

EMBRACING **THE** **CARNIVAL**



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The MIT of the North

Professionalising
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What's wrong with
public engagement?

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NOVEMBER 2019

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WELCOME

Welcome to this issue of the Wonkhe Briefing, your guide to current thinking and insight on higher education policy, in association with KPMG.

We have witnessed extraordinary political scenes in Autumn 2019, and it feels rather that political business as usual is suspended pending the resolution of the Brexit question. Though a General Election is imminent, it offers scant prospect of resolving the political crisis the country is in.

Political turmoil creates problems for universities, but it also creates opportunities, to reconsider approaches to external relations, to forge new connections between research and policy, and to seek to drive forward new ideas. This issue includes articles from Mark Leach on how universities might navigate the political carnival, from Debbie McVitty and Ant Bagshaw on their new book on the professional practice of policy analysis and public affairs in universities, and from Deborah Bull and Jonathan Grant of King's College London on their thinking about what it means to be a university that is engaged with the public.

Yet despite the apparent chaos at the heart of government, higher education policymaking continues, and requires a response from universities. The future of the Teaching Excellence Framework remains an open debate, there is a developing policy agenda around international student experience and outcomes, including the welcome reinstatement of the two-year post study work visa for international students, and two parallel reviews of university admissions are expected in the coming months.

The reaffirmation of the government's target of 2.4 per cent of GDP to be invested in research and development by 2027 suggests that research and innovation is likely to shoot up the policy agenda, especially in light of Brexit. This is an area in which there is political consensus about the importance and value of universities, and one in which universities can play a vital role in partnership with other regional actors. But they will need to work with partners to build shared vision and purpose for their places. Justine Andrew of KPMG and Tom Bridges of Arup draw lessons from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) to describe how they are working as part of a range of partners to grow an innovation driven economy in Leeds.

Questions of quality, and the measurement of value, remain central to higher education policymaking. The Longitudinal Educational Outcomes dataset that captures graduate salaries one, five and ten years after graduation is becoming a commonplace reference point for policymakers in government and for the media. Understanding how this dataset is constructed, what it shows, and the conclusions that can, and cannot be drawn from it, is therefore essential for university leaders and governors, as David Kernohan's article explores.

The identities and rights of transgender staff and students are coming under the spotlight, and are provoking debates inside universities, as well as prompting the development of practice to support inclusion and tackle barriers for trans people. The way these debates and discussions are reported in the media is frequently unhelpful, and so Sofia Ropek, with Emrys Travis and Tam Blaxter, offers insight on how universities might approach these questions in a positive way.

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DEBBIE McVITTY | EDITOR

Roll up, roll up

the political carnival
is coming to town

A seemingly unrelenting series of extraordinary political events constantly serves to remind us that we are not living in ordinary times. And although no one knows what's going to happen next, life goes on: the bread and butter work of running universities, teaching students and research continues, as does the churn of policymaking. The political chaos, though deeply unnerving, serves as a new backdrop to everyday life. And it gives a renewed urgency for universities' public engagement activity.

A NATION'S FUTURE

Few would put money on the shape of politics after the next election, but there's probably no majority for the most extreme vision of Britain advocated by some of the right-wing Brexiteers who see leaving the EU as the way to realise their ambitions for a country with weak or non-existent liberal institutions, a small state, more nationalism and maximum freedom for international business and finance.

Despite the hostility towards universities in the press in recent years, demand for higher education continues to grow. It is clear that it will take a lot more to break the sector than what's thrown at it by the proponents of a culture war that seek to place today's universities and their students on the wrong side of a major historical and social divide between liberals and conservatives, Anywheres and Somewheres.

But, as I've been arguing since the Brexit referendum result, the sector is fighting a gunfight with water pistols. Universities measure success in academic years at the very minimum, but usually three or five year periods. But the air war is being fought every single day, in both mainstream and social media, and the sector's enemies are gaining ground.

Universities are starting from a strong base, which is why the damage has been containable, but just carrying on as we are would see more leakage at the very least, and in the long term, we would risk taking on much heavier damage if public opinion was to start to permanently firm up in the wrong direction.

The same people attacking the sector in the popular press every day are usually the same people, or at least in league with those that want to turn Britain into the dystopian hellscape/free-market paradise [delete as politically appropriate for you] I outlined above.

Universities are not part of a big Remain conspiracy trying to subvert the will of the people, as is the charge. They are full of internationally-minded people who can only see benefit from Britain engaging in the world. And they suspect that the worst excesses of the ideological Brexiteers would spell disaster for the universities that inhabit these islands.

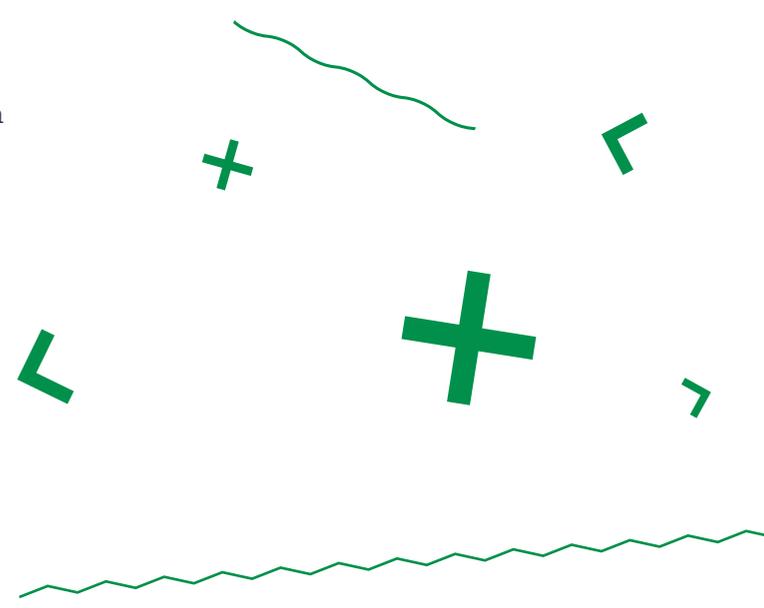
More needs to be done and it doesn't have to involve refighting the Brexit referendum or simply defending arguments about grade inflation and senior pay (although these are not going away and do need more robust responses).

Public engagement work needs to be greatly expanded. Many universities are already working on it and the civic agenda has kick-started hundreds of positive conversations this year. I've been lucky enough to be a part of many of them and encouraged by a new impetus around the agenda to open up the doors more widely.

But I think the sector needs to go further and move faster to show why universities matter to people's everyday lives. For example, I think universities should be unashamed social entrepreneurs, focused on public impact and not commercial self-interest.

Universities could adopt a campaign mentality – building partnerships and allying with activists on everything from mental health to job insecurity, from violence against women to welfare reform. They could be using the latest up-to-date campaigning techniques to genuinely engage people and politicians in those missions. We have the technology and we need to put it to better use.

Getting this right would make it harder for the critics of the sector to land their arguments and it represents an opportunity to show why universities matter in new and unexpected ways and in parts of society as yet untouched by the magic of higher education. And as powerful, wealthy and well-resourced institutions (at least in education or public sector terms), universities have an obligation to demonstrate unambiguous moral leadership of the society they are part of.



JOIN THE CAMPAIGN

A general election is imminent. And the chances are that the election carnival will come to your campus as university towns represent a slew of competitive seats.

Despite adding to the air of uncertainty, it should also be an opportunity to inspire civic engagement of students and staff, firstly in the job of making sure they can have their say in the form of voter registration. University lecture halls always serve as powerful backdrops for political debate - the local as well as the nationally televised variety.

Campus facilities serve as brilliant photo opportunities and platforms for politicians to make announcements. And our world-class political academics and psephologists give any other part of the punditry a run for its money on the airwaves when it comes to clearly explaining to lay people what's going on, and what might happen next.

My advice is this: let it all in. Embrace the political carnival for a few short weeks. And show the nation that universities are open, confident, up for, and engaged in the debate.

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MARK LEACH | WONKHE



The policy environment

for higher education

Though Westminster politics has been dominated by Brexit, there is no shortage of policy initiatives and debates in UK higher education. Here, we round up the policy debates likely to require thinking and response from universities over the coming months.

In September, Secretary of State for Education Gavin Williamson issued a fresh letter of instruction to the Office for Students (OfS), the regulator for English universities. In Scotland, the financial challenges of Scottish universities have been laid bare in a report by Audit Scotland. In Wales plans are in train for a bill to pass through the Welsh Assembly bringing together post-compulsory education under a single regulator.

TEF NOT DEAD

The first surprise concerns the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF). There are those who thought they'd provided Shirley Pearce, independent reviewer of the TEF, and her advisory panel, just enough ammunition to kill off the exercise at subject level. This view was reinforced by the Royal Statistical Society's referral of the whole exercise to the UK Statistics Authority on the grounds that the data it proposes to use is not fit for purpose to produce statistically reliable results.

Nevertheless, the Department for Education seems keen to press on with the exercise, instructing OfS to publish subject level TEF in 2021 alongside implementing a new TEF model anticipated to come from the independent review. Quite how the central critiques of subject level TEF will be addressed – its vast cost, its methodological problems and its relative lack of use by prospective students – remains to be seen, but this is likely to be a big debate in the sector over the next few months.

GOING GLOBAL

The Prime Minister's announcement of the re-introduction of a two year post study work route for international students on Tier IV visas studying at UK higher education providers offered a welcome moment of celebration for UK higher education. The mood music in government is gung-ho for "Global Britain", with an international education strategy published this year, and Adrian Smith's review of international research collaboration expected shortly.

In pursuit of the agreed international education strategy, the Secretary of State has tasked OfS with taking steps to ensure international students feel integrated on campus; are supported in terms of their mental health and wellbeing, and receive the employability skills they need to be supported into employment in their home country or the UK.

Part of this effort will be the collection and publication of data on the outcomes achieved by international students, including those studying on transnational education courses outside the UK - a proposal whose practical implications have surely not yet been thought through.

Williamson's letter to OfS also asked for a specific strand of work on "harmful student recruitment practices" aimed at international students, presumably by arm's-length agents. Though notionally confined to England, this is one area where Scottish and Welsh institutions will feel significant pressure to keep abreast, especially if, as all data seems to, it ultimately ends up in the TEF.



Prime Minister Boris Johnson has reaffirmed the government's plan to increase investment in research and development to 2.4 per cent of GDP by 2027

RESEARCH AND KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

Prime Minister Boris Johnson has reaffirmed the government's plan to increase investment in research and development to 2.4 per cent of GDP by 2027 - though the task will hardly be straightforward, especially in light of the fallout from Brexit.

This autumn, UK Research and Innovation is expected to publish its "road map" to achieving the target, and with universities and science minister Chris Skidmore an enthusiastic advocate for research, universities should expect a greater level of focus from government on growing the research base.

Government priorities were outlined in the minister's letter to Research England in October, which instructed, among other things, that the first iteration of the Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) should take place in the 2019/20 academic year, and noted the planned review of the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) over the next three years.

The Concordat to support the career development of researchers has recently been refreshed, which is timely if the sector is going to need to consider how to accommodate a rapid influx of early career researchers, in the event that investment genuinely does grow. And of course, with the submission date for REF2021 growing ever closer, we can expect the flurries of technical guidance and answers to frequently asked questions from Research England to grow into a blizzard.



The Labour Party, in line with the longstanding policy of the University and College Union, has attempted to reinvigorate the debate over whether universities should adopt post qualification admissions

UNIVERSITY ADMISSIONS

The inexorable rise of unconditional offers - and “conditional unconditional” offers - particularly in the English sector, has sparked a collective bout of public anxiety about the sanctity of university admissions. It is claimed that unconditional offers discourage prospective students from putting in sufficient effort for A level and equivalent exams, and that conditional unconditional offers amount to illegal pressure selling of university places.

The Labour Party, in line with the longstanding policy of the University and College Union, has attempted to reinvigorate the debate over whether universities should adopt post qualification admissions, a policy that has long found favour among left-learning and liberal media commentators. The case for post qualification admissions rests on the unreliability of predicted grades and the risk that particular demographic groups - particularly those from lower income and minority ethnic backgrounds - are likely to be disadvantaged as a result.

Emerging from the public debate over admissions are not one, but two, national reviews of admissions expected to report after Christmas, one undertaken by Universities UK, and the other by OfS.

Beyond the central question of how university admissions might be as fair, efficient and stress-free as possible in the modern higher education system, these parallel reviews will be a vital test of other questions: the ability of OfS to engage constructively with the English sector and the diversity of providers it is now responsible for, and the ability of Universities UK to produce recommendations that balance addressing the public’s concerns and protecting the interests of universities.

VALUE, QUALITY AND STUDENT CONTRACTS

OfS’ statutory duty to secure value for money for students seems to have taken a back seat to the pressures of registering providers and the Augar review. Chief executive Nicola Dandridge has been at pains to point out that the first piece of research that OfS commissioned was on value for money. Now according to the instruction letter from the Secretary of State it represents “the highest priority”. Value is framed as “rigorous decision-making during the initial registration process” and OfS is encouraged to intervene where “there are unacceptable levels of drop-out rates or failures to equip students with qualifications that are recognised and valued by employers”.

There is a wider emerging agenda about securing “rigorous and demanding” quality across the whole sector, perhaps implying that the Department for Education hopes that OfS will pick up on issues that it did not under its in-house system of designating courses for access to student loans.

OfS is also expected to prioritise work to support students as “empowered consumers”. Promises have to be “delivered”, choices need to be based on clear, comparable, and relevant information about what is being offered, and contractual terms and conditions have to be “fair, clear and transparent”. Williamson would like the OfS to report its conclusions and make initial recommendations to government by February 2020.

Also expected from OfS this term is updated guidance on student protection plans, a further look at the provisions available to students to switch course and institution, and a student engagement strategy. A packed agenda in anyone’s book.

AUGAR AND THE POST-COMPULSORY LANDSCAPE

Though the government has reportedly “shelved” the recommendation of the Augar panel that undergraduate full-time fees in English universities be reduced to £7,500, the report has not gone away. Certainly, the agenda on technical education in England remains live, and the government continues to push apprenticeships, accelerated degrees, and flexible learning. And the government has promised a full response to Augar “by the end of winter”.

Williamson has directed OfS to review the regulatory and funding arrangements surrounding flexible provision, including how providers use current funding, and how performance metrics “support and incentivise flexible provision”. An interim report is expected in March 2020. Other recommendations of the Augar panel, especially the reintroduction of maintenance grants, could see the light of day as part of a retail offer at a future general election.

JIM DICKINSON | WONKHE

Professionalising influence in higher education



Our new book, *Influencing higher education policy: a professional guide to making an impact* recently published by Routledge brings together insight from many voices across the UK higher education sector on the changing policy landscape for higher education, and how universities might respond.

INSIDERS AND OUTSIDERS

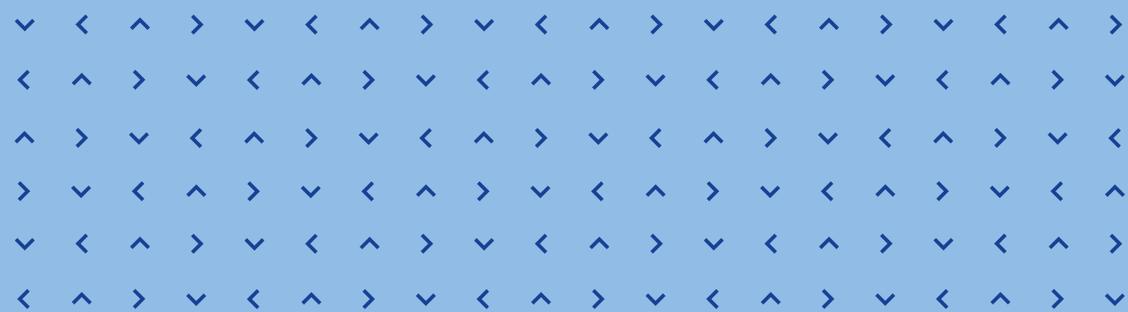
In the last decade, there has been a shift in the way policy is made and the positioning of the potential policy actors in higher education sector, including higher education leaders, students, staff and professional policy wonks.

Broadly, we believe we can characterise the difference as a shift from policy being made by and on behalf of universities, by informed insiders, with the aim of enabling universities to flourish in their collective mission, to a model in which disparate universities are imagined as always at risk of failing in their duty to students, and in contributing to national wellbeing. The value and success of universities is no longer a given.

The language of the new regulator for English universities, the Office for Students, reflects this shift: for example in its public characterisation of the “spiralling” issue of grade inflation, its announcement that it will not intervene to bail out a provider in financial difficulty, or its repeated assertions that it will be prepared to intervene if it believes universities are not sufficiently addressing problems, including those relating to student welfare, formerly well beyond the scope of the funding council.

There are many social forces in play, explored further in the book, including the populist turn in politics, which tends to foment mistrust in institutions, government policies (and demographic trends) that have allowed some universities to grow at the expense of others, and the encouragement of new higher education providers to compete on equal terms with established universities.

The rise of social media must also be acknowledged, which makes organisations more vulnerable in all sorts of ways, primarily by creating the conditions for a simple bad news story to become a public relations crisis much more rapidly than in the past.



PROFESSIONALISING INFLUENCE

A key thread in our book is the increasing professionalisation of university external engagement, public affairs and policy analysis. This relatively young profession of university external relations is, ironically, faced with the challenge of navigating a rapidly changing influencing environment, and developing competencies that might not have been needed ten years ago, in a relatively more benign policy environment.

The first of these is effective reputation management - while it may seem unfair given the enormous contribution universities make to society, the democratisation of media means that no individual or organisation is afforded an automatic right to be heard. Clarity of organisational values and the ability to evidence these in actions and behaviour are crucial.

An associated skill is the ability to communicate authentically and in ways that build public trust. In an era of rapid communication, this is very far from the carefully crafted corporate press release. In fact, anything that smacks too much of “crafting” is instantly suspicious.

Universities should want to be seen, as Ant puts it, “as an engaged party with knowledge, insight, and capabilities which can be of use to other actors in the system”. Having ideas, and knowing which of those ideas might be interesting to others is central to being seen this way.

In our respective time at Wonkhe, we have been struck by how anodyne some university corporate communications can be, compared with the less polished but much more dynamic and engaging voices of individuals working in those universities.

Internally to institutions, it’s necessary to have the ability to draw together disparate lines of evidence, expert views and researcher interests and connect these to the relevant policy issue and policymakers, to get the best value from influencing efforts. Some well-resourced universities have policy institutes that undertake this work; others have a single, hard-pressed member of professional staff.

No matter the size of the team involved, public affairs and policy professionals must decide, or advise leaders, which issues are a priority and have the flexibility to adapt these in light of a fast-moving policy environment. They must also maintain a balance between reacting to external threats to the institution’s mission or reputation, and pursuit of the institution’s own policy agenda and ideas.

All of this is in addition to having a grip of the policy issues, and the technical knowhow to work with policymakers, as well as the pragmatism to recognise the variety of other voices and influences those policymakers are subjected to. Though the environment has changed, wasting people’s time is still the besetting sin of influencing attempts, and the necessity of having a concrete, deliverable “ask” still the golden rule.

IS THERE A SECTOR?

Though convention demands that we continue to refer to the UK higher education “sector”, it’s debatable whether universities and higher education providers should consider themselves to have shared interests, and continue to associate collectively for the purposes of policy influencing.

The mission groups and - to a lesser extent - the representative bodies are grappling with defining their roles in the changing environment. The hostility of the external environment demands that higher education makes itself as powerful as possible through forging a shared policy agenda, and putting aside the cosmetic differences between different providers.

On the other hand, each provider must be pragmatic about which policy issues are most important, and local and regional influencing may be more fruitful than attempting to engage with national policymakers.

We see the value of mission groups in particular as acting as a catalyst for the production and dissemination of policy ideas. Though there is no reason why universities should not create ad hoc networks around particular policy agendas - and to some extent this is facilitated by representative bodies.

Where collective representation sometimes fails is in the dilution of policy ideas to the lowest common denominator. Whether the policy actor is an individual, an institution or a collective representative of institutions, failing to cut through in a crowded market for ideas is the worst possible outcome.

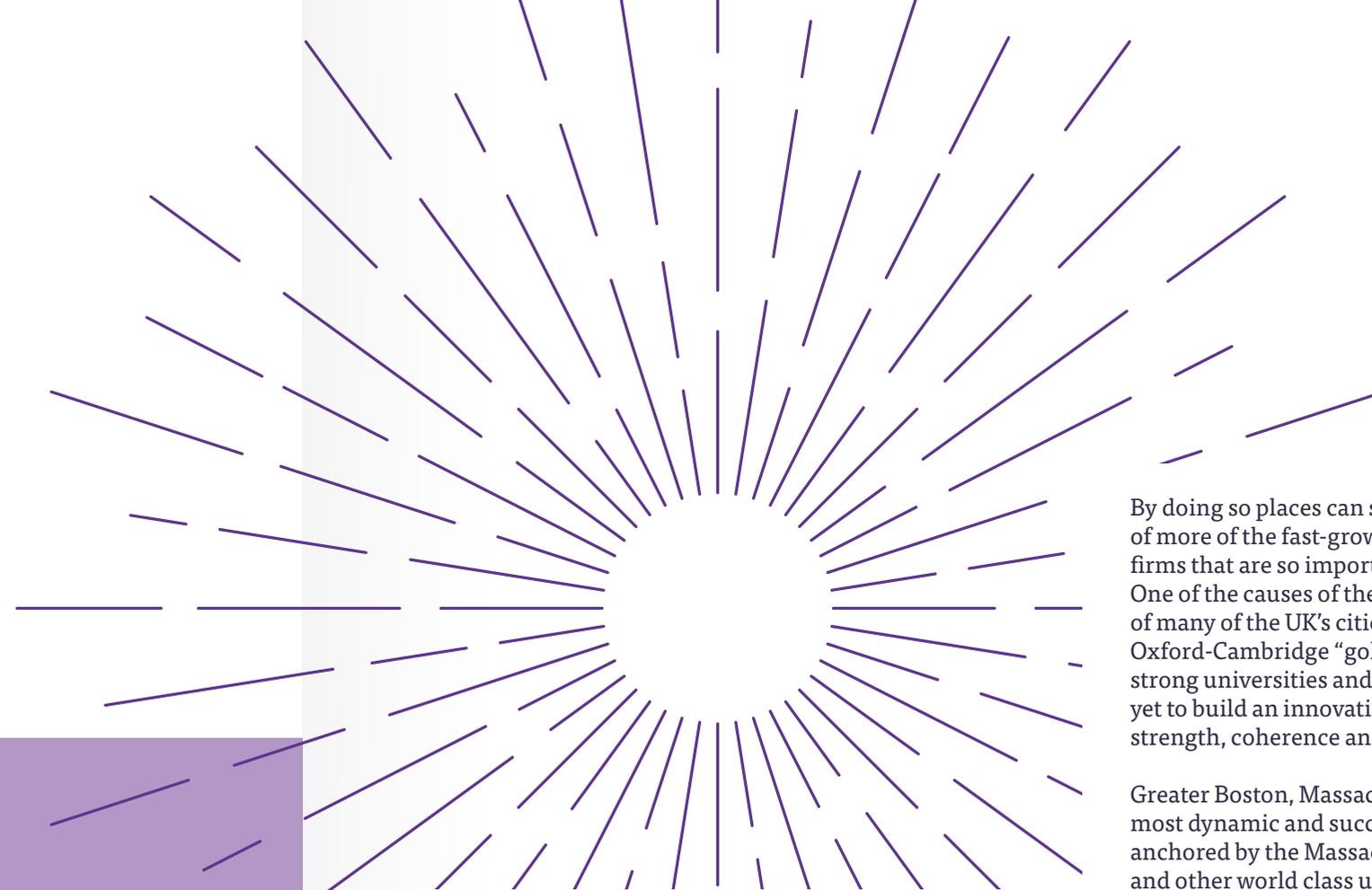
We have edited this book to help inform and shape the debates about higher education policymaking. It provides a valuable resource for anyone with an interest in the health of universities, sector organisations and the landscape of policymaking.

Find out more information and purchase a copy of the book, go to wonkhe.com/2019-book

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ANT BAGSHAW | NOUS GROUP
DEBBIE McVITTY | WONKHE

The MIT of the North

How we're building an innovation-driven economy in Leeds



At a time of rapid economic and technological change, the places that will be successful in the knowledge economy are those that can create and commercialise innovation. The opportunity is to spin out and diffuse research and knowledge from universities and other knowledge intensive anchor institutions, such as teaching hospitals or major cultural bodies.

By doing so places can support the start-up and scaling-up of more of the fast-growing, innovation-driven, high-export firms that are so important to rapid productivity growth. One of the causes of the relative economic underperformance of many of the UK's cities and city regions outside the London-Oxford-Cambridge "golden triangle" is that, despite having strong universities and some real success stories, they have yet to build an innovation-led-economy with sufficient strength, coherence and critical mass.

Greater Boston, Massachusetts has built one of the world's most dynamic and successful economies based on innovation, anchored by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and other world class universities.

The MIT motto is "mens et manus": hands and head working in tandem to provide real-world solutions. In the UK the role of universities as anchor institutions has been brought into focus by the development of local industrial strategies, the excellent UPP Civic University Commission, and the need to demonstrate real-world impact on research and knowledge exchange through the Research Excellence and Knowledge Exchange Frameworks.

While we see this civic mission now featuring more prominently at the head of many university strategies alongside excellent teaching; research and international profile, universities are still grappling with how they put it at the heart of what they do.

BUILDING SHARED VISION AND PURPOSE

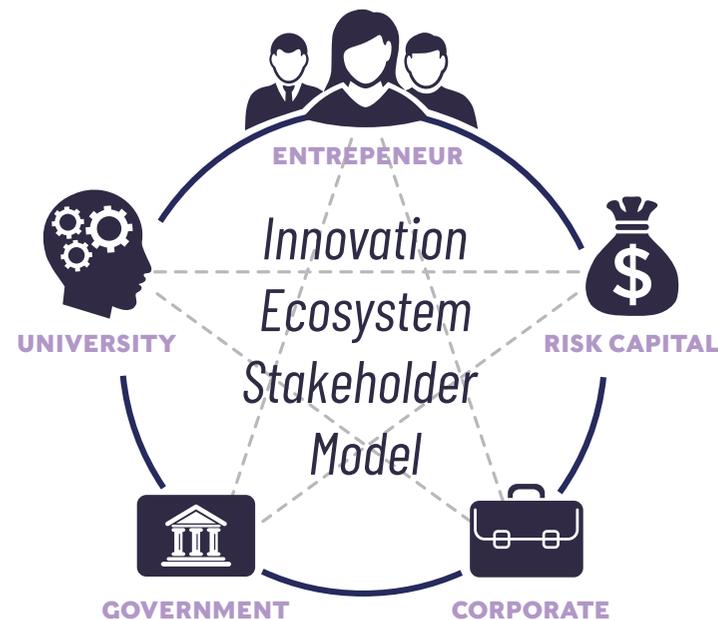
The question often asked is why the Greater Boston economy is so successful and how does MIT act as such a significant economic catalyst? The answer provides lessons for all parts of the UK. MIT, through its Regional Entrepreneurship Acceleration Programme (REAP) framework, has identified the components of a successful ecosystem for innovation-led growth.

Is it too fanciful for us to imagine an MIT of the North: a vibrant innovation driven eco-system?

Initiated and led by the University of Leeds as the cohort champion, this is the challenge that the MIT REAP Leeds team have picked as part of a global cohort going through a two-year journey as part of the programme.

A strong base of research intensive universities is important. There needs to be a sufficient number of entrepreneurs with the right skills and culture (and MIT believes strongly that entrepreneurship can be taught) to spin-out, start and scale up innovative firms. A strong group of corporates undertaking innovation and supporting and advising smaller firms is necessary. The availability of risk capital and the engagement of angel investors, who provide mentoring and advice, as well as finance, to entrepreneurs is a major factor. Local and national government has a major role to play in creating the right policy frameworks, infrastructure, and data.

All these actors need to work together to ensure there is the right engagement and support across the system to create a successful ecosystem that is more than the sum of its constituent parts. This stakeholder model sits at the core of the MIT approach.



MIT Regional Entrepreneurship Acceleration Program

Representing KPMG and Arup, we are the “corporate” part of the system for MIT REAP Team Leeds. For us, and for all of the Leeds team – made up of senior members from each stakeholder group from across the city - living the stakeholder model has been a core differentiator from what has gone before. Though initiated by the university we are all seen as equal players in the system each of whom brings a different lens to bear on the issues we are facing. The university has been the catalyst, but is seen as a part of the answer, not the whole solution.

We have a developing sense of a shared vision: we have worked hard to understand the Leeds eco-system together from a quantitative and qualitative evidence base; we have really questioned our assumed comparative advantages; we have discussed and argued our perspectives in an environment that enables robust discussion and disagreement and, fuelled by our joint analysis of the situation, twelve months in, we are developing a real sense of collective purpose.

LESSONS FOR THE UK

If the MIT REAP process does provide a blueprint, then our emerging observations are that there are four important implications here for UK cities and regions, and for the universities located within them.

First, a place-based approach is important. The MIT story demonstrates the importance of the components for innovation coming together in a geographical place. The modern economy relies on intangible assets and networks such as knowledge, research and development, creativity, software, data, and talent. Interconnected industries are growing, and the boundaries between sectors such as finance, digital, services, design, engineering, health, and so on, are becoming increasingly blurred. This means that knowledge spillovers between them are critical to the economic competitiveness of places.

For universities, who tend to start from a position of the strength of their own research base, true interdisciplinary working will become even more critical, perhaps more so outside the university than within it. The scale and density of knowledge transfers can be maximised in cities and connected districts which can support a critical mass and high densities of face-to-face contacts between knowledge-intensive firms, workers, and institutions. However, most policy and funding decisions for innovation in the UK are taken at national level and in silos relating to specific sectors. Universities need to be vocal advocates of the need to build on the local industrial strategy to move to a more place-based approach with greater devolution of funding.

Second, innovation districts in city centres and connected urban districts are emerging as the places that can help UK cities create, scale up and attract the fast-growing firms, new products and processes which will drive more productive and inclusive economic growth. The geography of innovation and the economy is changing. Knowledge intensive jobs are moving back into urban areas where skilled and creative workers, innovative firms, researchers from universities and other institutions, healthcare clinicians, investors and entrepreneurs are sharing knowledge and ideas in collaborative spaces and networks.

Cities, universities, and other anchor institutions for innovation, should seek to support and capitalise on this trend through bold investments to create new campuses, business space, and public realm. These are the science parks of the twenty-first century: regeneration hotspots, magnets for inward investment, and places that can change our economy. We would question any university plan that sought to establish an innovation centre in isolation from the other players.

Third, there needs to be a stronger focus on building the networks for collaboration to develop more successful innovation-driven entrepreneurial ecosystems. This might include creating accelerator programmes to ensure entrepreneurs can access the research, mentoring and advice to commercialise ideas (or fail fast), and the investment, markets and premises they need to succeed.

There is scope to build on the work of the Scale-Up Institute to provide more support to fast-growing scale-up firms. In some places there is a need to improve access to risk capital through initiatives such as NorthInvest which is building a network of angel investors and connecting them to start-ups.

For universities considering how they can play a stronger catalytic role in growing the economy as part of their civic purpose, this could include increasing entrepreneurial education and staff and student entrepreneurship and industry collaboration.

But bolting on innovation and collaboration to the university's strategy is not enough. Leaders need to review in detail how the different parts of the University interact with each other on innovation to ensure the right structures, people and incentives are in place to encourage, what might be for some, a very different approach.

There is potential for places to stimulate and bring together innovation activity around missions, aimed at solving societal challenges, as recommended by the UCL Commission for a Mission-orientated Approach to Industrial Strategy. This is one of the emerging strategic interventions we are considering in Leeds that also strikes the right balance for us on achieving inclusive economic growth.

Finally, tackling the significant regional imbalances in research and development funding will be needed as part of the government's aim to increase research and development investment to 2.4 per cent of GDP. Public sector research and development investment has a key role in stimulating private sector research and development activity but currently there are significant regional disparities in this investment.

As Roger Marsh, Chair of the NP11 group of Local Enterprise Partnerships, and part of the MIT REAP team, said recently:

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Creating ideas costs money, it is only by commercialising those ideas that we can make money and create wealth.

We need more places in the UK to build strong innovation-driven and entrepreneurial economies. That will require a place-based approach, more support for the development of innovation districts, a stronger focus on building the networks for collaboration between innovators, entrepreneurs and other actors in the ecosystem, and it needs a concerted effort to increase, and tackle the imbalances in, research and development investment.

As drivers of innovation and ideas, the role of universities is critical, but they cannot act alone and need to build their own stakeholder teams if civic mission is to be at the heart of their strategy, not just the headline.

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JUSTINE ANDREW | KPMG
TOM BRIDGES | ARUP

What should we make of LEO now?

Longitudinal Educational Outcomes (LEO) data was initially created as an experiment, but it is now at the centre of debates about the value of higher education.



Combining data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), the Department of Work and Pensions, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, and the Department for Education, LEO shows an approximation of a median graduate salary for a cohort graduating from a given subject at a given institution. It's a combination so complex it required an actual Act of Parliament to make possible - the Small Business, Employment, and Enterprise Act 2015 (part six, section 78) - and successive iterations have made the data a little more inclusive, comprehensible and reliable.

Although we are becoming accustomed to the annual releases, we have not yet seen the wholesale adoption of LEO insights into policymaking practice. Yet LEO features frequently at the heart of debates over the value of higher education, how that value might be measured, and to whom that value accrues.

The Augar report earlier this year used LEO-derived data to make a highly disputed case for rethinking the "subsidy" whereby students of fine art attract more Treasury funds than those studying finance due to the relatively lower long term earnings for fine artists. LEO is also a supplementary metric in TEF, replacing the venerable Destinations of Leavers of Higher Education (DHLE) in subject TEF.

But where we mostly see LEO is in prospective student information - and misinformation. It turned up in Unistats (and now Discover Uni, OfS' own prospective student information service) with heavy and appropriate caveats. It seems to form the basis of a quick, highly repeatable and click friendly, league table of graduate salaries anywhere from *The Telegraph* to *Cosmopolitan*.

Let's run through some of those issues.

HISTORIC

LEO is historic - it records what has happened, based on a specific set of wider economic and social trends. We don't yet have enough data to understand how well it predicts the future, although we can be cautiously encouraged by the moderate correlation between the oldest and newest data we currently have.

The data may refer to subject areas in institutions that have long-since closed, to courses and approaches long abandoned, and to groups of students who may be working in a career that has nothing to do with their undergraduate degree.

The data that exists covers the graduate job market mainly between the 2008 financial crisis and the 2016 Brexit referendum. How representative that period is in the gilded history of these islands remains to be seen. Salaries in particular sectors ebb and flow according to cycles of varying lengths - industries may die and then rise again. At present, there is simply not enough LEO to account and correct for these.

NON-SPECIFIC

Though LEO is based on an aggregation of individual data - we have to use assumptions and statistical methods to get to reportable and representative answers for how much particular cohorts get paid. For this, we need to use big buckets to get a reliable sample size. Subject areas - at a very high level - may include a very disparate group of courses. Some effort has been made to separate out key outliers, but there are still myriad exceptions in there.

Later releases have included surface-level data on student background and prior qualification. But it is not much, and - frankly - outside of Wonkhe and the Institute for Fiscal Studies no-one has used it. The differences in salary by sex are as embarrassing for the nation as they ever were, but there are also significant differences in outcomes based on prior qualifications and POLAR quintiles.

But the big one is region. And this works on three levels. The region a graduate applied to university from, studied in, and currently lives in, all have an impact on salary. Universities in the north, in particular, have rightly been quick to note the lower salaries and lower living costs dominate in their local areas, and the virtues of graduates choosing not just to move to London are clear. LEO has a real danger of being a league table of how many graduates a provider has working in London and the South East - we've seen initial data on region but a release covering region, subject, and institution due this autumn has been postponed.



NOT WHAT STUDENTS WANT?

Despite the student information justification used to support various presentations of LEO data, there are substantial survey findings suggesting that it is not something prospective students find useful. The practicalities of study - living costs, workload, the student experience - loom large, and where minds turn to career it is on experience rather than salary that the questions are formed.

What do graduates do? Which jobs? How happy are they? Money is an issue, but it emerges as a tool to live a comfortable and stable life - something earlier generations took for granted.

A version of this article with interactive data visualisations is available to view on the Wonkhe site.

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DAVID KERNOHAN | WONKHE



What do graduates do? Which jobs? How happy are they? Money is an issue, but it emerges as a tool to live a comfortable and stable life - something earlier generations took for granted.



How universities can support trans inclusion

In the news, trans and non-binary students are portrayed as either threatening or trendy, or a combination of the two; they're either endangering freedoms and bathrooms, or so woke that they're ripe for dismissal. If you visit a university cafeteria in 2019, not only will you be deprived of beef, but you'll hear every other student requesting a non-binary dessert option.

In news stories, you also rarely hear from trans or non-binary people. This piece is written with Tam Blaxter and Emrys Travis, who have spent their time in universities working to make higher education less hostile for them and other trans and non-binary students and staff. Tam is a junior research fellow at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, and Emrys is a master's student in the languages department.

THE TRUTH ABOUT TRANS

Confusing and often alarmist media representations of trans people make it difficult to get a clear sense of what it means to be trans or non-binary. Stonewall has developed a helpful guide “The truth about trans” on its website, which explores some common myths and misconceptions and aims to encourage discussions about trans equality.

Crucial reading for the sector, Stonewall recently surveyed over 1400 trans and non-binary people at university and found that 60 per cent of trans students surveyed have experienced negative comments from other students based on their identity and 41 per cent have experienced a hate crime in the last year. 39 per cent of those surveyed would feel uncomfortable reporting transphobic bullying to university staff. Others reported being physically attacked or encouraged to hide their identity by university staff.

CHANGE THE CONVERSATION

In a higher education landscape where trans students are encouraged to hide their identities, we can’t underestimate the impact of news stories. Over the last few years, most coverage of trans students has rehearsed the same few tropes, including pitching trans students against academic freedom.

The media is not unbiased: missing from accounts of trans students clashing with academic freedom is information about how trans people experience university, or an acknowledgment of the power imbalance between students and academics.

When the rights and experiences of trans people are represented as an issue of academic freedom, those rights and experiences are minimised and equality work is mischaracterised. Although higher education equality policies call for respect, they don’t restrict academic freedom; essentially, theorising is welcome, but bad-faith research which debates the validity of trans people’s identities is not.

Rather than dividing and conquering over academic freedom issues, universities could get on with the business of supporting their trans students and staff.

TAKE THE LEAD FROM STUDENTS

Trans inclusion involves new policies, practical work and cultural change. Open-source project Gender Construction Kit includes a list of trans-inclusive policies in UK universities, which are, on the whole, rigorous and progressive assessments of topics affecting trans people such as data management and time off from work. They also make clear the need to respect non-binary identities and provide gender-neutral facilities, and emphasise the seriousness of transphobic and transmisogynistic behaviour and the need to investigate it.

But the list is noticeably short. Only 50 per cent of the students in Stonewall’s 2018 study said that their universities had equalities policies protecting trans students. Moreover, pushing for the goals outlined in the policies has mostly been achieved through bottom-up campaigning efforts by student groups. At Birkbeck, Oxford, Warwick, Cambridge and Newcastle universities, among others, students have researched the trans student experience, provided resources for trans students and run awareness campaigns. The University of Strathclyde, awarded for its TransEDU project, is a welcome exception.

BEYOND BATHROOMS

Aside from policies, universities can get involved in direct and practical work to support trans students. De-gendering bathrooms and other spaces has attracted a lot of attention, but while important, administrative changes can be just as impactful as changes to physical spaces.

For example, getting information about name, gender and preferred pronouns changed is often surprisingly difficult. Universities could make sure they have simple and clearly signposted procedures for their students and staff to change personal information in their systems. Trans people could also be taken into account when universities design or update their systems by recording information about gender as infrequently as possible and always offering a gender-neutral option.

Staff training, noted in many of the trans policies linked in the Gender Construction Kit list, is also crucial. Any training must be continually reviewed and updated, and should always be led and informed by trans organisations and by trans students and staff.

CULTURE CHANGE

Ultimately, a great deal of the work of supporting trans students and staff is about fostering an inclusive environment and building positive community relations.

There are lots of ways of doing this. Supporting LGBTQ+ groups (staff networks, students’ union groups, and others) with funding and publicity can go a long way, but attention should be paid to whether these groups themselves are trans-inclusive or really just represent LGB people. Convening trans-themed events such as panel discussions, talks and seminar series on relevant topics can work both to signal that the institution values its trans and non-binary members, and help to create a community among them.

Very small steps, such as ensuring that the university uses up-to-date language to talk about trans issues, or having instructors introduce themselves with their pronouns at the beginning of the year, can cue that these are issues that the university is paying attention to.

Universities could take a leaf from student unions and LGBTQ+ societies and display trans-inclusive posters, or other trans-awareness materials to help foster an environment where trans students and staff feel confident and welcomed. City, University of London appoints “named contacts” to trans and non-binary students and staff, who can act as advocates or provide information. These sorts of policies and practical steps help to build trust between the trans community and universities.

Trans students and staff rarely have a voice in the media and they often experience discrimination and violence because they’re trans. It’s time for more universities to develop trans-inclusive policies, make practical moves to support trans staff and students and culturally signal that they’re inclusive of trans people. And, most importantly, universities need to develop this work in partnership with trans people.

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What's wrong with public engagement?



Our lived experiences prior to working in the university sector could not have been more different. One of us was a successful dancer and executive at the Royal Opera House, the other a policy wonk. We both joined King's College London to set up functions that were focused on external sectors – culture and policy – and aimed to increase the porosity of the institution.

Despite our diverse backgrounds, in developing these agendas we have relied on a similar set of tools that are rooted in the ideas of co-production, community organising and coalition building. At the time, we did not use that language, but unwittingly borrowed from and drew on their intellectual underpinnings.

We were also united in our dislike for the term “public engagement” as it disregards, at least semantically, what we were trying to achieve. We have observed in our present and previous roles that, in its form as a noun, it too easily becomes a responsibility that can be passed to others and something that can be considered, at some point, concluded or “done”. We see engaging with the world beyond the university as a holistic, active and ongoing process – a cycle of iteration and reiteration improved and enhanced by interaction with broader and diverse communities.

A further dislike is the understanding of public engagement as an activity that largely relates to research and does not include other core elements of university business, from education and procurement to student and staff wellbeing. Perhaps our overarching concern is that the terminology currently serves as a portmanteau for both transactional approaches (which are the focus of our concern) and more sophisticated practice (which is our aspiration).

THE ETYMOLOGY OF “PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT”

The word “engagement” comes from the French “engager”, meaning “to pledge”. In everyday usage this implies a transaction between two people, leading to some form of outcome. And this is our key concern – that at its heart, the phrase “public engagement” is transactional. We believe we need to move towards an approach that is rooted in the language of communities, with social interactions within and between those communities at its heart.

The second concern is with the word “public”. Although widely used, it again implies an “us and them” relationship, that there is an “other” and an “outsider” It also presumes an homogeneous identity, ignoring the inevitable diversity of people associated with, connected to, living alongside or aware of our universities. These relationships in themselves are fluid, meaning that individuals move between different “publics” in different circumstances and at different times of their lives.

An alternative framing may be through the lens of social capital, which captures these fluid networks of relationships between people residing – physically and virtually – in communities. The social capital imbued in these networks varies, as does their interactions and influences with universities. In our ideal world, universities are equal and active members of such networks, contributing to – and enhanced by – the overall social capital of communities of which they are a part. Where that parity does not happen, the networks will have different degrees of influence, meaning that universities will have asymmetric relationships (often unconsciously biased towards or against certain communities).

IF WE DON'T LIKE PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT, WHAT ARE THE ALTERNATIVES?

At King's, "Service" is the term we adopted in our Strategic Vision 2029 to describe our commitment to society beyond the traditional roles of education and research. We spent a considerable amount of time reflecting on what our vision should be to take us to our two hundredth anniversary in 2029.

Through a consultative process, we consistently heard from our students, staff and alumni their belief that our informal motto "in the service of society" reflected our longstanding ethos as a university. Service is in our DNA, but in 2017 we took the bold step to position it alongside education and research as a third pillar of our core academic mission, playing out in the context of London and internationally.

Internationally, it is probably the US universities that have led on this agenda, with the University of Pennsylvania providing a classic case study. As President Amy Gutman notes in the Penn Compact: "A university is, first and foremost, a social undertaking to create a social good." The Penn Compact – developed as part of Gutman's inaugural address in 2004 – identifies inclusion, innovation and impact as the key mission of the university, supported, as its website illustrates, with an impressive range of impact activities that clearly stretch beyond the narrow confines of traditional public engagement.

FROM CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY TO CREATING SHARED VALUE

This shift from public engagement to service is mirrored in the corporate sector by the evolution of corporate social responsibility (CSR) to creating shared value (CSV). Michael Porter and Mark Kramer wrote a seminal essay on the topic in 2011 in the Harvard Business Review: "Creating shared value, how to reinvent capitalism and unleash a wave of innovation and growth."

Core to their argument was the proposition that businesses were in danger of losing their licence to operate (their "social contract" in the language of universities) and that the purpose of corporations had to include social as well as economic good. As they note, this is different from CSR which, they suggest, is "a reaction to external pressure [which] have largely emerged to improve firms' reputations and are treated as a necessary expense."

Shared value, as they define it, is a set of "policies and operating practices that enhance the competitiveness of a company while simultaneously advancing the economic and social conditions in the communities in which it operates."

An alternative framing for the idea of shared value is to think of universities as social enterprises, where that shared value is delivering a social good – through education, through research but also through the way the university operates and behaves via, for example, its procurement policies and supply lines.

In our view, the shift from CSR to shared value or social enterprise is analogous to that between public engagement and service. Once we accept that we are not acting solely in self-interest but are looking for mutually beneficial outcomes, we liberate the mission of universities to be over and above traditional public engagement activities. In this world view, mutual benefit occurs through a multitude of activities, from galleries, museum and public spaces, through to socially responsible procurement, sustainability, research impact and service-led learning.

A NEW POWER PARADIGM FOR UNIVERSITIES

This changing mission has consequential implications for how we run universities. It relies on a new set of approaches that are nicely captured in a Wonkhe article by vice chancellor of the University of Lincoln, Mary Stuart. Stuart notes:

Increasingly we see movements emerging which are not overseen by elites but work through what is being called new power drawing on widely disseminated information through social media. We cannot ignore, or worse, dismiss these changes. If we, in universities, do not address these developments we will lose our significance and value to society. This is not just an issue for senior people in universities, but it points to a need to engage the whole community of scholars in deep thinking about our futures.

New Power by Henry Timms and Jeremy Heimans examines how power and influence is changing with the emergence of movements such as #MeToo, Parent Power and Extinction Rebellion. They neatly summarise:

Old power works like a currency. It is held by few. Once gained, it is jealously guarded, and the powerful have a substantial store of it to spend. It is closed, inaccessible, and leader-driven. It downloads, and it captures... New power operates differently, like a current. It is made by many. It is open, participatory, and peer-driven. It uploads, and it distributes. Like water or electricity, it's most forceful when it surges. The goal with new power is not to hoard it but to channel it.

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A university that is committed to a service agenda, where it is working for mutual benefit with its communities – within and external to the university – will have to shift its management and governance from one that values currency, to one that channels the current. For example, this could include accreditation to pay the Living Wage or insourcing cleaning and security contracts.

This is not an easy ask for institutions as traditional and rule-based as universities have often been but, in our opinion, it's an inevitable consequence of adopting a service agenda as part of the core academic mission we are arguing for. How this actually plays out inside universities will be different in different institutions, with no cookie-cutter answer. In practice a new power university will be one that is authentic to its core values (whether written or unwritten), is respectful of its old power history but interprets that for today's context.

We see an alternative language – that of service, public service, social responsibility, impact – developing to avoid use of the clunky term, public engagement. In a search for a common nomenclature, we resort to the lowest common denominator of public engagement. But that is precisely what we should rally against as it does a disservice to the holistic, embedded and mutually beneficial approach that we are advocating.

At our university, we will use the language of service to describe this important third element of a university's academic mission, acknowledging that other institutions will use different language that better reflects their context, their communities and their individual histories.

DEBORAH BULL | KING'S COLLEGE LONDON
JONATHAN GRANT | KING'S COLLEGE LONDON

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