ideas around it, perhaps learning could become a more tantalising and dynamic experience for many more people.

How might a less prescribed curriculum, combined with greater exploration through access to digital content and 'making' tools, encourage more peer-to-peer interaction and learning? Professionally we naturally work in groups and teams, but in education we are habitually encouraged to learn by ourselves, with our successes or failures measured as individuals. Is this something that we can challenge at a macro level in the way that Sugata Mitra's 'Hole In The Wall' has experimented with in India?

The answer (if there is one) I suspect lies somewhere in between the current scenario of highly prescriptive curricula and the free-form 'Digital Steiner School' scenario some might imagine. Being more definitive than that would be guesswork. However, to summarise here are five key points I feel should define the future of education policy:

1. ***If it exists, use it.***
   Don't be scared of technology in a classroom, and it doesn't need to be expensive.

2. ***Experiment.***
   Successful businesses, people and organisations don't stand still, they try things. Some work, some don't, but it's all progress.

3. ***Collaborate.***
   If possible, do not measure success of a learner by comparing them to others. Equally, if possible have them work with others and allow their success to be defined collectively.

4. ***Get personal.***
   Afford learners the space to customise their education (within subjects as well as between subjects) and give them the space to explore their interests whenever possible.

5. ***Engage everyone.***
   If learners are bored, unresponsive or under-achieving, it's the system that's broke, not them.

Tom Tobia is a designer, and co-founder of Makerversity, a making and learning space at Somerset House, London. He works with people, groups, organisations and institutions to design and explore ideas for social change. In particular, his interests lie in alternative education, building resilient populations, digital manufacturing, technology, food and how they all interconnect.

Makerversity *is a workspace for start-up making and manufacturing businesses, and applied learning opportunities. We provide access to a range of fabrication and prototyping tools, spaces, event and learning facilities. We exist to support emerging, working, manufacturing and learning practices and to provide employability opportunities for young people and kick-start the Third Industrial Revolution in the heart of London. Follow @makerversity on Twitter for the latest news and activity.*

18

Good for Everyone: The Scottish Model for Higher Education

Michael Russell

At the heart of the Scottish Government's approach to higher education are two core principles. The first is that we invest in education as a societal good. Secondly, we believe that access to education should be based on the ability to learn, not the ability to pay.

As a small, learning nation, Scotland values its university sector. Last September, the annual QS rankings again showed three of our universities in the world's top 100. To put that in context, Scotland has as many universities in the top 100 as Germany, a country with a population more than 15 times our own.

Scotland's universities excel as both research and teaching establishments. This dual role is indissoluble and crucial to maintaining their competitive position.

In 2012, the European Student's Union produced a map of how each country had fared since the beginning of the global financial crisis, with regard to government investment in higher education. Scotland was identified as one of only three countries in Europe to increase spending on the sector.

The Scottish Government spends over £1bn per year on higher education. This direct investment supports students, institutions, and both research and teaching. It is estimated that the annual economic impact of our universities is £6.7bn, with 140,000 jobs supported[1].

Translating knowledge into impact is vital for Scotland. The University sector is the third largest sector in our economy. Taking 2011/12 as an example, Scottish universities attracted £905m in research funding from a variety of sources including Government, businesses, charities and the EU[2].

Support for innovation is a key priority. In 2013, we began a six year, £124m programme of investment in new Innovation Centres. The first Innovation Centres were launched in April last year, related to Sensor and Imaging Systems and Stratified Medicine.

The success of research is predicated on excellence, and collaboration is not curtailed by national borders. We recognise the benefits of cross border co- operation and

[1] Biggar Economics Report "*Economic Impact of Scotland's Universities 2011/12*", June 2013

[2] HESA Finance Plus 2011/12

knowledge pooling. For this reason, in an independent Scotland, we want to maintain the 'common research area' that the countries in the UK currently operate as. It is clearly in the interests of both Scotland and the rest of the UK to maintain and cultivate this common research area, including shared research councils, access to research facilities and establishments, and rigorous and searching peer review.

No Scottish domiciled undergraduate student has to pay tuition fees to attend university in Scotland. This also applies to students from the EU. In response to imposition of tuition fees of up to £27,000 over the term of a three year degree in other parts of the UK in 2011, the Scottish Government had no option but to enable our universities to require students from the rest of the UK to pay tuition fees to attend Scottish institutions. This step proved necessary to ensure that there are sufficient places available for Scottish domiciled students.

One statistic amply demonstrates the unique nature of our circumstance and the risk we need to address, now and in future. Scottish Government analysis reveals that presently, only 1.5% of students domiciled in England study in Scotland. And they are very welcome. If that total were to rise to 10%, attracted by the prospect of avoiding prohibitive tuition fees, then as many as 80% of existing, funded university places in Scotland could be filled by those students.

Questions have been raised about this policy's compliance with EU requirements, in the event of Scotland being an independent country within the EU. We believe that it will be possible to establish an 'objective justification' for continuation of our current policy. This is not about rationing access to something based on nationality. In our opinion, there are a set of unique issues related to, for example our shared land border and common language that combine to justify our approach.

Maintenance of this policy links directly to our cherished principle of access to higher education being governed by the ability to learn, not pay. With a growing reliance on loans, particularly to pay tuition fees, students in other parts of the UK face the prospect of being burdened with high levels of debt after they leave university.

Scottish domiciled students also have access to student loans to help with living costs. It is right to give learners a choice in how they support themselves during their period of free study. However, the overall student support package offered by the Scottish Government is geared towards providing a mixture of support, through free tuition, bursary and loan, in order that any debt accrued is more sustainable and easier to pay back in the longer term.

The immigration policies being pursued by the UK government are harming higher education in Scotland. There are examples of individuals who cannot come to this country to study, often at a very high level, because of immigration restrictions.

It is essential that Scotland is able to set its own policies on migration and citizenship. Scotland needs to be seen as a welcoming place, open for academic and research business and more than willing to see those of talent staying if they wish to build lives and careers.

In an independent Scotland, we can also bring to bear some parts of our government which presently cannot be engaged in the devolved context. We could design taxation; welfare; and labour market policies aimed at creating a much wealthier and fairer Scotland. That is of particular importance within the early years and our school system. However, it would also have its benefits for further and higher education.

Scottish universities do not operate in a vacuum. Institutions across Europe and elsewhere in the world are not isolated from the economic realities presented to their home countries. However, universities are incubators of talented people and new ideas. Some of these ideas have the potential to revolutionise science and technology.

In so doing, they have the potential to generate sustainable economic growth and new employment opportunities at home and elsewhere. This Scottish Government invests in education as a societal good. In an independent Scotland, I believe we can accelerate achievement at home and increase our international contribution, as a country whose universities excel in teaching, research and extend the hand of welcome to students and academics from across the world.

***Michael Russell** is Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning in the Scottish Cabinet.*

19

Threading employability into the tapestry of higher education

Johnny Rich

Higher education is good at producing employable students. Even as the number of graduates has grown, the demand among employers to attract them has remained high and the extra earnings that a graduate can expect, compared to their peers who started work straight after school, seem to have increased[1].

The problem is that it's all a bit of a mystery. There is this vague quality 'graduateness' that recruiters say they look for. And, of course, there's always the possibility that universities aren't actually adding that quality, just admitting the students who've already got it. Certainly, few universities consciously set out to define or develop it, or even encourage students to see their education as a self-conscious process of gathering the attributes of graduateness, whatever those may be.

From the outset, may I say that I do not blame academics for their lack of worldly wisdom about employability. Personally, I agree with the idea that their cerebral adventures are usually aided by being free of such concerns. But the fact remains that most teachers in higher education regard the world of business, of commerce, of nine-to-five jobs, with something between disinterest and disgust.

This is not what they got into academia for. Indeed, some even embarked on postgraduate studies and academic careers partly to put off the day of confrontation with the world beyond education, the only home they have ever known.

There are many exceptions, of course – just enough to prove the rule.

Is it any wonder then that, despite the fact that by virtue of their higher education, graduates are somehow steeped in something that employers want – let us call it 'employability' – most academics know little and care even less about what employability is, or how to optimise the steeping process.

[1] See *University Degrees: impact on lifecycle of earnings, BIS, 2013* (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/university-degrees-impact-on-lifecycle-of-earnings) An alternative interpretation of the figures would suggest that the reason for the resilience of the graduate premium is more indicative of the lack of employment of opportunities for non-graduates, than of the extra value placed on graduates.

Meanwhile, students are ever more concerned with it. To cite but one of the countless studies in recent years evidencing the same trend, the *University Lifestyle Survey 2014* reported that the primary reason to go to university for 76% of students is to improve their job prospects, a proportion that has increased every year the survey has been conducted[2]. Even the second placed reason is roughly a head-to-head between 'improving knowledge' and 'improving salary prospects'.

Employers too want universities to be ever more effective at getting graduates "oven-ready" in recruiters' parlance. According to a YouGov poll, more than half of employers felt that few or no graduate recruits were prepared for the workplace when they started[3].

This bears out a conversation I had recently with a leading investment bank during which their head of recruitment *boasted* – for it was said with pride – that they had managed to reduce the time it takes for a graduate to make a commercial contribution to their business from a year to nine months. I was left wondering two things: what proportion switch jobs during that period? And surely they should be able to add value from day one?

It's not that universities wouldn't like to do better. The Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey of graduate destinations six months after leaving university, feeds into the league tables which are then afforded an undeserved reverence. But universities don't know how. That academic attitude towards employability pervades and careers support is rarely linked to teaching.

Instead careers support is seen as an add-on, albeit an important one – usually confined to self-selecting final year students – and it's mostly about trying to pair off employers with candidates. It's a mating game in which most universities believe their role is no more than to book the dinner table and let the couples get on with it. There is precious little effort to help the candidates seem more attractive, let alone actually *be* more attractive (or to have a deeper and wider appreciation of the full array of different qualities in a prospective partner).

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[2] *Times Higher Education-Sodexo University Lifestyle Survey 2014*, March 2014 (http://digitalpages.digitalissue.co.uk/00000082/00019241/00088093/). As it happens, *CBI/NUS Working towards your future: Making the most of your time in higher education*, recorded an even higher proportion (79%) stating improved career prospects as their primary reason in March 2011, but improved salary was not an option in that survey.

[3] YouGov poll (August 2013, on behalf of the *Times* and the *Sunday Times*) of 635 business decision-makers in employers found that "52% of graduate employers said none or few graduate recruits were work ready when they joined – with 17% of companies saying none of them were work ready and a further 35% saying only a few of them were." (http://news.co.uk/2013/09/13/the-times-and-the-sunday-times-good-university-guide-new-recruits-are-not-job-ready-according-to-survey/)

If you want a measure of the lack of serious regard for careers and employability in UK universities, just look at how few reserve a place for the head of careers (or someone with similar responsibilities) in their academic or institutional governance bodies, or in their senior management team. It is not even a handful.

Instead universities focus their enhancement on 'student satisfaction' as measured in their final year. It's as if students were supposed to know their job market value before they've had a chance to test it. Here in England certain universities focus on recruiting 'better' students and stamping them with 'Russell Group-approved', which all-too-many recruiters then use as a proxy for employability.

I would like to propose a solution: a simple framework that, if it started to get foothold among universities, students and employers, would smooth the transition through school, further study, first job and into a career. It would encourage students to do that most powerful thing in the context of employability: be self-reflective. And it would make the process of suitable candidates and employers finding each other so much simpler.

In careers research, it is common to talk of two types of skills. 'Hard' cognitive skills (or 'competencies') are those skills – like memorising the London street map – that are specific to particular tasks or jobs. Whereas 'soft' skills, such as communication and grit, are transferable. Different models describe the number of soft skills as anything from 5 to around 20. The exact model is not important here, but for the sake of argument, let us take the seven used by the National Union of Students (NUS) and the Confederation of British Industry (CBI)[4] as follows: self-management; team-working; business and customer awareness; problem-solving; communication; application of numeracy; and application of information technology.

I contend that these soft skills are exactly what we mean by graduateness. Far from being something the students have developed fully when they embark on higher education, they build on their soft skills through teaching, independent learning and living, critical thinking and extra-curricular activities.

The vagueness arises because there is no systematic reckoning of the soft skills that are developed. Meanwhile, hard skills are easier to assess, quantify and turn into boxes that a recruiter (or their applicant filtering algorithm) can tick.

As a result, employers tend to gravitate towards Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) graduates whose skills are 'harder' (in the sense of specificity, rather than difficulty necessarily). Meanwhile, students – particularly those from non-traditional backgrounds – have gravitated towards vocation-oriented subjects in the often-misguided belief that the supposed hard skills training offered must equate to the career success that tends to be their reason for going to university.

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[4] *CBI/NUS Working towards your future: Making the most of your time in higher education*, March 2011. (http://www.cbi.org.uk/media-centre/news-articles/2011/03/working-towards-your-future/)

And yet, all higher education courses imbue students with soft skills to a greater or lesser degree. Pun intended.

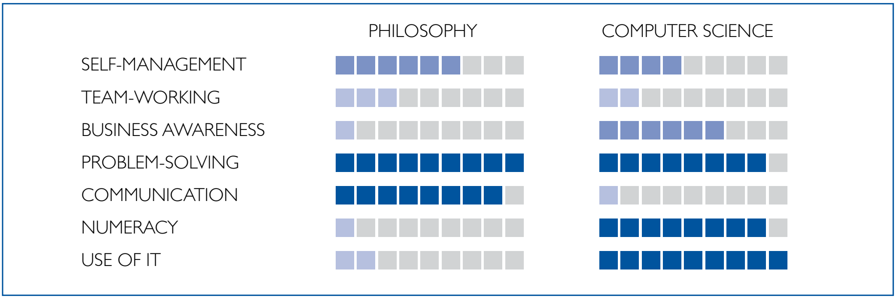
We need a way to systematise the gathering of soft skills. For prospective students, this would make explicit exactly how the course will improve their employability and which jobs they would be qualified to do. For employers, it would not only make it clearer what each candidate has to offer in terms of differing skill sets – because, remember, jobs rarely require the same mix of skills.

Furthermore, the very act of making explicit what skills the course aims to develop might help to bring it about. A student delivering a presentation to a seminar of their peers may gain communication skills, but just think how that process could be improved by telling them beforehand that that is what this exercise will do and is intended to do, and consolidating that learning afterwards by merely inviting the student to reflect on whether they learnt anything about communication and, if so, what?

Meanwhile, for academics it would provide a simple way of embedding employability into everything they already do without a fundament change to their mindset, or radical retraining in concerns that never interested them in the first place.

How would this work in practice?

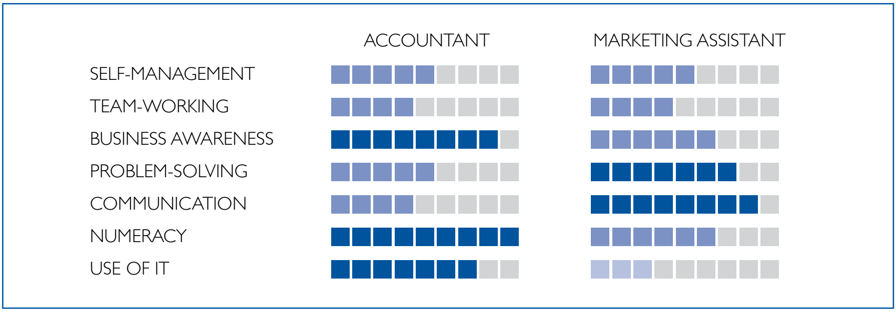
Every course should publish as part of the course description its intended soft skills outcomes. It might look something like this:



Within that, each module should have its own chart, showing the student how they're working towards their skill set. Ideally, it would even form part of the assessment process and would be published alongside the student's degree classification or Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR)[5].

[5] The Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR) is a more detailed summary of the student's accomplishments throughout their course. In partnership with a number of universities, the Higher Education Academy is also currently trialing a Grade Point Average (GPA) approach to assessment as the traditional grading system has proved inadequate for, among other, employers.

To complete the circle, employers should do the same in terms of what they're looking for. Something like this:



Students can clearly see jobs for which they are more suited (as can employers) and they can see gaps in their skill sets that they may be able to plug through extra-curricular activities (such as sports that build teamwork), specific employability training or work experience.

Meanwhile, the employers' applicant filtering algorithms have an easier job to do – and, one might hope, a more accurate one.

Among the many advantages of a framework like this is are that it encourages students from all backgrounds to develop their employability on the basis of reflecting on their actual skills, rather than the stereotyped attributes of different social groups. It is also an inexpensive way to make a big change, with an incentive for all stakeholders to adopt the framework on an individual basis, which would then build to systematic benefits if it became common practice.

__Johnny Rich__ is a media and higher education specialist with various roles as Publisher of brands such as Push (the leading independent resource for prospective students), Real World Magazine, the Recruiters' Guide to Courses & Campuses and the Oxbridge Students' Careers Resource. He is also a director of the Higher Education Academy. He appears regularly on television and radio as a specialist on students and higher education issues.