

The Social Purposes of the University and Academic Research: Between Excellence, Elitism, Equity, and Engagement.

URGE Symposium, Monday 22 April

Morning: The Character of Academic Research and the Conduct of Researchers (WP5)

8:45 – 9:15 Coffee / Introduction

9:15 PANEL 1: Measuring Academic Performance: National Research Assessment Exercises and their impact

Speakers:

Lisa Lucas (The University of Bristol) 'National Performance Based Research Funding Exercises; what do they mean for university researchers and research work?'

Performance Based Research Funding (PBRF) systems operate in various guises across a number of national higher education systems. The Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) now Research Excellence Framework (REF) in the UK is a well established system of evaluating and funding university research. Similar exercises operate elsewhere, notably Hong Kong but also Australia and New Zealand. This presentation will draw on my own research on the UK RAE and also a recent literature review completed on PBRF systems across different countries, to discuss the impacts of these systems and the implications for the conduct of university research, the management of research work within institutions and the subjectivities and identities of university researchers.

Sue Wright (Aarhus University) 'Instruments for measuring and funding Danish university research and their impacts on the conduct of researchers.'

The Danish government has developed a system for measuring academics' publications in 'top' international journals and using the resulting scores as one of four factors in a system of allocating funding to universities. While this focus on top journals may be in keeping with the government's aim for at least one Danish university to score well in international rankings, it does not accord with the government's aim for universities to produce research of application to industry and society. The paper will explore the contradictions of this 'bibliometric points system' - which is spreading fast to other countries. It will show how it is being used as an instrument of university management, and it will explore impacts on one faculty which has long had such a system for resource allocation and performance measurement and suffers high levels of stress, and another faculty for whom such a system was entirely new and resisted (successfully) as an existential threat, undermining the very nature of academic work.

Bruce Curtis (The University of Auckland) 'The PBRF and cultural cringe'

The PBRF is a compulsory system of peer review that generates quality scores for individual academics and institutions. This 'evaluation exercise' was developed primarily by the NZ professoriate and reflects their collective interests: international scholarly works are fetishized; an engagement with local issues, communities or forms of publication are marginalised. In this respect the PBRF reifies a cultural cringe. New Zealand academics and academics focused on New Zealand are disadvantaged. Hence Philosophy appears as the top rated discipline. At the same time, the PBRF sends mixed messages to academic management. It does not straightforwardly promote a neo-liberal 'agenda'. Further, the PBRF makes a minimal contribution to university budgets and any multiplier effects are debateable. It is most significant as a symbolic marker and as a touchstone for politicised Vice Chancellors.

- **Commentators/Discussants: Cris Shore + Roger Dale**

11:00 Coffee break

11:30 – 1:00 PANEL 2: Impact and Engagement Agendas: Redefining the Nature of University Work

Speakers:

Susan L. Robertson, (University of Bristol) ‘Follow that output...to its (public...) outcome! An institutional ethnography of making and materializing ‘Research Impact’.

This paper traces out, and reflects upon, a highly political, contested and institutionally uneven, process at the University of Bristol; efforts to make sense of, materialize, and institutionalize ‘Impact’ – a distinct and new component of the UK’s 2013 Research Excellence Framework. Drawing on an ethnography of the process, I show that in the early phase, HEFCE’s effort to articulate what impact ‘meant’ as a discourse and practice was dependent upon a series of ‘sense-making’ pilot projects in selected universities, on the one hand, and government pressure to make universities more publicly accountable for research funding, on the other. Over time key administrative departments within the University and the Impact Committee sought to second-guess the final rules of the game to be set by HEFCE, whilst building new institutional structures and processes that could deliver on this agenda. Nevertheless, despite what the institution viewed as the high financial stakes of the game, efforts to materialize and institutionalize ‘impact’ have been highly uneven. The paper explores a range of practices at work giving rise to this uneven impact geography: (i) for some units of assessment, their outputs do not lead to public outcomes; (ii) locating evidence to support the outcomes claims of outputs is extremely challenging; (iii) academic unwillingness to participate in the new rules of the game; (iv) the unit of assessment has viable alternative research funding streams sufficient to enable them to be independent of REF Impact funding, and (v) there are major difficulties in understanding how to make sense of, represent, and advance impact outcomes. This institutional case highlights the uneven and contested nature of implementing ‘impact’.

Dirk Michel Schertges (Aarhus University) ‘Administrational Reason and Academic Strategies’

Due to contemporary university reform processes that are leading to fundamental changes of both the means and ends of the university and the understanding of the university as such it is crucial to understand the specific rationality that is related to the “modern” university. On the background of this specific rationality the dialectic between form and content of the modern university will be discussed. Following this theoretical framework, academic strategies will be presented in order to describe different ways of how academics “deal” with the new academic environment.

Miri Davidson, Nick Lewis & Cris Shore) Commercialising University Knowledge: The New Zealand Story

The rise of the ‘third mission’ represents one of the most important facets of the globalisation of universities over the past fifteen years. Typically, third mission activities are geared towards commercializing university IP and establishing externally referenced research institutes that bring business and government more directly into the routine activities of universities. These trends are thought to be having a major impact not only on research and the work of academics and their relations to each other, but also on the organizational architecture of universities, the nature of knowledge produced, and the very meaning and mission of the public university. This paper draws on a new research project to map the third mission in New Zealand in order to explore these claims and their implications for university futures.

- **Commentator/Discussant: Elizabeth Rata**

1:00 – 2:30 Lunch

Afternoon: The Social Purposes of the University: Excellence and Equity (WP6)

2:30 – 4:30 PANEL 3: Widening Access: Are Equity and Excellence Compatible?

Speakers:

Saba Kiani: ‘Neoliberalism and Islamicisation in Iranian Universities’

This paper examines the confluence of Islam and contemporary forms of neoliberalism within Iranian higher education. While neoliberal strategies emphasise the marketisation of higher education in the global knowledge economy, the Iranian government has embarked on a set of university reforms that are also based on religious imperatives. In order to implement these reforms, the government has appointed new university Vice Chancellors who combine loyalty to the regime with fidelity to the clerics. In this paper I will explore the implications of these contradictions.

Airini, Kirsten Locke, and Annie Weir: ‘Diversity, equity and excellence in the University: A comparative study of New Zealand and Scotland’

Universities have traditionally played a central role in educating citizens, in the construction of nationhood and nation-building. At the same time they have often been criticised for promoting elite knowledge, for limited engagement with a diverse wider public, and for creating exclusion in ethnicity and class. The effects have been evident at the level of the student body as well as in the kinds of research questions pursued and knowledge produced. The pursuit of 'excellence', quality research, higher rankings, and elite fee-paying students exists alongside the mission of many universities to be inclusive of diversity, to improve social mobility and equality. How are universities responding to these policy agendas? This paper explores the influence of policy reforms on the social purposes of the university sector in Scotland and New Zealand. A comparative critical analysis suggests a conceptual shift is taking place. While diversity, equity and excellence have been questioned as seemingly contradictory, policy and university initiatives suggest some level of complementarity. This paper discusses origins, possibilities and challenges when diversity and equity are core to the business of high performing, socially purposeful universities.

Jill Blackmore, (Deakin University) ‘Leadership in higher education: a feminist perspective of global restructuring’

Leadership has only recently become part of the lexicon of reform in higher education at a time of heightened marketization as academic capitalism ‘goes global’. The radical restructuring of higher education post-1987 in Australia was gendered and gendering in its processes, practices and effects (Blackmore and Sachs 2007). The paper draws from Bourdieu’s (1988) distinction between academic and intellectual habitus, Connell’s (2009) framing of the social relations of gender and notions of transnational masculinities, and Hearn’s (2004) ‘hegemony of men’ that is informed by the Critical Studies on Men (CSM). I argue yet another phase of gender restructuring is underway, marked by the emergence of new forms of academic (managerial) and intellectual ‘leadership habitus’. The sphere of decision-making in Higher Education is increasingly distant from academics as the field is no longer able to protect its boundaries, discourses and practices from the social fields of politics, economics and the media. At the same time, devolved governance puts the onus on university leaders to be strategic, innovative and entrepreneurial within the context a university sector that has multiple often contradictory functions, expectations and values with regard to private and public good (Marginson 2012). This impacts on who gets to lead and what leadership practices are valued. Evidence from a three year longitudinal study suggests that there is a lack of both gender and racial diversity in Australian universities, despite the existence of a range of equity policies. This lack of

diversity in leadership and of the practices of leadership has significant flow on effects for the future of leadership in and of higher education.

- **Discussant. Maureen Baker (Sociology Department, University of Auckland)**

4:30 – 5:15

Wrap up Session: Reflections on the past, present and future of URGE (Sue Wright, Susan Robertson, Cris Shore and others)

Evening Drink

7:30 Conference Dinner