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Foundation

# Laying the Foundations: Examining the relationship between universities, students and society

Advisory Board Essay Collection





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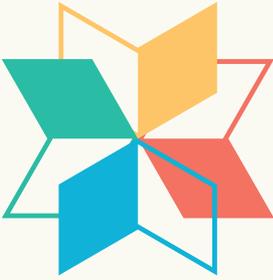
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# UPP Foundation – Helping enrich communities and transform lives within higher education

## About us

In recent years, as higher education has expanded, the burden of paying for a degree has shifted towards the individual. This naturally presents difficulties of maintaining the ‘university for the public good’, as well as ensuring there is greater equity in terms of going to, succeeding at and benefiting from the university experience.

The UPP Foundation has been established to make a positive contribution in helping universities and the wider higher education sector overcome these challenges. It was set up by the University Partnerships Programme (UPP), the leading provider of on-campus student accommodation infrastructure and support services in the UK. UPP is the sole funder of the UPP Foundation.

## What we do

The UPP Foundation offers support to the UK higher education sector through two key areas: grants and a public policy platform.

We provide grants to universities, charities and the wider higher education sector, in order to support the sector in tackling issues within our four strategic themes:

- Increase access and retention
- Improve student employability
- Enhance civic universities
- Develop global citizens

We also provide a public policy platform enabling sector leaders, experts and the wider public the opportunity to debate the future of higher education. Our platform will allow the sector to share best practice and discuss new research, ideas and policy with the aim of advancing the understanding and knowledge of the key issues within each of our themes.

# Foreword

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*Jo Johnson, MP,  
Minister for Universities and Science*



Our universities rank among our most valuable national assets, underpinning both a strong economy and a flourishing society. Powerhouses of intellectual and social capital, they create the knowledge, capability and expertise that drive competitiveness and nurture the values that sustain our open democracy. But for this to remain the case, we must be ready to face the challenges of the future, including ever-increasing international competition. We need a globally competitive market that supports diversity, where anyone who demonstrates they have the potential to offer excellent teaching and clears our high quality bar can compete on a level playing field.

Our previous reforms, such as the removal of student number controls, means that everyone with the potential now has the chance to secure a university place. But despite this, access remains uneven, with young people from the most disadvantaged backgrounds 2.4 times less likely to go into higher education than the most advantaged. Furthermore, as this collection of essays says clearly, better access is not enough. There remain pronounced differences in retention, degree attainment and progression to employment and further study, that cannot be explained by prior attainment. That is why the government has announced that the new Office for Students will have a statutory duty to cover equality of opportunity across the whole lifecycle for disadvantaged students, not just access, alongside its duty to promote choice – and the sector will need to respond to this, through new Access and Participation Agreements.

Furthermore, whilst in many areas our sector is outstanding, there is too much variability in teaching quality, which has been tolerated for too long. Courses are inflexible, many students are dissatisfied with the provision they receive and feel it is poor value for money, whilst employers are suffering skills shortages, especially in high skilled STEM areas; at the same time around 20% of employed graduates are in non-professional roles three and a half years after graduating. The fact that some providers from across the sector have drop-out rates substantially higher than their comparators should not be merely a dry statistic, nor even simply a squandering of taxpayers' money. It is worse: it represents thousands of life opportunities wasted, of young dreams unfulfilled, all because of teaching that was not as good as it should have been, or because students were recruited who were not capable of benefiting from higher education.

This is why, last month, I announced a wide ranging package of reforms that will place competition and choice at the heart of higher education, driving up standards for all who have the ability to benefit. We will make it quicker and easier for new high quality challenger institutions to enter the market and award their own degrees, a new Office for Students will put competition and choice at the heart of sector regulation, whilst the Teaching Excellence Framework will drive up the standard of teaching and provide clear information to students as to where the best provision can be found.

In order for these reforms to have the greatest impact, it is critical that the sector engages actively with the challenges ahead. We are championing competition; we believe the diversity of the sector is one of its greatest strengths. A flourishing of bold ideas is what will allow higher education to not just address, but to thrive on the great challenges of the twenty first century. This is why it is fantastic that University Partnerships Programme are setting up the UPP Foundation. By focusing on matters such as participation, employability and global citizenship it will provide a platform for the sector and policy makers to discuss the critical issues facing universities.

I welcome this debate and look forward to seeing how the UPP Foundation establishes itself in the coming years.

# Introduction

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*Rt Hon. David Laws,  
Chair of the UPP Foundation Advisory Board*



We are fortunate in the UK to have some of the very best universities in the world, shaping generations of talented graduates to achieve their full potential. In order to protect this incredible legacy and to preserve our position as leaders in the higher education sector, it is necessary for our institutions and the wider sector to collaborate, share best practice and work together to ensure that all of our students receive the best possible education.

**“Improving education is the most important investment our nation can make, but good education is not just an investment. It is also a key ingredient of a liberal society in which every citizen is empowered and can realise their full potential.”**

Whilst serving as Minister for Schools in the Coalition Government I saw first hand the importance and necessity of providing a high standard of education for all. We must enable our institutions and students to achieve their goals and ambitions, and safeguard each generation’s transition from school, through further and higher education, and into the globalised economy.

Improving education is the most important investment our nation can make, but good education is not just an investment, it is also a key ingredient of a liberal society in which every citizen is empowered and can realise their full potential.

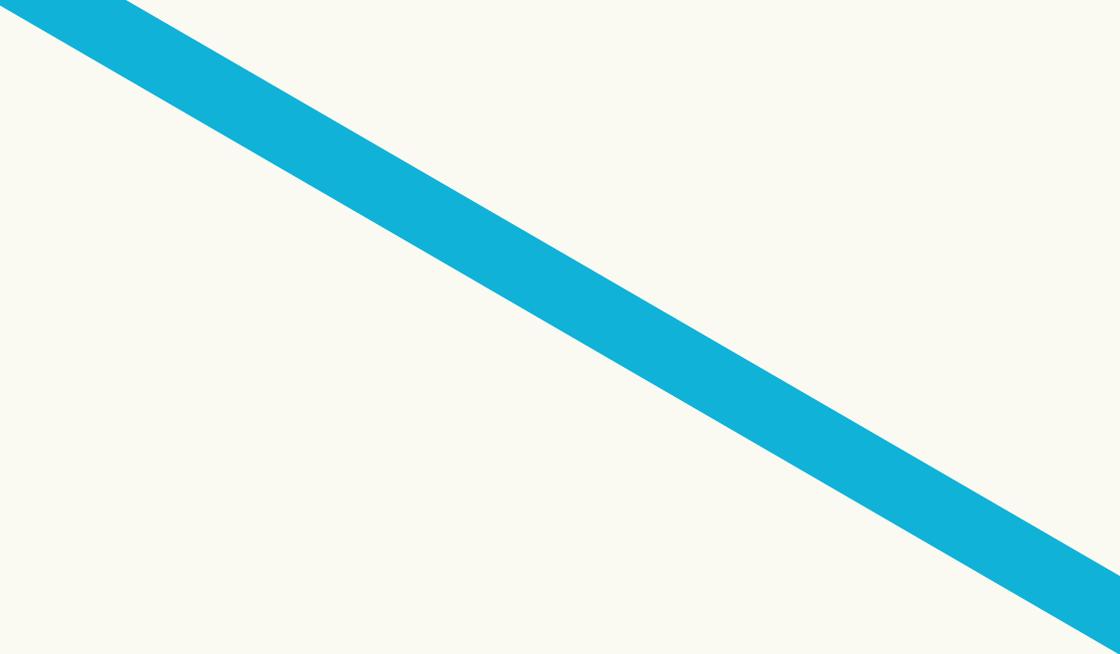
The UPP Foundation has set out a bold agenda to tackle the big issues facing the higher education sector, all falling within the following key themes: increasing access and retention, enhancing civic universities, improving student employability, and developing global citizens. The UPP Foundation seeks both to fund the innovative and inspired work of organisations and institutions confronting these issues, and to provide a platform for higher education sector leaders and the policy community to collaborate, debate new ideas and share best practice.

This collection of essays brings together the voices of the UPP Foundation Advisory Board to discuss the main issues facing UK higher education. The Board comprises highly regarded sector specialists from leading UK universities, think tanks and industry bodies, including university vice-chancellors, members of parliament and sector experts.

**“The UPP Foundation has set out a bold agenda to tackle the big issues facing the higher education sector, all falling within the following key themes: increasing access and retention, enhancing civic universities, ensuring student employability, and developing global citizens.”**

The essays examine the role of universities within both a national and international context, and through the lens of the individual students they teach. Using the framework of the UPP Foundation’s key themes, the essays explore the role institutions can play in preparing students for successful employment, the need to internationalise the student experience, and the contribution universities can make to our economy and society. The essay topics range from how to ensure students from all socio-economic backgrounds have access to the best education, to how to create systems to safeguard those same students, enabling them to remain in higher education.

Through working with the UPP Foundation as Chair of the Advisory Board, I hope to encourage further debate and discussion around the future of higher education, expanding on the topics raised in these essays. By bringing together sector leaders and openly debating ideas we can help to ensure a bright future for UK higher education and enable exciting new innovations to take place.



## Access & Retention

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The UPP Foundation believes that everyone with the potential and ambition to go to, and succeed at, university should have the ability to do so, regardless of background, family income or disability. Yet there are still too many barriers to access for under-represented groups and too many challenges to overcome once there for students who face certain problems, such as health issues or financial difficulties.

Three members of the UPP Foundation's Advisory Board have contributed essays on access and retention. Nick Hillman, Director of the Higher Education Policy Institute, has written an essay on widening participation: 'The ABC of Widening Participation: Access, bursaries and contextualisation'. He says that the focus of financial support in the wake of £9,000 fees, such as bursaries, was a costly mistake. He calls on universities to focus on better evidenced and less inefficient initiatives to support widening participation.



In 'Access and Retention: The story so far and challenges ahead' Professor Mary Stuart, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Lincoln, argues that students need to feel part of the institution that they attend, and that their social needs are addressed, in order to create an open and successful higher education system.

The third essay in this chapter is by Professor Simon Gaskell, President and Principal of Queen Mary University of London. In 'Widening Participation is Not Enough' Professor Gaskell contends that success in widening participation is a job half-done. He says:

*It will be possible to claim genuine equality of opportunity only when the contributions our graduates make to society, and the benefits that they derive from it, are determined solely by their talents and educational achievements.*

# The ABC of Widening Participation: Access, bursaries and contextualisation

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*Nick Hillman, Director of the Higher Education Policy Institute*



Two-and-a-half decades ago, I left the confines of my rural independent boarding school for an interview at a research-intensive university. When I got there, it consisted almost wholly of a discussion on the merits of my school's previous headmaster, whom the interviewer had known personally. At the end, the interviewer asked me just one set question: 'What book would you like to have with you on a desert island?' I mentioned an obscure out-of-print school story by Evelyn Waugh's older brother.<sup>1</sup> My interviewer had not heard of it but he jotted the title down and, a few weeks later, an offer arrived in the post.

It is to be hoped that such an unstretching interview – based on who I knew rather than future potential – would not happen today. I studied elsewhere, at the University of Manchester, which had a different approach, and gave me a tougher offer than people from less well-resourced schools. That seemed fair in principle to me even at the time, but it also seemed pretty unsophisticated in practice. It was a process of contextualised admissions, but not as we know them today. Decisions were based on hunches rather than hard data.

I worked on the 2011 higher education white paper *Students at the heart of the system* as the special adviser to the Universities and Science Minister, David Willetts.<sup>2</sup> This pressed for a more professional approach. We endorsed universities' use of contextualised admissions, as many vice chancellors had requested, but our backing was conditional. It must, we said, always be 'fair, transparent and evidence-based'.

That attempt to make the admissions system fairer and less opaque was remarkably controversial at the time – just five years ago. But much has changed since. Most notably, Conservatives, who until recently loudly condemned higher education targets, have adopted a bunch of their own targets. They have one on the proportion of people from poorer backgrounds in higher education<sup>3</sup> and another for students with black and minority ethnic backgrounds.<sup>4</sup> Their 2015 higher education green paper even suggested the proposed new Office for Students could 'have the power to set targets for providers that are failing to make progress on agreed widening participation goals'.<sup>5</sup>

This is a volte face of totemic proportions. Just a few years ago, a high proportion of Conservative parliamentarians regarded contextualised admissions as dumbing down and giving schools an excuse to fail. Now, they are demanding that universities recruit more people from under-represented groups. There is a consensus that waiting until all our schools are equally excellent and all children have the same chances takes too long. We must aid people who are already close to the threshold of higher education.

Discussions on widening participation rarely begin with the removal of student number controls. But they should. It is the policy that I am proudest to have worked on in government because it is the one that will make the most difference.<sup>6</sup> If the size of individual institutions and the whole higher education sector are held down, as in the past, university entrance is a zero-sum game. First-in-family students can only get in by displacing applicants from middle-class households, who unsurprisingly are reluctant to give up their places.

The removal of student number controls is that rare thing, a win-win-win policy: good for students who can find it easier to get on to the course they most want; good for universities, which are free to grow; and good for government, which will benefit from higher skills and more productivity in due course. It has become an established part of the system quicker than many people expected and the more embedded it becomes, the harder it will be to reverse.

## “The removal of student number controls is that rare thing, a win-win-win policy.”

However, the removal of student number controls is a necessary but not sufficient prerequisite for opening the doors to university more widely. Since £9,000 fees were introduced, providers have spent considerable sums on widening participation activities, but far too much of the cash has been spent ineffectively, particularly on financial support for students. According to the Office for Fair Access, in 2013/14 higher education institutions spent almost five times more on financial support (£436 million) than on outreach (£93 million).<sup>7</sup>

Admittedly, this balance of spending was officially encouraged through initiatives like the National Scholarship Programme. But it has been a costly mistake for three reasons:

- We know from the response to the imposition of £9,000 tuition fees that choosing a university is not a price-sensitive business, at least for young people wishing to study full time.
- Each university has its own different package of financial help; applicants cannot hope to understand the range of support on offer.<sup>8</sup>
- Other interventions offer more bang for buck, so there is an opportunity cost.

The raw material of academia is evidence and data, so it is inexcusable when higher education policymaking is not rooted in such information. Moreover, data has improved so we now know far more about where to target our efforts than we did in the past. Measures looking at how many people from a local area make it to higher education are being supplemented by a multi-dimensional approach. For example, Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) data shows that less than 10% of white males entitled to free school meals (from POLAR3 quintile 3) enter higher education, but 43.8% of Asian women entitled to free school meals enter higher education. This shows clearly where more effort should be made.<sup>9</sup>

**“According to the Office for Fair Access, in 2013/14 higher education institutions spent almost five times more on financial support (£436 million) than on outreach (£93 million).”**

Let me end where I started, at an independent boarding school. That is an odd place to dwell in a piece on widening participation in higher education. But there are huge similarities between our most famous universities, which face the biggest access challenges of all, and our most famous schools: both are educational, autonomous, private, selective, residential and costly. Comparative research by Boston Consulting Group for the Sutton Trust showed in 2007 that school bursaries were the single least cost-effective common social mobility intervention.<sup>10</sup> The Charity Commission still continued to insist that private schools put more emphasis on bursaries but, quite rightly, lost the argument in court.<sup>11</sup>

Universities, which are not as closely regulated by the Charity Commission as schools, should now belatedly learn the same lesson. In other words, those institutions still spending lots of their widening participation budget on financial support should start directing the bulk of their access agreement spend to more targeted, better evidenced and less inefficient initiatives.

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<sup>1</sup> Alec Waugh, *The Loom of Youth*, 1917.

<sup>2</sup> BIS, *Students at the heart of the system*, Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, 2011, p.58, [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/31384/11-944-higher-education-students-at-heart-of-system.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/31384/11-944-higher-education-students-at-heart-of-system.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Conservative Party, 'David Cameron: half a million young people out of tax under a Conservative government', press release, 30 April 2015, <http://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Press-release-30-April-2015.docx>.

<sup>4</sup> Nick Hitchens, 'Election 2015: David Cameron says fate of country rests on voting for Gavin Barwell', *Croydon Guardian*, 25 April 2015, [http://www.yourlocalguardian.co.uk/news/12913760.David\\_Cameron\\_says\\_fate\\_of\\_country\\_rests\\_on\\_voting\\_for\\_Gavin\\_Barwell/](http://www.yourlocalguardian.co.uk/news/12913760.David_Cameron_says_fate_of_country_rests_on_voting_for_Gavin_Barwell/).

<sup>5</sup> BIS, *Teaching excellence, social mobility and student choice*, Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, 2015, p.38, [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/474227/BIS-15-623-fulfilling-our-potential-teaching-excellence-social-mobility-and-student-choice.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/474227/BIS-15-623-fulfilling-our-potential-teaching-excellence-social-mobility-and-student-choice.pdf).

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- <sup>11</sup> Angela Harrison, 'Independent schools win Charity Commission fight', BBC News online, 14 October 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-15305699>.



# Access and Retention: The story so far and challenges ahead

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*Professor Mary Stuart,  
Vice-Chancellor, University of Lincoln*



## Growth and diversity in higher education

The history of higher education since the 1950s has been one of growth in the sector, a massification.<sup>1</sup> Since the Robbins Review of Higher Education in the 1960s, which recommended that 'all applicants with appropriate qualifications should have places',<sup>2</sup> the proportion of 18 year olds going into higher education has risen from about 8% to 45%. Robbins never imagined the extent of growth in higher education that has occurred, but he believed in the importance of access to higher education for a wider range of groups than had previously been able to go to university. Widening participation lay at the heart of the growth agenda and was part of a wider education policy environment in which the school age was lifted first to 15, then 16 and now 18.

**“Concern about access is only part of the story in creating equality of opportunity – how successful students are in higher education is also important.”**

However, growth in the number of students going to university did not mean there was equality of opportunity for all groups in society. Since the 1960s, policymakers have focused on different groups and the composition of the student body has changed significantly. During the 1980s and 1990s the focus was on women, who were under-represented in higher education at the time. During the 1990s, as equality between men and women in universities became a reality, a new concern grew: how to encourage working class students to go to university.

## Higher education challenges in the 21st century

From 2006 to 2015 the proportion of 18 year olds living in England who had received free school meals entering higher education increased by 80% from 9.1% to 16.4%.<sup>3</sup> Other groups have also increased their access to higher education over this period. The number of full- and part-time undergraduates receiving the Disabled Students' Allowance rose by 81% and 130% respectively.<sup>4</sup> The number of full-time UK undergraduate students from black and minority ethnic groups has also increased, rising by 30% between 2006/07 and 2013/14. Women are now more prevalent and successful in higher education than men.

However, higher education institutions still need to address some areas relating to access. The entry rate for those in the most disadvantaged group in society (quintile 1) varies considerably between the sexes, with 22.4% of 18-year-old women in quintile 1 accepting a higher education place via the Universities and Colleges Admission Services in 2015, compared with only 14.7% of equivalent men.<sup>5</sup> The Higher Education Statistics Agency student record found that the number of full and part-time undergraduates aged over 25 fell by 37% between 2009/10 and 2014/15, and while the numbers of minority ethnic students in higher education are well represented, these groups are under-represented in the most selective institutions.<sup>6</sup> Participation in higher education varies considerably by region and area and there are some parts of the country where participation for the most disadvantaged groups remains stubbornly low. Similarly, attainment of school pupils differs considerably across the country and recent research suggests that these differences are getting worse.<sup>7</sup>

These differentials have led UK governments to continue to push higher education to do more; most recently Scotland has set out targets for widening access to higher education for the most disadvantaged groups by 2030.<sup>8</sup> Wales has also set targets for participation in higher education. In England, the Government has set out its goal to double the participation in higher education of students from disadvantaged backgrounds and increase by 20% the number of students from ethnic minority groups by 2020.

### From access to success – what happens when you get into higher education?

Concern about access is only part of the story in creating equality of opportunity – how successful students are in higher education is also important. Many higher education systems that have high participation also have high failure rates, but the UK has always had good retention rates, even as the system has expanded. However, like the access question, patterns of retention and success are not evenly distributed across all groups of students.

The Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission identified in 2015 that many of the institutions with the biggest gaps in their non-continuation rates between the most and least advantaged students were also the most selective institutions.<sup>9</sup> Research by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) suggests that male entrants to higher education are less likely and female entrants more likely than would otherwise be expected to complete their degree, so male entrants are less likely to obtain a degree, regardless of their background.<sup>10</sup>

Other research by HEFCE found that among UK-domiciled entrants, white entrants and those of Indian and Chinese heritage were the most likely groups to complete their studies, with entrants with black Caribbean, black other and black African heritage having the highest rates of non-completion. White entrants on the other hand had non-continuation rates in line with what would be expected given their entry profiles.<sup>11</sup>

Mature full-time first-degree student non-completion is considerably higher than that for young full-time first-degree students (12.7% versus 5.7% in 2012/13). However, part-time students have the highest non-continuation rate of any group (34% versus 7% in 2012/13).<sup>12</sup>

HEFCE also identifies a significant growth in the number of students in higher education with mental health difficulties. These students have complex needs and it is expected that challenges to their retention and success will grow as the population grows.<sup>13</sup>

HEFCE research has also shown differences between the proportion of entrants from each ethnic group going on to obtain a degree qualification, with the highest proportions coming from white entrants and those with Chinese and Indian heritage, and the lowest proportion coming from entrants with black and other Asian heritage.

### The new policy environment

Government policy on access and retention is framed in the context of social mobility between different groups. While higher education has historically been a precondition for upward social mobility, it does not follow that it will deliver upward mobility. Recently social mobility has slowed but clearly policymakers remain convinced that a more focused and targeted approach to access and retention in higher education will go some way to delivering the progress they hope to see.

There have been considerable shifts in approaches to higher education in England in the last year, including a strong desire to free up the system and bring in new entrants, with policymakers in many countries interested in the English experiment. Recent announcements of an assessment of teaching excellence and the review of quality assessment in institutions suggest that the Government is keen to try to examine inequalities in the system. For the first time institutions will be required to examine their student body and look carefully at how each group of students is doing compared with national statistics and other students at their own institution. The introduction of technology in the form of learning analytics could also provide some useful tools for institutions to understand how their students are progressing and develop interventions to support their success.

## “Women are now more prevalent and successful in higher education than men.”

Research by the Higher Education Academy indicates that over a third of higher education students think about dropping out during their course but what makes the majority of these students persist is their social environment, not necessarily academic issues.<sup>14</sup> Given the environment in which institutions will be operating in the future, a greater focus and understanding of the issues in each institution and

systematic approaches to support students may well address some of the disparities discussed above. It is more complex to address the social needs of students so they feel part of the institution that they attend. This needs to be done in order to create a truly open and successful higher education system.

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- <sup>7</sup> TSocial Market Foundation, 'Educational inequalities in England and Wales', 2016, <http://www.smf.co.uk/publications/educational-inequalities-in-england-and-wales/>.
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# Widening Participation is Not Enough

*Professor Simon Gaskell, President and Principal,  
Queen Mary University of London*



For several decades, widening participation in higher education has been – and continues to be – a priority across the nations of the UK, and rightly so. Significant progress has been made, even in the face (in England) of funding changes that have resulted in an escalation of student debt.

It is widely understood, though articulated too infrequently, that the benefits of a university education are both personal and societal, and both material and intangible. So widening participation makes sense on the grounds of equalisation of opportunity and from the perspective of the society that supports it.

Perhaps understandably, however, the encouragement of young people (in particular) to consider applying for university has tended to focus on the perceived personal and material benefits of university education. Indeed, the consistent national narrative in the UK over the past decade and more has been that students should commit to a university education because of the anticipated outcomes of enhanced employability and increased earning power. Put another way, the more considered enumeration of the benefits of a university education – personal and societal, material and intangible – has been skewed in favour of the quadrant covering personal and material. Many universities appear comfortable with this characterisation; others, including my own (Queen Mary University of London, QMUL), are certainly not – even while we maintain a strong commitment (emphatic and long-standing in the case of QMUL) to improving opportunities for students from less privileged social and financial backgrounds.

**“The benefits of a university education are both personal and societal, and both material and intangible.”**

There is no contradiction here. If one accepts, as I would strongly argue, that the fundamental purpose of a university education is to enhance intellectual skills such as critical analysis of evidence, presentation of cogent arguments, and engagement across boundaries whether national or disciplinary, then the outcome should be an opportunity for the individual to derive greater personal satisfaction from their subsequent career and to make a greater contribution to the society and communities in which they are embedded. If the likely side-effect is greater ‘employability’ (and, yes, enhanced earning power) then we should not be surprised.

However, it follows from this that the notion of ‘employability’ risks being insultingly minimalist. If we are content as universities in simply achieving acceptance of our former students into ‘graduate-level’ jobs, then I suggest that we are abdicating our responsibility to ensure that the education we provide prepares them to make a maximum contribution to society, and to derive maximum personal benefit (material and otherwise) from that contribution. If we achieve that higher purpose, then the prospects of our graduates should be determined solely by their talents and educational successes. It is becoming increasingly apparent that we would be complacent in assuming this to be the case at present.

We might conclude, in short, that widening participation is not enough. The question to be addressed is whether making it possible to study at a leading university and providing education of the highest quality is sufficient for our graduates to realise their full potential in personal achievement and societal contribution. Too often, I suspect the answer may be ‘no’. Highly talented individuals who receive a top quality education – and who make the effort fully to benefit from it – may nevertheless not access the career positions that they deserve if deficits in social capital and ancillary skills with which they enter university are not corrected, or at least reduced, before graduation.

**“The fundamental purpose of a university education is to enhance intellectual skills such as critical analysis of evidence, presentation of cogent arguments, and engagement across boundaries whether national or disciplinary.”**

Is it the purpose of a university to correct such deficits? The answer might arguably be ‘no’ if their correction involved provisions which detracted from or diminished an academic programme. But this need not, and should not, be the case. Mitigation of social capital deficit may be achieved through enhanced networking ability, improved communication skills (written and oral), and greater ease in inter-personal interactions – all attributes that can enhance the effectiveness of an academic education. Furthermore, the encouragement of thinking across traditional disciplinary boundaries is likely both to enhance academic rigour and help students prepare for a world, post-graduation, where such boundaries have little relevance.

The challenge is to establish a multiplicity of complementary approaches to enhance the development of these attributes and to do so on a scale that provides benefit to a high proportion of the student body.

At QMUL we already offer a variety of programmes to students which are relevant to these wider objectives. The QConsult scheme, for example, which is supported by J.P. Morgan, places teams of high-calibre students from low-income families into East London businesses to conduct consultancy projects. Participants receive a range of support, including from a dedicated careers consultant who leads four

skills development workshops, offers on-demand one-to-one sessions, and conducts a post-project skills debrief. Teams meet a J.P. Morgan panel to receive constructive feedback to inform their final client presentations.

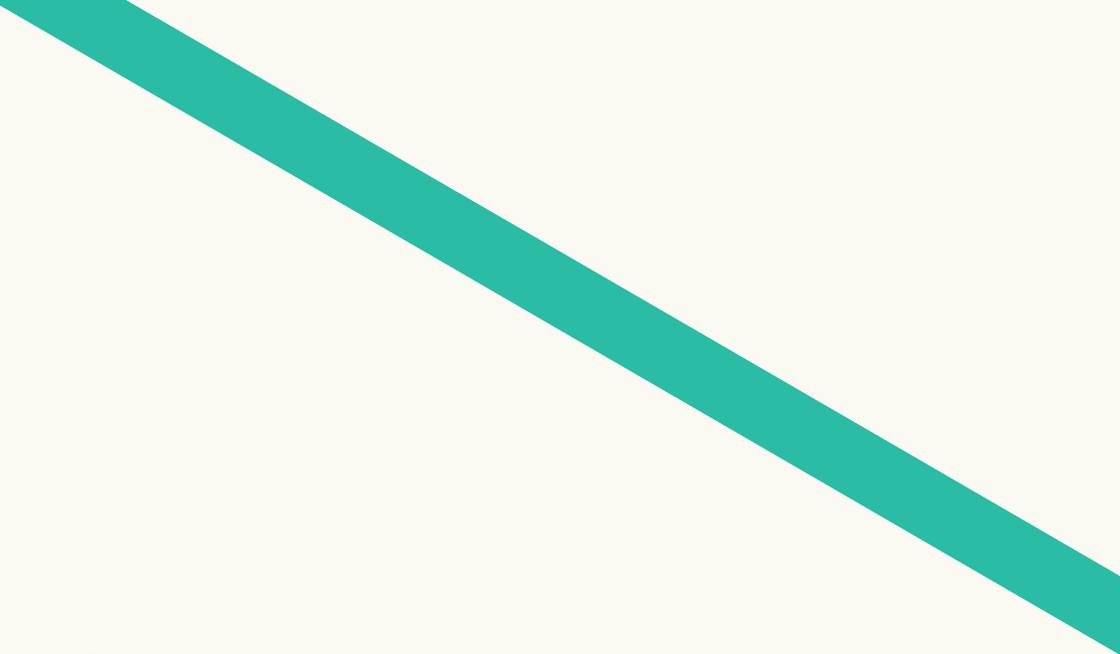
The academic-related attributes promoted by participation in QConsult include improved communication, networking skills, entrepreneurship and cross-disciplinary thinking. QConsult won the Employability Initiative category in the 2016 *Guardian* University Awards (no, the irony is not lost!). The challenge now is to expand the scale of this and multiple other initiatives to provide such opportunities to a high proportion of our students, and to do this in a coherent and considered fashion.

Accepting this challenge is tantamount to acknowledging that success in widening participation demonstrates a job half-done. It will be possible to claim genuine equality of opportunity only when the contributions our graduates make to society, and the benefits that they derive from it, are determined solely by their talents and educational achievements.

**“The encouragement of thinking across traditional disciplinary boundaries is likely both to enhance academic rigour and prepare for a world, post-graduation, where such boundaries have little relevance.”**



BLOCK G



## The Civic University

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The UPP Foundation believes that universities enrich our cities, towns and regions through providing community access to lifelong education programmes; music, culture and the arts; sporting facilities; and public engagement events. This strengthens the place they are part of and helps universities become the civic anchor of their communities.

In this chapter we have three essays from members of the UPP Foundation's Advisory Board. Professor Sir David Greenaway and Alex Miles from the University of Nottingham discuss their university in 'The University of Nottingham: Building the global civic university'. Using Nottingham as an example, they contend that institutions which are comfortable and adept at forming bridges between the local and the global amplify their economic and social contribution.

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In 'The Role of the Civic University in a Global Economy: The best of all worlds' Libby Hackett, Senior Partner, Perrett Laver, argues that despite successive governments' focus on universities' economic impact, the civic role of universities has increased in the past 15 years through their growing interconnectedness to the cities and economic regions they influence.

However, in 'Civic Universities in the 21st Century: A crisis of confidence', Emran Mian, Director of the Social Market Foundation, argues that there is actually a crisis of confidence in universities' civic role. He claims that it is riskier than ever before for university academics to be involved in public debate, and thinking about how this challenge is met is critical to restoring the role of the civic university.

# The University of Nottingham: Building the global civic university

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*Professor Sir David Greenaway, Vice-Chancellor, University of Nottingham, and Alex Miles, Deputy Director, External Relations (Public Affairs), University of Nottingham*

Communities and cities in which the UK's great civic universities are based are increasingly required to both interact and compete with global flows of culture, talent, business and risk. The responsibilities of 'civic universities' in the 21st century must therefore include supporting their host communities to navigate and leverage these global interactions.

With its unique global footprint, and deeply embedded collaborations with local government, business and communities, the University of Nottingham is reconceptualising what it means to be a 'civic university' in a highly interconnected 21st century.

## The genesis of the civic university

The University of Nottingham was formally constituted by Royal Charter in 1948 – with formal university status granted to an institution founded as a civic college in the city in 1881.

In 1928 its future was reimagined, following a gift of land on what is now University Park by local business leader, philanthropist and educational visionary, Sir Jesse Boot. Its chronology in the context of the development of the great UK civic universities therefore falls somewhere between the original set of 'redbrick universities' and the Robbins Report-era of 1960s 'plate glass' universities.

The founding principles of these universities incorporated a strong civic commitment to the betterment of the real-world skills and knowledge-base of the communities and cities in which they were embedded. In this, the origins of the UK civic university shares much with (and you could say, owes much to) European institutions such as the Humboldt universities and the US Morrill Land Grant universities. The universities mentioned above have a similar commitment to practical skills, and a mission to contribute to their local economies.<sup>1</sup> Like many of these great institutions, The University of Nottingham continues to act in accordance with the strong civic principles that shaped our creation, and continue to help shape our future.

However, at the same time, many of the UK's leading universities also have a deep heritage in thinking internationally. Our academic and student communities have for decades (and in some cases centuries) been at the forefront of building international relationships, global cosmopolitanism and cultural exchange – all framed within the breadth of experiences that universities offer. The free flow of ideas is untroubled by national borders; nations are not the natural unit of analysis when our institutions think about research collaboration, teaching and scholarship. Knowledge transfer or innovation. In short, we also behave like global institutions.

Higher education in the UK, as in many other places globally, experienced dramatic expansion over the past couple of decades, during a period of unprecedented technological change and globalisation. At the same time, because of their experience in cross-cultural navigation, collaborative instincts and drive to promote mutual understanding, universities have surfed the waves of globalisation more effectively than most others. We have even helped make some of them.

There has been an inevitable tension between these two core characteristics of leading UK universities. We attempt to attract talent from all over the world, conduct research aimed at solving global challenges, and devote significant resources and a strategic premium to internationalisation. This has sometimes led to a perception that there has been a drift in focus away from civic engagement, especially by some research-intensive universities over the past couple of decades. This space has sometimes been filled by the post-1992 institutions, whose focus on applied and contract research and more localised patterns of recruitment may be more obviously in alignment with the immediate priorities of local policymakers.

### Regional economic policy: renewing the UK civic university?

But this perception is not actually reality. Leading research-intensive civic universities, and in particular those in the great British industrial cities of the Midlands and the North, have been increasingly influential at local and regional level over recent years. In particular, this has come about via a realisation by policymakers in large metropolitan areas and universities themselves that their role as engines for economic growth, providers of stable employment magnets for inward-investment, and developers of skills is something of mutual benefit, and worth investing more time in and cooperation to pursue.

The City Growth Commission report *Univercities* observes:

*In all metros, continuing economic restructuring will mean growing demand for knowledge-intensive work, often requiring graduate-level skills. This holds for traditional economic sectors such as manufacturing and consumer services, as well as emerging sectors such as creative and digital.<sup>2</sup>*

Over the last few decades, sub-national economic development policy in England has changed its focus from city regions to regions, back to city regions again – and now to the super regions of the Northern Powerhouse, the Midlands Engine and Anywhere An

Hour's Drive Away From London. This is all in the never-ending (yet seemingly cyclical) search for the perfectly aligned functional economic area. It could be argued that this perpetual game of economic development Tetris – via the introduction of a multitude of funding schemes, legislative bodies and various agreements between different geographical administrations over the years – has in some places created a few areas of actual alignment. This has then inspired more habitual collaboration, a key example being the Northern Powerhouse, underpinned by the 2014 devolution of powers to the Greater Manchester Combined Authority. This in turn was formed of the 10 metropolitan boroughs of the Manchester City Region, which before that had been cooperating for well over a decade via various acts and area agreements. Both the University of Manchester and the N8 Group of leading research universities from across the North played an important role in the development of this particular 'devolution revolution'<sup>3</sup> – and continue to be highly active within the broad scope of Northern Powerhouse activity.

**“The free flow of ideas is untroubled by national borders; nations are not the natural unit of analysis when our institutions think about research collaboration, teaching and scholarship.”**

In 2010, the Coalition Government's 'bonfire of the quangos' abolished regional development agencies and replaced them with local enterprise partnerships (famously only mandated by a two-sides-of-A4 letter of guidance by then Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government Eric Pickles), which was accompanied by austerity measures that hit local authorities hard. Following this hollowing-out of resources and power structures at sub-national level universities were asked to play a greater role as thought-leaders and conveners, and in some cases to provide resources such as research, analysis and intelligence that helped fill the vacuum of these lost functions. Similarly, universities are true 'anchor institutions' (there's little danger of us outsourcing or relocating out of an urban area), and provide significant stabilising effects to local and regional economies. For example, over the years of the most recent UK recession, The University of Nottingham was able to sustain a 13% growth in our workforce, across different job families, compared with a 0% average growth in jobs for the East Midlands.<sup>4</sup>

Austerity also led to a growing realisation among the higher education sector that in a tough funding environment universities had to justify the contribution they made to the UK in a more effective, policymaker-friendly fashion. The flurry of university economic impact studies (to which our institution has recently contributed) published since 2010 is testament to the extent to which universities decided to focus their enunciation of this contribution on the role they play in local and regional economic growth.

## Rethinking the UK civic university: cities standing out in a spiky world

Researchers and commentators attempting to describe the shifting role played by UK universities within their civic contexts following the rapid growth in higher education over the past two decades have often tried to characterise and capture this enriched, complex ecosystem as a model of innovation, or 'smart specialisation'. Professor John Goddard of the University of Newcastle's Centre for Urban and Regional Development Studies recently described the interplay between universities, public authorities, firms and citizens as the 'quadruple helix model' of innovation – where universities provide a range of platforms, cultures and initiatives that inspire citizen-led social innovation.<sup>5</sup> The University of Nottingham's soon-to-open Technology and Entrepreneurship Centre is predicated on this co-location principle, aiming to generate an ecosystem of talent and entrepreneurs by ensuring and nurturing this mixed-economy approach.

## Global flows of talent – the heart of the 21st-century civic university

The economic theory and policy reality looming large behind all of the aforementioned innovation ecosystems is that 'human capital' is now pre-eminent as the driver of future growth and prosperity. Quite simply, nations, cities, businesses, universities and societies are all prioritising 'talent'.

**“Universities have always had great civic responsibilities to the communities in which they are embedded. They will have ever more in a world which is becoming more and more globalised and more and more urbanised.”**

Talent, resources and opportunities are increasingly clustered within urban areas – with these agglomeration effects creating what Richard Florida has termed 'spiky worlds',<sup>6</sup> where cities are superseding nations on many indicators, resulting in extreme concentrations (or 'spikes') of innovation resources within them.

Communities and cities are therefore having to think global. But they are not used to this, let alone used to acting globally. This is where leading universities with their global super connectivity are natural, but generally under-leveraged, leaders.

The introduction of regional competition for investment and business location to drive agglomeration is increasingly important. And as Sir Andrew Witty stressed in his review of universities and economic growth, universities are incredibly important to agglomeration.<sup>7</sup> They are key to talent development, research and innovation, and building social capital. In addition, they provide a magnet for global leverage.

Universities are also central to brain circulation:

*Migrants may initially take with them skills and capital; yet, ideas and capital may flow back (and in larger amounts) as long as migrants maintain diaspora-type social and*

*cultural ties to the home country. Remittances represent one of the most studied phenomena, allowing households in developing countries to invest in education as well as consumption.*<sup>8</sup>

This migration of ideas, exposure to a diversity of cultures, bringing the best and brightest to Nottingham and the UK – but also back again – is truly the definition of a global civic university:

*Cities and regions are becoming increasingly important players in the global talent scene – have to become more proficient at managing the emerging new dynamics of brain circulation. For example, attracting returnees back may not be useful unless these have in-depth experience and success, and this demands creativity in maintaining ties with diasporas.*<sup>9</sup>

That is, our alumni community.

## Conclusion

Universities have always had great civic responsibilities to the communities in which they are embedded. They will have ever more in a world which is becoming more and more globalised and more and more urbanised.

Having institutions that are comfortable as well as adept at forming bridges between the local and the global amplify the economic and social contributions that universities like Nottingham can and will make in our increasingly spiky world.

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<sup>1</sup> A. Torrens and A. Thompson, The social impact of research conducted in the Russell Group universities, Russell Pioneering Research Group, 2012, <https://www.russellgroup.ac.uk/media/5235/socialimpactofresearch.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> City Growth Commission, Univercities: the knowledge to power UK metros, Royal Society of Arts, 2014, p.7, file:///C:/Users/SusannahW/Downloads/UniverCities-City-Growth-Commission-RSA-October-2014.pdf.

<sup>3</sup> Simon Lee, "The "devolution revolution"", in Richard Hayton, Arianna Gionannini and Craig Berry (eds), The politics of the North: governance, territory and identity in Northern England, White Rose Consortium, January 2016, <http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Politics-of-the-North-Hayton-Giovannini-Berry.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> University of Nottingham, The economic impact of The University of Nottingham: on the city, the region and the UK, October 2015. <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/economic-impact/documents/economic-impact-study.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> John Goddard, The Civic University and the City: Building Quadruple Helix Partnerships, 2015. [http://www.auril.org.uk/Portals/26/AURIL2015/Plenary\\_slides/John%20Goddard%20AURIL%20talk%20Oct%202015.pdf](http://www.auril.org.uk/Portals/26/AURIL2015/Plenary_slides/John%20Goddard%20AURIL%20talk%20Oct%202015.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Richard Florida, The World is Spiky, The Atlantic Monthly, 2005. <http://www.theatlantic.com/past/docs/images/issues/200510/world-is-spiky.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Andrew Witty, Encouraging a British invention revolution: Sir Andrew Witty's review of universities and growth, Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, 2013, [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/249720/bis-13-1241-encouraging-a-british-invention-revolution-andrew-witty-review-R1.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/249720/bis-13-1241-encouraging-a-british-invention-revolution-andrew-witty-review-R1.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> Bruno Lanvin and Paul Evans, eds, The global talent competitiveness index: talent attraction and international mobility, 2015-16, [http://global-indices.insead.edu/gtci/documents/INSEAD\\_2015-16\\_Full\\_Book\\_Ebook.pdf](http://global-indices.insead.edu/gtci/documents/INSEAD_2015-16_Full_Book_Ebook.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.



# Civic Universities in the 21st Century: A crisis of confidence

*Emran Mian, Director, Social Market Foundation*



The culture of our universities should be among the best qualities of this country. But you would hardly know it.

Popular media are ambivalent about university culture, as likely to scorn as to admire the learning and research that goes on in universities. Universities do not need popular admiration but it helps. In some ways, though, the harder challenge may be an internal one: it is possible that universities are losing confidence in themselves as civic institutions.

I see three symptoms of this. The first is the tendency for university academics to approach any important issue about the kind of country we are by what that particular issue means for the higher education sector. When you look closely, are people from universities engaging in the debate about immigration or the future of the UK in the EU from the perspective of what it means for universities or what it means for the country? All too often it is the former. Perhaps that is the right choice for vice-chancellors. But, despite the near-consensus among academic researchers on for example the benefits of immigration, the best proponents of that evidence are not university academics but journalists or think tankers. I would love to see university academics become bolder about participating in public debate, not in order to hit metrics on impact for their research, but to regain the civic ideal of the university.

The second symptom of the loss of confidence among universities is the unwillingness for university academics to be at the leading edge of cultural change or to take risks in political, religious and economic debate. Here comparison with the US is instructive. For example, most experiments in creative writing in the US are either led by creative writing academics or produced by university publishing presses, and sometimes both. By contrast, in the UK, writers on the whole live in privately rented garrets, not university ones; and they typically rely on commercial presses or crowdfunding to distribute their work.

In other subject areas changes in the law and the spectre of extremism have certainly had a chilling effect within UK universities – still, the number of universities that are innovating is surprisingly small. Sometimes the presence of regulation feels like an excuse for taking a conservative approach to promoting open debate rather than the reason for it. For example, even risk-free changes, like teaching a much wider

economics curriculum following the financial crisis, have not been adopted quickly. Finally, many universities have treated the issue of widening participation as one of regulatory compliance rather than an opportunity for civic engagement. Many outreach schemes are limited in nature, and selective institutions in particular have widely observed that the real barrier to widening participation is prior attainment. Yes, it is. But framing the issue in this way seems to exclude the possibility that universities might get stuck into improving prior attainment. An alternative approach would be for universities to become major providers of top up tuition, summer programmes and even free schools. They already spend a large amount of money on widening participation activity; they could divert that to proper civic engagement in education.

Taken together, this is a tough set of criticisms. I am suggesting that our universities run the risk of becoming parochial, conservative and insular. But they need not be like this; in fact their future would be much brighter if they adopted a more civic approach. So what is holding them back?

One challenge, certainly apparent over the last few years and still present for some institutions, is financial instability. The funding for higher education teaching in particular has gone through a massive change. But now the outlook is clearer. Increases in tuition fees have not prevented a rise in participation. Student finance for part-time and postgraduate students is steadily improving.

**“I would love to see university academics become bolder about participating in public debate, not in order to hit metrics on impact for their research, but to regain the civic ideal of the university.”**

Nevertheless other policy changes continue to pose a challenge, and create competing demands on university managers as well as academics. The Teaching Excellence Framework is perhaps the most substantial change of the moment. Whatever its merits or those of any other policy change, the cumulative effect is both to increase compliance costs for universities and to reduce the bandwidth that managers, teachers and researchers have to pursue the more adventurous civic engagement that I am pressing on them.

But there is a much wider challenge, too: to confront the closing in of our culture and a wider loss of faith in an open, liberal view of the world. The way in which we talk about immigration, even refugees rather than economic migrants, manifests that change. In this context, it is less surprising that university researchers hesitate from taking part in the debate. Sadly, the role of the civic university is all the more important in this moment but it is also more contested, has to be carried out with much greater care, and carries more risk for those doing it. Thinking about how we meet this challenge is the most important part of restoring the role of the civic university.

# The Role of the Civic University in a Global Economy: The best of all worlds

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*Libby Hackett, Senior Partner, Perrett Laver*



At the heart of any discussion about the civic role of a university is a fundamental debate about whether universities are essentially public or private institutions. A civic university was always one that felt a strong connection with, and made significant contribution to, its local community – usually a city or region. The image of a classic ‘red brick’ university probably comes to mind for most British readers of a certain age, myself included. But what if the university’s community was just as global as it was local, and what if the civic contribution was defined through a lens of a more privatised or marketised system for higher education? I hope to explore what it would look like for a university to have a civic role, defined as making a contribution to the public good, and being an economic agent on the global stage.

The UK has experienced a relatively rapid move from a system that viewed universities as major public institutions to a model that now emphasises the private economic and commercial role of universities as engines of our economies. As public institutions, universities were delivering ‘free’ (state-funded) education and undertaking state-funded research, both delivered through block grants, with limited government intervention. There are still those who desire to return to this previous era, usually because they have a deeply held conviction about the public nature of universities. These voices are diminishing in political debate, however, and it is near impossible to envisage how the UK, Australian, Canadian, New Zealand or any other mixed private–public models would return to such a system of sole dependency on public funding grants. A balance of private and public funding is the way things can be expected to be at present, with a continuing trajectory towards the former replacing the latter. More accurately, direct public funding for teaching has been converted into fee loans and loan subsidy. Some have argued this is a move towards the US model, but it is more complicated than that.

The shift towards a high-skill, technology-driven, knowledge-based economy has necessarily put universities at the heart of economic policy across all parties of government in these countries. In Australia, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull has recently launched the National Innovation and Science Agenda calling for universities to ‘embrace new ideas in innovation and science’ and work more closely with industry as part of an innovation ideas boom,<sup>1</sup> the purpose of which is to ‘deliver the next age of economic prosperity in Australia’<sup>2</sup> – a sentiment that is deeply familiar in the UK.

The focus is now on the training of graduates, the development of talent needed to undertake jobs of the future, and the commercialisation of research. Discovery and the pursuit of new knowledge is framed as tackling our global challenges; what matters is the outcome and impact of that research. Universities are not just transforming lives of individuals but transforming the economy or ‘transforming Australia as it transitions to the new economy’.<sup>3</sup> This conception of universities is necessarily more instrumentalist, focused on economic and commercial outputs and discussed in terms of the market for students and the impact of research. Over 15 years of shaping the public debate in these terms has normalised the role of universities as primarily economic agents.

There is, of course, still a balance of public and private benefit delivered by universities through teaching and research. Universities have always been a complex construct of private, autonomous, independent organisations receiving public funding, and delivering economic and social benefit to individuals and wider society and communities. But it is the underlying question about the purpose of universities that shapes the debate and priorities given to the public versus private contributions of these great institutions.

The question arises of what the civic or public role of universities can be in an economic framework that sets them up as primarily private, commercial organisations responding to clients and customers. In this context, is it still appropriate to expect them to have a civic role or public purpose? Quite frankly, why would any university bother, apart from those relationships that are mutually beneficial to the business needs of the university? They could top the global rankings without giving a second thought to their civic role. In a high-skill global economy, it is imperative to any government to recognise and support the economic role of universities as drivers of innovation, discovery and future talent. It is equally important, however, to ensure that this perspective is not reducing the social impact of universities to a positive externality resulting from the economic transaction of delivering teaching and research.

**“Our universities are often at the heart of transforming both our economies and our societies.”**

At this point, I should confess that I hold a very high view of universities and their contribution to our economy and society. I am equally at ease with describing universities as ‘bastions of society’ as I am with portraying them as ‘jewels in the crown of our national economies’. I fully recognise, however, that not everyone shares my view of universities or my comfort with hyperbole. I have had the privilege of working with university and academic leaders all over the world and there are two things that unite them: a passion and commitment to creating unique learning environments, rich academic communities, that will nurture the discovery of new knowledge and transform lives, and a deeply held desire to work towards the

betterment of our society and economy. This is the beating civic or public heart of our universities. Universities demonstrate an irresistible desire to make the world a better place, which in my experience seeps into the very fabric of these institutions in all their many forms and expressions.

It is clear that the current economic lens through which many governments view universities does not necessarily promote the social impact of universities – but neither does it rule it out. My contention is that the public role and impact of universities has actually increased in the past 15 years through their growing interconnectedness to the cities and economic regions they influence. I also believe there is a growing need for universities to play a public role, including as guardians of free thinking, critical agents within society and as independent voices on the most difficult and sensitive issues of public debate. Universities should not just undertake the enormous task of tackling some of the world’s most complex challenges through new knowledge and discovery; we also need them to have a louder voice in the major philosophical questions about our place and role in world that is changing around us at an accelerating pace. We need our university and academic leaders to discuss matters of public importance publicly, and on the global as well as local stage. And we need them to do this while still responding at a system level to the needs of the local and global economy.

A 2015 IBM survey of 1,000 global business and academic leaders found that less than 50% thought that universities were making an effective contribution to society. This should not concern us too much, however, because very few of us would be able to define what an ‘effective contribution to society’<sup>4</sup> is and even fewer could grasp the full extent or range of engagement and impact our university staff and students have on their communities. Consider the role universities play in our hospitals, schools, health clinics and social care; or think about the many neighbourhoods that have been regenerated through teams of volunteers working with individuals and families to raise aspirations; the contributions made towards alleviating poverty, reducing conflict and protecting the vulnerable; the exploration of human nature, social constructs and our very existence through leading research and engagement across the arts and humanities. Very few governments would ever fully fund this type of activity but our public debate about the purpose of university needs to acknowledge the importance and value of this civic and public contribution. Our universities are often at the heart of transforming both our economies and our societies.

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Government, The National Innovation and Science Agenda, 2016, [www.innovation.gov.au](http://www.innovation.gov.au).

<sup>2</sup> IP Australia, ‘The Government’s \$1bn innovation statement’, National Innovation and Science Agenda, 2016, <https://www.ipaustralia.gov.au/about-us/news-and-community/news/ideas-boom-delivering-next-age-economic-prosperity>.

<sup>3</sup> Birmingham. Simon. Address to the Universities Australia conference. Universities Australia Annual Conference, March 2016. <http://www.senatorbirmingham.com.au/Media-Centre/Speeches/ID/2990/Address-to-the-Universities-Australia-conference>

<sup>4</sup> IBM Institute for Business Value and Economist Intelligence Unit, ‘Survey of 1,000 academic and business leaders about their views on issues facing HE’, 2015. <http://asmarterplanet.com/blog/2015/06/new-ibv-study-half-say-higher-ed-fails-prepare-students.html>





## Employability

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Employment is vital for economic and social wellbeing, so it is of no surprise that most students who enter higher education do so in the hope of securing fulfilling employment. Graduates fare better than non-graduates in the jobs market but employers continue to complain that students and young people more widely do not have the skills to succeed in the workplace.

For the UPP Foundation's employability theme, Professor Paul Boyle, President and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Leicester, discusses why and how employability has become a key issue for universities to tackle in 'A Lifetime of Career Success'. He raises the concern that lower professional employment rates among disadvantaged students persist across their early careers and concludes that partnerships are critical to delivering outcomes to graduates, employers and government.

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The essay of John O’Leary, journalist and education consultant, is titled ‘Employability: The greatest challenge facing universities’. He highlights successful employability projects in the sector, but suggests there is greater scope for action, particularly as initiatives to promote employability are seen by students as a top funding priority for their universities.

# A Lifetime of Career Success

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*Professor Paul Boyle, President and Vice-Chancellor, University of Leicester*



*While employers report strong demand for graduate talent, they continue to raise concerns about the skills and job readiness of too many in the graduate labour pool. Recent indications that the graduate earnings gap is in decline, and that significant numbers of graduates are going into non-graduate jobs, reinforce the need for action.*

This quote from the government's recent higher education green paper questions the role of higher education in preparing graduates for the labour market. This concern among policymakers is not new.<sup>1</sup>

The 1963 Robbins Report highlighted the 'instruction in skills suitable to play a part in the general division of labour' and recognised the dependence of a 'competitive position on skills demanding special training'.<sup>2</sup> More than 30 years later, in 1997 the Dearing Report was more direct, making explicit the importance of education for employability, and the value of key skills development and work experience in developing students' potential for employment.

However, a combination of unfavourable factors over the last eight years has made graduates' employability a headline issue and, debatably, a more impartial argument with which to drive change in the sector. A turbulent world economy heralded by the 2008 crash, rising tuition fees following the Browne Review in 2010, a series of government reviews looking at the sector's relationship with students and employers, greater competition for both home and international students, and research from employer bodies that question the 'efficacy' of higher education have all contributed to this renewed scrutiny. And it is no surprise, therefore, that students and their sponsors (parents, employers or government) are demanding a university experience that will prepare them for an increasingly competitive, dynamic and globalised world.

To help students 'make well-informed choices' and 'provide degrees with lasting value to their recipients' one proposed solution is to introduce the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF).<sup>3</sup> This assessment of university teaching will likely include a mix of metrics, one of which may be graduate employment outcomes, as the core aims stated in the green paper were to:

*Raise teaching standards, provide greater focus on graduate employability, widen participation in higher education, and open up the sectors to new high quality entrants.*<sup>4</sup>

Whether one agrees or disagrees with the inclusion of employment in the TEF (and one could argue that the Key Information Set coupled with university league tables already provides this information to students), an important question is whether this will help universities support student employability. And, crucially, whether this will drive change that actually benefits those entering and leaving higher education? The final iteration of the TEF could well do both, driving the innovation the green paper seeks. However, to truly realise the government's aspirations, there are several important points that should be considered in order to support and drive positive change.

## “Alarming, lower professional employment rates among disadvantaged students persist across their early careers.”

The first is the responsibility key stakeholders – employers, policymakers and students themselves – have toward supporting this agenda. Arguably, one failing of the current situation is that employers and students are becoming increasingly encouraged to think of themselves as consumers, rather than partners, when dealing with higher education. The relationships between employers and students must be at the heart of delivering improvements in students' labour market skills and subsequent employability.

For example, work experience is critical for developing students' employability. All universities want to be able to offer their students quality opportunities to gain experience in the workplace and are developing partnerships with employers to achieve this. However, the demand for experience far outweighs the supply and universities have little – at least financially – to help employers address this. Policymakers could help, but opportunities to acknowledge or support students' need for work experience have been missed. For example, while important to the economy, was it right to introduce the Apprenticeship Levy, focussing solely on apprenticeships? Couldn't employers have used part of this levy to fund imaginative and focused placements and internships? Initiatives such as these, co-funded by employers, might have a lasting impact on students' employment outcomes. Incorporating these types of experiences into the levy would also have been a great signal from government to employers that ministers recognise the importance these types of experience play in the economy.

While Advanced Apprenticeships offer universities some benefit, of the 13 areas announced there are notable gaps for students interested in arts, humanities and social sciences, and employers that operate in areas relevant to these disciplines. The way employers' needs are presented to universities also affects the skills debate more broadly. Instead of encouraging a more dynamic relationship between employers and universities, we are inadvertently encouraging the wrong mind-set, as the World Economic Forum recognises:

*Firms can no longer be passive consumers of ready-made human capital. They require a new mind-set to meet their talent needs and to optimize social outcomes.<sup>5</sup>*

This raises the question of whether many employers, despite voicing concerns about graduate skills, are failing to see the potential benefits that early investment in the student experience might provide.

A second point to consider in order to support and drive positive change is the importance of emphasising 'employability' rather than 'students' employment'. The distinction between the two cannot be overstated.<sup>6</sup> Johnny Rich identifies three components – knowledge, social capital and skills – which offer a more nuanced approach than focusing solely on the general term employability, and these are what many universities are considering, through imaginative curriculum responses and broader conceptualisations of the student experience. At the University of Leicester we are delivering one of the most flexible curriculums available through 'pathways', which allow for traditional, primarily single discipline degrees, but also offer truly inter-disciplinary experiences for those who want to blend insights from different disciplines. Our research suggests that this more flexible training is in demand from both students and employers.

**“A combination of unfavourable factors over the last eight years has made graduates' employability a headline issue.”**

The lasting value of degree training is also of concern to our minister. What students do immediately after completing their degrees is of core interest to students, and their ability to keep pace with the dynamic world around them also requires attention:

*By one popular estimate, 65% of children entering primary school today will ultimately end up working in completely new job types that don't yet exist.<sup>7</sup>*

It will be interesting to see how the TEF will help us measure how well universities have prepared students for jobs of the future – a challenging prospect, given the difficulty of measuring teaching excellence in general.<sup>8</sup>

Improving social mobility is a third means of making the employability of graduates better, as the green paper recognises. Recently we have learned that:

*For all but those with the very highest A-level grades, state school graduates tend to have higher degree outcomes than independent school graduates with the same prior educational attainment.<sup>9</sup>*

However, reports from the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission have highlighted that students from areas of high disadvantage are less successful in obtaining professional employment than those from more advantaged backgrounds. More alarmingly, lower professional employment rates among disadvantaged students persist across their early careers.<sup>10</sup> This raises the tricky problem of separating the respective influence of university experience and social background on employability. Of course, despite the political

focus on access to the most selective institutions, these universities do not necessarily deliver the best professional graduate outcomes for less advantaged students. A challenge for the TEF deliberations is how to incorporate some kind of contextual value-added measure that helps benchmark an institution's influence over employability, not just against other institutions, but against other forms of learning, such as apprenticeships. Whether or not the TEF will genuinely help students remains to be seen. It is perhaps telling that a recent survey found that only 18% of applicants accessed information through Unistats, the system that currently compares official course data from universities and colleges.<sup>11</sup> The TEF has re-opened debate about student employability and higher education, and what this means as we embark on a fourth industrial revolution.<sup>12</sup> The soon to be published reviews by Wakeham (looking at Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) and Shadbolt (looking at Computer Science) will undoubtedly add more to this discussion, but only for certain disciplines.<sup>13</sup>

In the end, though, much of this debate will centre on partnership – with employers, students, other universities and policymakers. These partnerships must have the capacity not only to drive innovation, but to deliver what students deserve: 'a lifetime of career success'.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> BIS, Fulfilling our potential: teaching excellence, social mobility and student choice, Cm 9141, Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, 2015, p.8, [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/474227/BIS-15-623-fulfilling-our-potential-teaching-excellence-social-mobility-and-student-choice.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/474227/BIS-15-623-fulfilling-our-potential-teaching-excellence-social-mobility-and-student-choice.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Charles Robbins, Higher Education, Cmnd 2154, 1963, p.6, <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/robbins/robbins1963.html>.

<sup>3</sup> BIS, Fulfilling our potential.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> World Economic Forum, The future of jobs: employment, skills and workforce strategy for the Fourth Industrial Revolution, 2016, p.7, <https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-future-of-jobs>.

<sup>6</sup> Johnny Rich, 'Why the TEF must measure employability not employment', Wonk HE, 10 December 2015; Johnny Rich, Employability: degrees of value, HEPI Occasional Paper, 2016, [http://wonkhe.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Rich\\_HEPI-Employability-Report\\_web.pdf](http://wonkhe.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Rich_HEPI-Employability-Report_web.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> World Economic Forum, The future of jobs.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Frey, '55 jobs of the future', <http://www.futuristspeaker.com/2011/11/55-jobs-of-the-future/>, 11 November 2011.

<sup>9</sup> HEFCE, 'Correction', Higher Education Funding Council for England, 2015, <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/HEFCE,2014/Content/Pubs/2015/201521/Correction.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> HEFCE, Differences in employment outcomes: equality and diversity characteristics, Higher Education Funding Council for England, 2015, [http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/HEFCE,2014/Content/Pubs/2015/201523/HEFCE2015\\_23.pdf](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/HEFCE,2014/Content/Pubs/2015/201523/HEFCE2015_23.pdf); Louise Ashley, Jo Duberley, Hilary Sommerlad, Dora Scholarios, A qualitative evaluation of non-educational barriers to the elite professions, Social Mobility & Child Poverty Commission, 2015, [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/434791/A\\_qualitative\\_evaluation\\_of\\_non-educational\\_barriers\\_to\\_the\\_elite\\_professions.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/434791/A_qualitative_evaluation_of_non-educational_barriers_to_the_elite_professions.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> HEFCE, Differences in employment outcomes, p.5.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.10.

<sup>13</sup> Klaus Schwab, 'The fourth Industrial Revolution: what it means, how to respond', World Economic Forum, 2016, employability, 2015, <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/kess/gradstemreview/csreview/>.

<sup>14</sup> University of Leicester Employability Strategy, 2014–2019, p.7.





# Employability: The greatest challenge facing universities

*John O'Leary, Journalist and Education Consultant*



Almost every university now has an employability strategy, many of them either introduced or upgraded as a response to the arrival of £9,000 fees. They cover everything from employability modules in degree programmes to the certification of extra-curricular activities, dedicated units to support start-up companies, and internment schemes in universities and partner organisations.

Some initiatives are tried and tested – and long pre-date current fee levels. Liverpool John Moores' World of Work programme is perhaps the best known, having involved local employers for more than a decade in ensuring that graduates acquire the skills that will give them an advantage in the labour market.

With graduate employment levels fluctuating in recent years, governments have focused on employability more than in the past. While ministers of all political shades insist that they value higher education for more than purely utilitarian reasons, the needs of the economy inevitably dominate policy debates in Whitehall. More than a decade ago, then Labour Secretary of State Charles Clarke was embroiled in controversy over whether the country could afford more medieval historians if other disciplines were more productive in economic terms. Employability is a dominant theme of the latest green paper, even though it does not appear in the title.<sup>1</sup>

One of the last Labour Government's preferred solutions – workplace learning – is making a comeback in the form of degree apprenticeships. While foundation degrees and other work-based programmes never quite reached their targets, the era of £9,000 fees, particularly since the withdrawal of grants and the discouragement of bursaries, may bring different attitudes. The apprenticeship 'brand' is strong and many young people appear to be having doubts about the value for money of purely academic degrees, although applications for higher education remain buoyant.

Certainly, the training schemes offered by big City firms are increasingly popular. This is even the case for students from independent schools, where one might expect fee levels to be less of a factor than to those from state schools. The Association of Graduate Recruiters has reported that the number of vacancies its members have offered to apprentices increased by 24% year-on-year, compared with an increase of only 2% (of a much larger number) in graduate vacancies.<sup>2</sup> The hundreds of

thousands each year who still opt for university are now much more likely to carefully consider the employment prospects provided by different subjects and institutions.

Research by the University Partnership's Programme (UPP), published in the company's 2015 report *Work hard play hard*, found that a quarter of undergraduates had considered apprenticeships before opting for university. The authors described students and applicants as 'rational and cautious' in choosing between the two, and said: 'They engage in a series of trade-offs – between future job prospects, the experience of university and their need to gain real-world experience of working life.'<sup>3</sup>

Sadly, the graduate employment data available to applicants are a poor guide because they record destinations only six months after graduation. This has been the case for many years, but the defects are still more obvious in an age of internships and multiple changes of employment by young people. Although some graduates' destinations are tracked for three and a half years, the sample is too small for institutional averages to be published.

Even so, despite the absence of better data, the Government plans to use the figures to help assess teaching quality in the proposed Teaching Excellence Framework. If any longer-term data are used, salaries rather than categories of employment are likely to be the measure by which universities are judged. Although he gave no timescale, the Chancellor promised to obtain better data in the March Budget statement:

*The Government will bring together information about the wages of graduates of different courses and the financial support available across further and higher education to ensure that people can make informed decisions about the right courses for them.*<sup>4</sup>

The figures and their relationship with teaching quality will be questionable, and will place universities in economically depressed areas at a considerable disadvantage. Particularly disadvantaged will be universities that serve a high proportion of local mature students, since these students are the least likely (or able) to move for a well-paid job in London or elsewhere. Nevertheless, graduate employment statistics will become even more important to higher education institutions, and some may be tempted to game the system where they can.

**“The hundreds of thousands each year who still opt for university are now much more likely to carefully consider the employment prospects provided by different subjects and institutions.”**

Some people argue that universities should be judged on their success in fostering employability skills – those needed for all types of job – rather than focusing only on graduates' first foray into the employment market. However, there is so far no sign of an assessment system that would be likely to appeal to ministers.

There are now numerous examples of successful employability schemes. Queen Mary University of London's QConsult scheme, for example, won the *Guardian's* most recent award in this area.<sup>5</sup> Launched in March 2015, QConsult is supported by J.P. Morgan, and sends teams of students from low-income families into east London businesses to conduct mini consultancy projects. Participants have a dedicated careers consultant and take part in an end-of-cycle pitching and networking event where teams present to a J.P. Morgan panel, whose feedback informs their final client presentations.

The 42% of QMUL undergraduates from low-income backgrounds are more likely to be unemployed or in non-graduate jobs than their peers from more affluent households, but QConsult closes this gap by raising the confidence, social capital and employability of participating students by providing them with work experience, connecting them with high-growth job sectors and giving them access to mentoring.

**“While ministers of all political shades insist that they value higher education for more than purely utilitarian reasons, the needs of the economy inevitably dominate policy debates in Whitehall.”**

Also shortlisted by the *Guardian* were two interactive massive open online courses (moocs) designed by the University of Sheffield Careers Service, which deal with writing applications and succeeding at interviews. The courses were designed to be highly participative, with ice-breakers, interactive exercises, quizzes, discussions and peer support, to ensure an active learning experience and offer learners as much feedback as possible.

Employability increasingly encompasses self-employment as well as the traditional graduate labour market – and not just because graduates are finding it harder to secure the jobs they want. Universities are responding with enterprise schemes such as the InTechnology enterprise incubator programme at the University of Leeds, which offers guidance and encouragement – including office space, administrative support and access to grants – to students who want to launch their own business. So far, the programme has engaged with 1,200 students, creating 48 successful business starts annually, 90% of which are still operating after a year.

The Royal Agricultural University's Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Programme offers start-up support to graduates, as well as students, for up to three years. Students are encouraged to try out their business ideas through a pop-up shop on campus and practical start-up workshops, including a three-day start-up boot camp; they receive professional support such as legal and accountancy advice, and have the opportunity to sell their products at external events.

The question for a foundation such as UPP is what it can contribute that does not duplicate universities' efforts but will lead to improvements in the area that is probably more important to students (and graduates) than any other. The provision of internships may be one possibility and support for start-up companies and self-employment schemes is another. There is no doubting the scope for action: in one survey, three-quarters of students named initiatives to promote their employability as their top priority for investment by their university.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, Higher education: teaching excellence, social mobility and student choice, 6 November 2015, <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/higher-education-teaching-excellence-social-mobility-and-student-choice>.

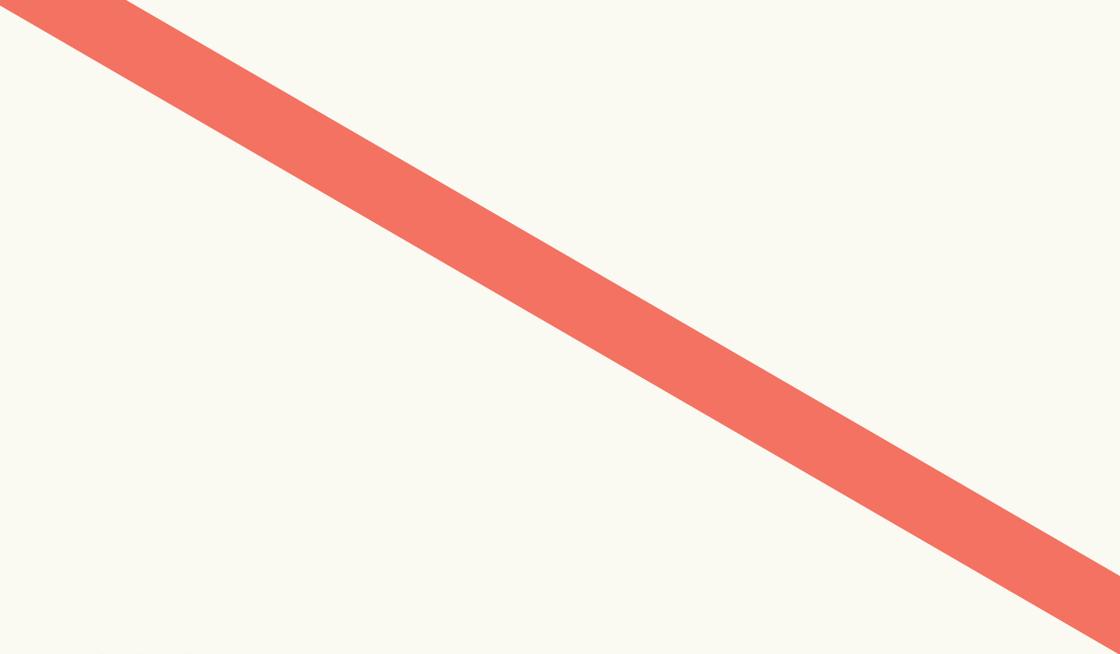
<sup>2</sup> Chris Havergal, 'Graduate recruitment stutters as apprenticeships take off', Times Higher Education, 9 March 2016, <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/graduate-recruitment-stutters-apprenticeships-take>.

<sup>3</sup> University Partnerships Programme, Work hard, play hard, 30 September 2015, <http://www.upp-ltd.com/perch/resources/student-exp-report-digital.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> HM Treasury, Budget 2016, 16 March 2016, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/budget-2016-documents>.

<sup>5</sup> Guardian University Awards, 17 March 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/2016/mar/17/employability-initiative-category-winner-and-runners-up>.

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## Global Citizens

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Technological innovation has rapidly increased the interconnected and interdependent nature of our world. To thrive in the 21st century we need to understand and preserve cultural diversity, as well as embrace our commonly shared values of pluralism, equality and tolerance. Universities are at the forefront of advancing the concept of global citizenship through their international activities such as student exchange schemes and trans-national education programmes.

For the UPP Foundation's global citizens theme, Professor Mark E. Smith, Vice-Chancellor of Lancaster University, has contributed an essay titled 'Global Citizens for a Globalised Workplace'. He argues that there is a role for universities in supporting students to become global citizens but this can only take place if every facet of a university's core business is embedded with a global perspective.



# Global Citizens for a Globalised Workplace

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*Professor Mark E. Smith,  
Vice-Chancellor, Lancaster University*



Universities and their students share a common challenge: competition in an international environment. Employers are increasingly willing to scour the global labour market for the graduates best prepared to work in their businesses. Likewise, universities seek to recruit the highest calibre staff and students to their institutions. As educational institutions with an international focus, we have both the means and the motivation to support our students in becoming global citizens ready to act in a globalised workplace. This brief contribution to the essay collection outlines some of the evidence demonstrating the impact of internationalising the student experience, going on to suggest how a globally significant university in the 21st century can open up fresh and exciting new avenues for developing global competencies in its students.

A report surveying business leaders showed the need for school leavers to be able to think globally in order to succeed, but found this skill often lacking in new recruits.<sup>1</sup> It is fortunate therefore that many of our universities have spent time and resources developing internationalisation strategies, benefiting from a two-way flow of staff and students. However, a university can only really claim to be internationalised if a global perspective is embedded into every facet of its core business. To take a few examples, some of the research undertaken should focus on global issues, although all should be of a world-leading standard; international partnerships should be developed to support the growth of education in other nations; curricula on offer should broaden students' horizons beyond the UK; and extra-curricular activities should encourage competition and friendship with people from other nations, and prepare all students to work in such teams. When the overall approach is at this stage of maturity, the full benefits for the students can be realised.

According to recent research, students in the UK are generally less motivated to study abroad than counterparts in comparator nations like the US.<sup>2</sup> This is reflected at a European level with the UK's relatively small (but growing) take-up of Erasmus+ placements compared with the take-up of these placements by similarly sized higher education sectors elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> A number of academic and non-academic factors encourage those who are motivated to study abroad. Among the most important non-academic factors are building confidence, immediate employment prospects and the opportunity for establishing an international career.<sup>4</sup> In a separate study 90% of students ranked employability as an important or very important reason to study

abroad.<sup>5</sup> The employment prospects of those who are outwardly mobile are good. Analysis of the 2013/14 survey Destination of Leavers from Higher Education found that mobile students are less likely to be unemployed, earn a higher average salary and are more likely to be employed within the top three socio-economic classifications than students who do not study abroad.<sup>6</sup>

**“While ministers of all political shades insist that they value higher education for more than purely utilitarian reasons, the needs of the economy inevitably dominate policy debates in Whitehall.”**

Students keenly recognise the cultural benefits of studying abroad and this appears to take precedence in the minds of respondents when participating in research based on self-reporting questionnaires. This is a symptom of the fact that these benefits are not considered skills obviously pertinent to employment. The cultural benefits of studying abroad are also less frequently referred to during recruitment processes. The lack of explicit mention of skills that are obviously pertinent to employment can lead to an erroneous perception that international experience is not in demand.<sup>7</sup> On the contrary, soft skills are invaluable to employers; key global competencies include working collaboratively, being able to communicate, showing resilience and being able to understand multiple perspectives.<sup>8</sup> Much more can be done to equip students with the ability to articulate and evidence skills enhanced through international experiences.

When setting out on my career I did not think about an international dimension to my formal education. However, I started my career working in Germany in industry and then in a research institute in Australia. In both cases I worked in highly internationalised environments and learned a great deal about different ways of doing things – experience which I still use today.

Careful readers may have noticed an evolution in the framing of internationalisation during the previous paragraphs, moving away from talking just about study abroad in favour of a broader conception of international experience. This is deliberate because, as outlined above, the multi-faceted nature of a university’s international operation extends beyond outward student mobility. The next question then is how we can use this positioning to provide a greater choice and extent of international experience to our students, to support their long-term employability.

Campus universities can become miniature world cities, pulsating with diversity and interest. International students are an essential element and most UK students value their contribution.<sup>9</sup> In 2013, 10% of all international students worldwide came to the UK and we are third in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) for the proportion of tertiary level students of international origin.<sup>10</sup> This is an

enviable position, one which other countries wish to emulate, hence the increase in Anglophone delivery in mainland Europe. We have a strong product, but competition is fierce and we should beware incremental changes to visa regulations, which might lead to a reduction in international student demand.

Lancaster University has a network of partner institutions across teaching and research, with major collaborations based in Ghana, Pakistan, India, Malaysia and China. The depth of these relationships allows for the co-creation of interesting new opportunities for our students to address issues such as public health, sustainability and digital security. An illustration of how an international network can be drawn together to address elements of complex global issues is the development of an innovative six-week programme on public health by Lancaster and Boston universities, to be delivered in Accra to students from Boston, Lancaster and Ghana. This programme engages experts in infectious disease from Lancaster with social scientists from Boston, offering students the opportunity to gain internships with non-government organisations and hospitals while learning alongside peers from at least two other continents. This is a unique academic experience for participating students, contributing to the development of new competencies that can be articulated and evidenced in future job applications.

## “A global curriculum builds the knowledge and understanding a graduate needs to work at an international level.”

For our graduates to become truly global citizens we must engender an understanding that goes beyond the borders of the UK, leading us naturally to reflect on our academic curriculum. We cannot assume that what is attractive domestically will have equal appeal further afield. A positive implication of this is the need to broaden the subject matter to include topics of global significance. There are sound educational reasons why we would want to do this. Students should have the opportunity to consider global issues and develop an understanding of how their discipline is applied within different cultural, geographic and economic contexts. This responds directly to the challenge from the business community mentioned earlier. A global curriculum builds the knowledge and understanding a graduate needs to work at an international level.

As universities have become more global in their outlook, so have their students. Ease of modern communication and social media have heightened student awareness of the world around them and the stimulating options available for their future careers. Educators should be prepared to respond to these conditions, finding ways to unlock the global citizen in everyone. Only then will we be preparing graduates ready for the global workplace, and through this engagement allowing them to reap the associated cultural and economic benefits throughout their lives.

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40 Gracechurch Street, London, EC3V 0BT  
+44 (0)20 7398 7200 | @UPP\_Foundation  
upp-foundation@upp-ltd.com

[upp-foundation.org](http://upp-foundation.org)

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