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Essays on Higher Education and Society
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What constitutes the public good of higher education?

Lindsay Hutchinson

Debate concerning the purposes of higher education is not a uniquely contemporary concern. The goals of universities have been debated for centuries with the focus of debate shifting according to the particular political, economic and societal contexts of the time. Much debate has surrounded the two broad purposes of higher education: private benefit and public good. In this essay I will focus on the public good purpose of higher education and argue that the generally accepted idea of what constitutes the public good in contemporary UK society – the supply of suitably skilled workers for the labour market – warrants debate. I will argue that this conception of the public good and its implications for higher education policy and practice can actually harm the public good. I will examine an alternative conception of the public good and consider how higher education practice and pedagogy could be shaped by this in order to fulfil the purpose of contributing to the public good.

The current dominant view of the public good

As publicly funded institutions, universities must account for the public good they provide in addition to the private benefits they confer on their graduates. While the potential private benefits of a university education such as increased lifetime earnings and elevated social position are widely accepted, what exactly constitutes the public good is contested territory. The current context in which this debate takes place is within a neo-liberal higher education system. Neo-liberal philosophy conceives that economic rationality is best and asserts that individuals should act in order to maximise personal benefits. Neo-liberalism is individualistic, characterised by an emphasis on individuals meeting their own needs (as opposed to society’s needs) and a belief that the public good can be improved by private enterprise (Kezar 2004).

Current UK education policy is informed by a dominant conception of the public good which is utilitarian in nature. In this view the public good is defined purely on economic grounds, viewing universities as training grounds for workers for the labour-market. It is thought that higher education should equip students with the skills necessary to
meet the perceived future needs of the nation’s economy. Recent government reports such as the Leitch Report (2007) articulate this view. This report, entitled 'World Class Skills: Prosperity for all in the Global Economy' called for there to be, "a rebalancing of the priorities of HE institutions to make available relevant, flexible and responsive provision that meets the high skill needs of employers and their staff‖ (2007:68). Subsequent government reports have continued to emphasise this view. This is of course, unsurprising given that the most recent government has been trying to plot a path through a global economic crisis and so has increasingly focused educational policy on the needs of the economy. Higher education’s contribution to the public good is defined through its ability to aid the economic recovery. This view is perhaps most plainly conveyed by the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills White Paper 'Skills for Growth’ (2009). In this paper the former Labour government stated that higher education should be increasingly market-driven, with businesses involved in programme design in order to ensure that degree courses produce graduates who possess the skills desired by business. The future of the country is seen to be in the hands of graduates who must be, “educated, enterprising young people with the right skills: the skills demanded by modern work in a globalised economy” (2009:2).

The implications of this market-driven view of what constitutes the public good for higher education practice can be seen in the White Paper ‘Higher Ambitions: the future of universities in a knowledge economy’ (2009). This paper states that universities should focus on priority sectors of the market; and the approach will be somewhat enforced by the development of HEFCE funding initiatives for STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) “the winners being those universities who can best respond to these evolving economic challenges” (2009:8). In this environment there is a clear threat to the funding of subjects which are not perceived to have immediate economic impact; most notably perhaps, are the arts and humanities, as Nussbaum pointed out: “if we don’t insist on the crucial importance of the humanities and the arts, they will drop away, because they don’t make money (2006: 15).

The consumer-driven nature of education policy is not exclusive to the needs of business and industry, it is also concerned with the demands of students and parents; demands which are also increasingly focused on the labour-market. In response ‘Skills for Growth’ sets out the introduction of a ‘traffic light’ rating system for every higher education institution and every course to be used by potential students and their
parents when choosing where and what to study. Among the aspects included in this rating system will be the course or institution’s past performance of securing graduates a better job and higher earnings (2009:43).

The dominant conception of the public good as the growth of the nation’s economy links very closely with the private benefits of higher education. ‘Higher Ambitions’ is almost entirely concerned with policy aimed at the development of national and individual prosperity. This focus on the labour-market is not particular to the UK, rather it is a worldwide phenomenon. Such organizations as the European Union and the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) have stressed the importance of higher education for increased competitiveness in the economy (Boni and Gasper 2009:2). Kezar (2004) notes that this focus has been particularly marked in developing countries where, like elsewhere, the public good has been redefined as, “private advancement and economic attainment” (2004:430). Arguably, this trend is due to the influence of global economic competitiveness on political and educational agendas.

The failing of the dominant conception of the public good

In the midst of a global economic crisis and unprecedented national debt in the UK it may be understandable and even compelling to equate the public good with national economic prosperity. However there is evidence that, rather than contributing to the public good, this conception and the resultant structure and practice of higher education can be detrimental to both broad and narrow conceptions of the public good.

A higher education pedagogy which is shaped by a conception of the public good as economic well-being, paradoxically might not develop all the skills necessary to achieve even this narrow goal. Molesworthy, Nixon and Scullion (2002), for example, assert that the current marketised higher education system has created a shift in students’ conception of themselves from ‘being’ learners to ‘having’ a degree, or worse, ‘having bought’ their degree. They argue that when students focus on higher education solely as a means to getting a ‘good’ (for which read ‘well-paid’) job, they will approach their learning in an instrumental manner. In response to such consumer demand pedagogy, especially on vocational courses, is being stripped of opportunities to reflect and debate. Molesworthy et al. argue that this
kind of higher education pedagogy offers a poor preparation for life in the modern world and labour-market. They claim that vocational skills are being taught at the expense of critical skills yet graduates need to be equipped with these very critical skills in order to deal with the complexities of societal and technological change so prevalent in modern society.

Furthermore, defining the public good purely on economic grounds has been criticised as being reductionist (Boni and Gasper 2009; Fisher 2006) and of ignoring the broader public purposes of higher education. Kezar (2004) explains that a broader conception of the collective public good has historically been an important part of the charter between higher education and society. Among the wide-ranging aspects of this collective public good are: improving society by supporting local communities; educating citizens for democratic engagement; advancing, preserving and disseminating knowledge; creating leaders of the public sector; and, broadening access to higher education in order to enhance a diverse economy. The current narrow conception of the public good as personal and national economic growth poses a marked threat to many of these traditional ‘public goods’.

The market-economy focus of neo-liberal education policy increases individualism and is at risk of eroding community and social responsibility. Fisher (2006) explains that this emphasis begins even before students have begun their course when they must take part in a system of competitive entry, and is sustained throughout university by a continuing focus on preparing for a competitive job market and the importance of ‘getting ahead’. In his examination of public education in Australia, Reid asserts that the neo-liberal system “constructs education as a positional good and emphasises individual freedom of choice at the expense of equity and broader collective social purposes of education” (2002:572). Jonathan (1997) argues that there is an internal contradiction in the neo-liberal marketised education system which emphasises individual freedom yet threatens this freedom through the competition it creates. She maintains that, “when some must lose, it is not just equity that is ill-served by giving reign to the market, but freedom itself” (1997:81).

An economic definition of the public good can then impede the liberating potential of higher education. Jonathan (2001 cited in Fisher 2006) posits that the current UK higher education system is likely to replicate existing social structures rather than offering the opportunity for social mobility. Marginson (2007) similarly explains that in a
marketised higher education system the cost of the product (in this case, a degree) is driven up by increasing exclusivity so the fact that degrees cost more in some universities than others (though, at present, not a lot) could damage equal educational opportunity and threaten to increase the division of universities by social class.

One of the public good purposes outlined in Kezar’s (2004) summary of the traditional charter between higher education and society is the role of universities as social critic. Using Habermas’ concept of the ‘lifeworld’ Booth, McLean and Walker (2009) state that universities should be crucial spaces for public debate. Giroux (1995) also thinks that higher education institutions should be moral and political spaces and that the debate which takes place within them should impact directly on public life. However the focus on the economy and the subsequent threat to disciplines in the arts and humanities in which this kind of public debate typically takes place jeopardises this role. Walker points out that the current higher education policy which is focused on economic growth lacks a space where the “meaningfulness of economic opportunities” can be debated (2009:233).

It is also important to note that an economy-focused conception of the public good is based on a narrow definition of ‘the public’. Higher education which is aimed at developing national wealth is a public good only for the particular nation in question. Marginson (2007) points out that while a globalised higher education system can produce broad public goods such as the sharing of knowledge, cultural exchange and increased tolerance, the system is also at risk of creating a ‘brain drain’ from some developing countries as skilled and capable graduates who have studied in the UK opt to remain and contribute to our economy at the expense of their own. This definition of the public good also focuses on those members of society who are in a position to benefit directly from a stronger economy, in particular employers in business and industry. And despite arguments about a ‘trickle down’ effects, such a definition contributes little good to the proportion of society who, for various reasons, are unable to participate in the labour market and higher education itself.

Undoubtedly, the economic well-being of a nation contribute to the public good of its citizens however the discussion above demonstrates that economic well-being alone cannot be considered sufficient to constitute the public good. Higher education practice and pedagogies which are influenced by an economy-focused conception of the public
good work against traditional, broad public good outcomes such as equal educational opportunity and social responsibility. Not only this, but these pedagogies are arguably not in fact effective in producing the kind of graduates necessary to achieve the economic growth conceived of in this view.

It should be made clear that I am not arguing that economic considerations should not be a factor in the purposes, organization, funding or pedagogies of higher education in the UK or elsewhere. As Jonathan (1997) points out, a healthy economy is necessary in order to maintain the modern expectations for public and private life; and without a healthy economy the provision of higher education itself would not be possible. It is also undeniable that increased personal economic well-being will always be a consideration for the majority of people considering entering higher education, especially given the rising personal cost of this education in the UK today. What is problematic however is when it is these economic factors which drive higher education practice and pedagogy.

**An alternative conception of the public good**

The current utilitarian system which is driven by the perceived needs of the labour market ignores the fact that university graduates will not be workers only – they will each occupy multiple roles in their own lives and in wider society. Higher education should not only focus on ensuring that graduates have the skills necessary to be good workers but should also be equipping them to be good citizens, parents, members of communities and so on. The present system which has become so focused on the development of vocational skills – enabling graduates to be able to perform a particular profession – also ignores the manner in which they will perform their jobs. Doctors, lawyers, teachers and every other kind of worker do not perform their vocations in a vacuum, but rather in relation to others both in local society and often in the wider world; higher education therefore should also be shaping what kinds of workers it is producing. As John Stuart Mill astutely put it:

Men are men before they are lawyers, or physicians, or merchants, or manufacturers; and if you make them capable and sensible men, they will make themselves capable and sensible lawyers or physicians (1875:335).
Despite the economic focus of the current system, the current economic crisis was not prevented and we can speculate whether matters would have turned out differently had more attention been given to the type of bankers, economists and politicians our universities are producing. The fact that ninety percent of MPs in the new UK parliament are graduates, a higher proportion than any previous government, emphasises the importance of this consideration. For the production of a broader public good as well as economic well-being, concern about educating for the ethical and moral orientation of professionals is arguably as important as other kinds of training for the labour market. I propose that a superior conception of what constitutes the public good of higher education must include social and political, as well as economic good, it should be aimed at all members of our society and have the potential to impact on the wider world.

There is a growing body of educational research which seeks to promote this broader conception of the public good and re-assert the transformative and social justice role of higher education. There are two important and linked questions that are essential to the success of a broad conception of the public good: What kind of graduate should higher education be producing? and What role should they play in society?

Ron Barnett addresses these questions. He describes the modern world as being in “an age of supercomplexity” (2000:409) by which he means a world which is characterised by change, uncertainty and often, turmoil. He posits that higher education should be producing graduates who are equipped to live and thrive in this kind of world. He suggests that this is made possible by the development of ‘critical action’ which is the ability to examine one’s own actions with critical insight. Through critical action higher education will not produce merely competent professionals but also those who are able to imagine and develop new forms of professionalism.

Martha Nussbaum (1997) also has important views on the role of university education in producing particular kinds of people. She states that developing certain kinds of people should be a central concern of higher education, she describes the process as ‘cultivating humanity’. She asserts that higher education produces citizens and

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1 See [http://www.suttontrust.com/reports/MPs_educational_backgrounds_2010.pdf](http://www.suttontrust.com/reports/MPs_educational_backgrounds_2010.pdf) for more information on the educational backgrounds of current UK members of parliament.
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“this means we must ask what a good citizen of the present day should know” (1997:8). Nussbaum proposes three capabilities that today’s citizens should possess and which should be developed through higher education: critical self-examination, narrative imagination, and global citizenship. The first, ‘critical self-examination’, is self-explanatory and connects to Barnett’s ‘critical action’. The second, ‘narrative imagination’, refers to the ability to empathise with someone who is very different to oneself and to be able to understand that person’s desires and point of view. The third capability, ‘becoming a world citizen’, means recognising the interconnectedness of the modern world and being able to act in a manner that is mindful of this fact.

Melanie Walker (2006) like Nussbaum uses Amartya Sen’s capability approach to develop both what kind of person higher education should be producing and what kind of role they should play in the world – or as she more plainly puts it, “what education enables us to do and to be” (2006:164). She maintains that higher education should not just be concerned with economic productivity but rather with developing whole persons. She states that, “human capabilities offer a rich set of goals for the development of our full human dignity” (2006:164). Walker, McLean, Dison and Peppin-Vaughan (2009) explain that these capabilities bring with them a level of social responsibility: capabilities can be seen as individual powers which should be used to shape the world we live in for the good of all. As students progress through higher education and become certain kinds of people, for example confident, critical thinkers, they should also take on the obligation to “bring about the changes that would enhance human development in the world” (Sen 2008:335 cited in Walker et al. 2009:567).

A growing number of higher education institutions are developing an ethos and practice of contributing to human development. The Talloires Network is a world-wide association of higher education institutions committed to developing socially responsible activities and public engagement within and between their institutions. The network currently has over 150 member institutions from across the world which are committed to the goals of the Taillores Declaration (2005). These goals include: the promotion of shared human values, through teaching, research and public service; engaging with local and global communities; and, creating regional networks of universities in order to achieve these goals.

In the UK at the request of the Quality Assurance Agency, the New Economics Foundation’s Centre for Well-Being produced a report
entitled ‘University Challenge’ (2008). The report aims to develop a transformative vision of quality in higher education which addresses the well-being of individual learners, the economy, the environment and wider society. In response to the question of what is worth knowing, the report outlines “seven things every graduate should know” (2008:13). As well as what could be described as traditional ideas such as in-depth subject knowledge ‘for its own sake’ and how to apply this knowledge in different contexts, the list includes learning “what makes a good life” (2008:14), the ability to understand what assumptions lie behind how they and others think, and the globally interdependent nature of the modern world. This final perspective is seen as necessary to develop citizens who will address global problems through sustainable development.

Walker, McLean, Dison and Peppin-Vaughan’s (2009) study of professional education at three South African universities provides a specific example of the potential transformative role of higher education. They examined how higher education could contribute to poverty reduction through the development of public good professionals. They examined five professional education sites as wide ranging as engineering and theology and considered in what ways higher education could develop the pro-poor attitudes and action needed to meet the challenges facing South African society in the 21st century. They asserted that in order to contribute to the public good, higher education should develop “professionals who are all critically aware... of the society in which they will work and [are] oriented to understanding and acting on their own individual and collective responsibility to act to bring about improvements” (2009:566).

The examples outlined above demonstrate how higher education can contribute to a broad conception of the public good both in local and global contexts. These public good aims are summarised by Walker: “to form graduate citizens who are self-knowing agents capable of purposeful action for individual and collective-change” (2009:19).

It is necessary to point out that it is not naïve to state these public good aims for what we want graduates of higher education to be and to do. It is of course, impossible to guarantee that graduates of higher education will choose to act for the broad public good but this does not negate the validity of the aims. In the utilitarian conception of higher education it is equally impossible to guarantee that graduates will exercise their skills in order to be an asset to the labour-market.
However the aim of any educator must surely be to do all they can in order to give students the ability to realise their potential; in this case to act for the public good. Fisher (2006) points out that although higher education confers many private benefits on graduates there is nothing that compels them to contribute anything to society beyond their legal obligations. She states therefore that effort must be made, “to ensure that the promotion of economic prosperity and social justice for all is nurtured among the participants of higher education” (2006:159). It is to examples of the kinds of higher education pedagogies and practices that might nurture concern for the good of all that we now turn.

**Tentative implications and some examples for higher education pedagogy and practice**

The emphasis in recent years on preparing workers for the labour-market has influenced pedagogy and practice in UK higher education institutions. Examples can be seen in the development of curriculum toward transferable and vocational skills and the trend among some universities to categorise themselves as ‘business-facing’ defined as those who collaborate with business on curriculum design, research and training in order to meet the needs of business. However examples also exist of pedagogies and practices which aim to contribute to the broad public good; of developing students whose concern is to ‘be and do’ for the good of all, and developing institutional practices which serve the public good. More needs to be done to realign and increase pedagogy and practice toward a broad conception of the public good and the following are a small set of examples which provide hope for the future and point us in the direction we should be aiming for.

Monica McLean (2006) uses the term ‘critical pedagogy’ to describe teaching practices which connect learning to the future roles students will play in influencing social, ethical and political life. She argues that strong elements of critical pedagogy are observable in university teaching and so remains optimistic that, with some reorientation of goals, university education has the potential through its graduates to foster democracy, solve some of the social problems we face and improve the world we live in. Similarly, Walker (2009) suggests that there is an extant university pedagogy which encourages students to be ‘practical reasoners’ who have the potential to produce citizens who will ‘be and do’ for the public good. She offers an example from the teaching of history in which students are encouraged to learn secular intellectual skills in combination with the ability to understand the other and all the complexities involved in this enterprise. In an earlier study
Walker (2002) illustrates how this kind of pedagogy was also used in the study of German Popular Culture in which students are required to apply theory to case studies in discussion with the tutor and their peers. The course which this case study focused on aimed to enable students to engage with knowledge, to think critically about the world, their role in it, and the moral and political consequences of their current and future actions.

One form of pedagogy which has the potential to contribute to the broad public good purpose of higher education has been conceptualised as ‘integrative learning’, which is examined in a study of five university lecturers by Booth, McLean and Walker (2009). This term refers to a form of learning in which, “awareness of subject is more deeply aligned with self-awareness, and self is connected outwards to awareness of others and the world” (2009:930). In their interviews with lecturers across a range of disciplines in arts, science and social science there is evidence that this alignment of learning with self, others and society is breaking through in various degrees in current university teaching despite the emphasis on employability and generic transferable skills. What is here defined as ‘integrative learning’ could play a key role in developing democratic citizenship in which graduates can connect what they have learned with their own lives and with their responsibilities to others both known and unknown to them.

If we assert that higher education should produce graduates who will ‘be and do’ for the public good and that pedagogy should develop this capacity in our students then it is also essential that universities provide opportunities for students to be involved in community engagement while they are still in higher education. Not only this, but community engagement in the interests of the broad public good should be modelled to students by their higher education institution itself. Crucially the leadership of our higher education institutions needs to resist the temptation to be driven by market-forces but rather be committed to social change.

Progress is being made in this area, for example the University of Nottingham’s community engagement strategy outlines a commitment to active engagement in the local community through sharing knowledge and resources, promoting and supporting education and

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2 See [http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/community/index.aspx](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/community/index.aspx) for more information on the Community Engagement Strategy.
promoting civic agendas. Students and staff are encouraged to be involved in local schools and community projects. Elsewhere in the UK, the Northern Ireland Science Shop is a link between the country’s two universities, Queen’s University Belfast and the University of Ulster, and the community. By being linked to community and voluntary group projects students carry out research which is useful for the community on a range of issues including the environment, local history and social policy\(^3\). With the introduction of the Research Excellence Framework’s assessment on the economic and social impact of research, we may see this kind of institutional involvement in the community for the public good increase, albeit perhaps, motivated by pragmatic rather than altruistic concerns.

**Conclusion**

I have argued that the current UK higher education system is driven by a dominant economic conception of the public good – the supply of workers equipped to meet the perceived needs of the future labour-market. I have argued that this conception of the public good is reductionist, ignoring the multiple, diverse roles which graduates will hold in the world in addition to that of ‘workers’. I have demonstrated that when the structure and practice of higher education is driven by this economic concern broader, traditional public good goals such as equal educational opportunity and social responsibility are curtailed; and ironically that graduates are not well prepared to live and work well in the modern world. I have claimed that the public good purpose of higher education must include social, political and ethical dimensions. Higher education should be a transformative experience for those who participate in it, developing in them the capabilities necessary to effect purposeful change in the world for the good of many. I have outlined some implications of this view for the pedagogy and practice of higher education, including the application of critical pedagogies such as integrative learning. I have also suggested that it is crucial that concern for the public good be modelled by institutions and opportunities given to students to contribute to the public good before they graduate. It is this conception of the public good purpose of higher education which, as Nussbaum put it, will “make a world that is worth living in” (2006:15).

\(^3\) See [http://researchservices1.qub.ac.uk/Scishop/scishop/Scienceshop/comp-pro.asp](http://researchservices1.qub.ac.uk/Scishop/scishop/Scienceshop/comp-pro.asp) for details of all completed projects to date.
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2 ‘Careers Training Camps’: A Crisis for the University?

Charlotte Verney

There has been a growing focus in recent years on the role of the University in ensuring its graduates are prepared for employment in the labour market. Pressures from the UK government to create more business-facing universities and produce more employable graduates and, in particular, the creation of the Confederation of British Industry’s (CBI) Higher Education Task Force in 2008, has heightened debate about the role of the University in training its students for the workplace. In 2008, Hannah Fearn wrote “some have suggested that by 2020 the university may become nothing more than a careers training camp” (Times Higher Education, 27 November 2008). In the same article, Roger Brown, Professor of Higher Education Policy, states his fears that universities may become akin to workplace training camps within ten years. The notion of a ‘careers training camp’ and its implications for the university will be explored in this essay. Some believe universities are becoming too focused on employability, they are critical of what they see as a break away from the real purpose of the University, of intellectual development, and they see a ‘crisis’ for the University. But I believe that the ‘idea of a university’ is not set, it is socially constructed and has changed over time. Taking an historical approach, I will argue that Universities have always existed to train their students for careers and that over time, the nature of society has changed and the number of jobs that require formal graduate qualifications has increased. Universities have therefore evolved and universities of the twenty-first century should continue to evolve, developing the part they play in enabling its students to enter the complex labour market of contemporary/postmodern society. Rather than signalling a ‘crisis’ for the University, the perceived changing emphasis on the role of the university in training students is a role that has always existed.

What is a ‘careers training camp’?

In order to identify the extent to which universities in the twenty-first century could be described as a ‘careers training camp’, it is necessary first to define my interpretation of the term. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) defines ‘career’ as: ‘A person’s course or progress through life (or a distinct portion of life)’. It goes on to identify its use in modern times as: ‘A course of professional life or employment, which affords opportunity for progress or advancement in the world.’ Training’
is defined as: ‘Discipline and instruction directed to the development of powers or formation of character’. The term ‘Camp’ traditionally has military connotations, and is associated with a permanent site for troops to be trained in combat. And so, it is possible to define ‘career training camp’ in a higher education context as:

‘A permanent site for the discipline and instruction of students directed to the development of powers and formation of character to enable a course of professional life or employment’.

Under this definition, a primary purpose of a University that operates as a ‘careers training camp’ is preparing its students for employment, or allowing them to progress in their professional field. In this context, ‘site’ (camp) can refer not only to the physical buildings and university campus, but also to anything that bears the university’s name, so the instruction of students is not dependent on geographical location. There are two parts to the role of the university in careers training: training in a specific subject for a specific profession; and, training in more general skills not so much for a specified career rather than to enable entry to and progression within the labour market.

A careers training camp would train for traditional professions such as medicine and law, as well as for more recent specialized professions such as teaching, nursing and engineering. It could also train for new and emerging ‘professions’, such as marketing, journalism and computer networking. As well as this ‘professional’ focus, training camps could provide more generic career training, focusing on transferable and management skills. I will argue that the former function of universities preparing students for specific professions has always existed, in some form, and that globalization and the massification of higher education has increased the range of career destinations and range of subjects taught in UK higher education institutions. I will also argue that in today’s society a shift towards the latter function (skills development) should not be viewed negatively given the complexity, fluidity and uncertainty of the postmodern world.

**Are UK Universities becoming Careers Training Camps?**

There has been an increased interest in the employment destinations of graduates over the last two decades: both from government and, probably as a result of this, from institutions. Kelly (2000) describes the government’s interest as the need to ensure that the rapid
expansion of higher education that took place in the second half of the twentieth century was matched by a growth in the number of graduates who have a “firm grip on the world of work” (cited in Poynter, 2002, p.57). This interest can be seen by the growing number of surveys about graduate destinations. In 2001 the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) published its first survey of employability for the 1999-2000 graduates. Similarly, the Higher Education Statistics Agency’s (HESA) Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey first ran in 2006-7 and now forms part of most national league tables. The Leitch Review of Skills reported in 2006 on the role that education and skills can play in strengthening the UK economy and more recently the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) established a Higher Education Task Force to review how universities and businesses can work together to ensure graduates are developing the skills that the business industry needs.

Many of the ‘new universities’ created since 1992 are embracing the perceived need for employable graduates through a focus on skills for work. For example, Thames Valley University’s ‘FutureSkills’ division seeks to embrace its role in training and even retraining the workforce through close working with industry. Similarly, Liverpool John Moores University has refocused itself as an employer-facing institution through its ‘World of Work’ programme. The QAA reported in 2010 that twenty institutions confirmed changing their mission statements in order to become more business-facing and responsive to employers. More established Russell Group universities have also taken steps to highlight the employability of their students through the introduction of institutional awards for extra-curricular activity, recognising life-wide learning, for example the Nottingham Advantage Award at the University of Nottingham.

The growing focus on employability has been linked to the growth in the size of the higher education sector. McLean (2008) states “the main purpose of “massification” has been to produce technically exploitable knowledge and create a trained labour force’ (p.46). The 1991 White Paper ‘Education and Training for the 21st Century’ identified a gap in the nation’s skills and criticised the limited investment in Post-16 education. The 1992 Further and Higher Education Act was established, in part, to address the skills issue and removed the binary divide between universities and polytechnics in the UK higher education system. The removal of this divide naturally led to an increased number of universities: the 1997 report of the National Committee of
Inquiry into Higher Education identified 115 universities, compared to 31 in the 1963 of the Committee on Higher Education.

It has become clear to most commentators that the UK has moved from an elitist to a mass higher education system is on the way to becoming a ‘universal’ system (Trow cited in Scott, 1998, p.30). With so many students, Connor (1999) suggests that there is no longer a ‘typical’ graduate and therefore not a typical graduate career.

The growing focus on employability and career skills is evidence of the university’s role in preparing students for the work place in today’s society. Under my definition, it is therefore possible to describe some universities of the twenty-first century as on their way to becoming ‘careers training camps’, that is, permanent sites for the training (and possible retraining) of student cohorts for employment, either in specialized professional fields or in more general transferable skills for employment throughout the lifecourse.

**Does conceptualising universities as careers training camps imply a crisis for the university?**

Whether the notion of a University as a ‘careers training camp’ presents a crisis for the university depend upon what ‘idea of the university’ is adopted, and what the purpose of the university is perceived to be.

Debates about the ‘idea of the university’ are not new and Delanty (2001) charts the development of ‘ideas’ of the university. According to Delanty, the first major debate on this issue took place in the late eighteenth century when Kant defended the importance of a liberal education and the importance of philosophy as a discipline that should sit alongside the traditional disciplines of theology, law and medicine. Shortly after Kant’s debate, Wilhelm von Humboldt took forward his arguments for a liberal education and argued that the university should be separate from the state, teaching and research should be combined and the university should not function merely to train civil servants (Delanty, 2001). In the nineteenth century the belief that there was a founding ‘idea of the university’ persisted, evidenced by the continued debates around the importance of combining teaching and research, and of a liberal or scientific education, and Delanty suggests that ‘both the Enlightenment and counter-Enlightenment theories of the university were based on the idea of knowledge as an end’ (ibid. p.39).
This cluster of ‘ideas’ of the university regard the primary purpose of higher education as the cultivation of the mind and the generation of new knowledge. In 1897 a speaker to the Social Science Congress, expressed the view that:

‘It is no part of the proper business of the university to be a professional school. Universities are not to fit men for some proper mode of gaining a livelihood; their object is not to teach law or divinity, banking or engineering, but to cultivate the mind and for the intelligence.’ (Mark Pattison cited in Lowe, 1990, p.10)

From this view, an increased focus on employability and industry needs would be an anathema giving businesses too much influence over the shape of the higher education sector and curriculum, and would certainly threaten the ‘traditional’ ideal of a liberal education.

University then was seen as a rite of passage for elite young gentlemen before moving on to specialist training for their chosen profession. (This notion still exists to some extent in today’s society, for example, the continuing relevance of the Graduate Diploma in Law undertaken by students from a variety of disciplines to convert their undergraduate training into the foundations for a career in law.) It was this conception that directed the development of the university sector over the next 100 years away from the needs of the employers and professionals towards an elitist conception of liberal education (Lowe, 1990). Lowe indicates that civic universities were created from the nineteenth century to meet the needs of professionals in society, but that when they gained university status they began to recruit staff from the ancient universities and strove for academic prestige which, in turn, changed their curricula to a more liberal education and a move away from local industry needs. Lowe believes that history repeated itself in the UK in the 1970s when institutional diversification had to contend with academic prestige. He claims that this elitism was inevitable in a society where deep seated cultural norms blocked development (p.16).

The suspicion has continued in recent years, Roger Brown insists that:

‘The purpose of higher education is the education and empowerment of the individual. We should be recognising intellectual development. The course, and the job a student goes on to, is secondary to that.’ (Fearn, H, Times Higher Education, 27 November 2008).
The Director of the Institute of Ideas, Claire Fox (2002) presents a similarly pessimistic view of the focus on employability describing the relationship between higher education and the workforce as a ‘love affair’ that has been encouraged within academia (p.136). Fox opposes the perceived new role of the university as ‘credentialising’ skills for work and believes that mass higher education and widening participation agendas are fundamentally changing for the worse the nature of higher education. Similarly, Daniel Bell (1996) warns of the danger of universities existing only to serve professionals and industry and describes such a university as simply “an accrediting institution” (cited in Smith and Webster, 1997, p.10).

With the traditional ‘idea of a university’ focused on knowledge as an end and the cultivation of the mind as a primary function, it is possible to concede that a move towards a university which focuses on training its students for the roles they will fulfil after graduation, rather than focussing on opening up their mind, would present a crisis for the university. However, this reading of the situation assumes incompatibility: that the university cannot simultaneously train students for the workplace and cultivating their minds.

I wish to highlight that the perceived ‘traditional’ role and ‘idea of a university’ was socially constructed in the nineteenth century and, that other ‘ideas’ have existed in the past and can exist in the future (McLean, 2008). It is in these other ‘ideas’ of the university that it can be seen that the role in training students for the workplace was prevalent, but I will also argue that this role has been present as part of the ‘traditional’ idea. Whilst I do believe in study ‘for its own sake’, the role of the University in training students for work cannot be denied. It has been present in the universities of the past in some form, and it should remain.

**Historical Perspective – The role of universities in training for careers**

Starting from the medieval period, I will illustrate how universities have from then till now had a role to play in training students for employment, both in training for specific professions and for more general ‘skills’ training. I will then explain why it is not a crisis for the university to enhance the part it plays in this process by diversifying subjects taught and by enhancing transferable skills, given the society in which we now live.
According to Frijhoff (1996), there are three purposes of the university, which he claims were discussed in society as far back as Aristotle: ‘Learning, virtue and utility; the advancement of knowledge, preparation for the observance of a code of social, moral and religious conduct, and training for high office or the professions’ (p.43). Caine (1969) also identified four basic elements of universities in the past, simplified as scholarship, training, research and mind-building (p.27). Furthermore, McLean (2008) summarises the work of Jurgen Habermas who identifies four functions of a university: for technical knowledge useful to society; for academic preparation for professional and vocational knowledge; for the transmission, interpretation and development of cultural knowledge; and, for critical knowledge necessary to a healthy democracy.

Such ideas about the historically multiple-function nature of universities draw attention both to their part in the training of its students for work; and to how functions are related to the society in which they operate. So, as David Watson (2000) indicates, higher education has always been ‘for the professional’; it has always had a role in preparing students for careers in a range of technical and professional areas, but the significance of that role as a function of the university has shifted in different historical era.

According to Anderson (2006) medieval historians are agreed that the universities of the period were characterised by a vocational and utilitarian culture and purpose. Across Europe, professional education was the primary function of universities. (Cobban, 1975; Engel 1983; Torstendahl 1993). In the nineteenth century, Rashdall pointed out that:

‘The rapid multiplication of universities in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was largely due to a demand for highly educated lawyers and administrators to serve the state’(1895, p.456).

In England, Oxford and Cambridge were first established to prepare students for entry into Priesthood. The medieval curriculum was designed within an orthodox framework to develop analytical and expository skills, rather than to encourage critical thinking (Anderson, 2006). The main faculties were Law, Medicine and Theology, intended to train professionals. The social origins of medieval university students illustrates that these were institutions that had a function in society to train and develop a workforce: most students were from the middle ranks of society, some merchants and farmers and, for them,
university offered a means of social mobility through training for the Church. As Anderson states:

‘First the aristocracy, then the broader mass of landed gentry became enthusiasts for university education as a way of training their sons for leadership of their local communities, for service in the expanded state bureaucracy, and for the careers in the more prestigious professions such as law and the church.’ (Anderson, 2006, p.7).

Despite this, it is important to note that professional training was not the sole purpose of the medieval university. According to Rashdall the universities also:

‘[T]aught men to reason and to speculate, to doubt and to inquire, to find pleasure in the things of the intellect both for their own same and for the sake of their applications to life.’ (Rashdall, 1895, p.456)

In addition to the medieval universities’ role in training clerics, Edinburgh University, created in 1583, was known for its medical training; and, what are known as ‘redbrick’ universities, now known for a liberal education, were established in the late nineteenth and early twentieth to serve local industrial needs. (Wright, 1990)

Despite the grand idea of a liberal education and a drive for research in nineteenth century universities, Bud and Roberts (1990) claim that the institutions of this period were not solely driven by the research tradition and as evidence for university’s utilitarian role they point to the development of science and the attempts by some to teach the application of science. Similarly, numerous commentators have drawn parallels between the development of entry exams for the civil service and the reorganisation of the curriculum at Oxbridge. The entrance exams bore a heavy resemblance to the honours exams at the ancient institutions, and figures show that by 1939 90% of senior civil servants were Oxbridge graduates (Lowe, 1990, p.11). As Kearney states: ‘Oxbridge effectively became a training ground for the civil service.’ (1973, p.7).

As well as this role in training for specific professional careers, universities of the past also sought to prepare its students for any employment. Fröhlich (1996) describes the university graduate in early modern Europe as having reached the end of his training period; that on obtaining his degree, a young man would settle down to a career.
University was seen as a preparatory step to a career, not necessarily a specified one. Furthermore, writing in 1923 on the university in a changing world, Ernest Barker (1923) drew attention to the university’s role in training its students for professions, both specific and general:

‘[P]artly with a view to preparing them for a specific profession or calling (such as that of engineering or again of medicine), but partly, and still more, with a view to preparing them for doing work of a better quality, in virtue of the better training they have received, in any profession or calling which they may subsequently enter.’ (p.85)

This historical perspective demonstrates how the history of universities is complex (McLean, 2008), and that even in an age where the ‘idea of the university’ was focused on intellectual development and the cultivation of the mind, the university still had a role to play in training for future employment.

The Twenty-First Century University

The university in the twenty-first century is operating in a specific society (Scott, 1997) with diverse students who are, arguably, coming to see themselves as consumers (Ritzer, 2002). It has already been stated that the UK has moved to a mass higher education system in recent years. Jary and Parker (1998) argue that the transition to a mass higher education in the UK has retained too much of the old elite system; that is, it has not embraced diversity of institutional missions in the same way as the USA (who entered a ‘universal’ higher education system in the 1950s and 1960s), and, its meritocratic access has remained too narrow, McLean (2008, p.46) highlights that ‘the expansion has been almost exclusively middle class’.

Stevens (2004) explores the politics behind the changes in the 21st century in higher education and posits that by 1977 the primary purpose of the University was to produce graduates who would add to the economic success of the country. This involved skills training for a wide range of jobs and for the newer professions. According to Connor (1999) there are now:

‘There are considerably more, but different kinds of, graduates being produced, entering a wider range of jobs and employing organisations, and experiencing more varied employment outcomes and career paths.’ (p.9)
The graduate labour market has increased, and has also become more diverse and fragmented. Connor (ibid.) also suggests that more graduates are entering employment in smaller firms and the service sector rather than ‘blue chip’ organisations. Although this observation was made over ten years ago, it still holds true and is arguably now more pronounced.

What constitutes a graduate career has changed over time. Results from DLHE published by HESA in 2007 show that first degree qualifiers entered into a wide range of industries, with the highest proportion (22%) entering real estate, renting and business, which are sectors not traditionally associated with university graduates. In the same way, what constitutes a ‘profession’ is always developing and changing (Downie, 1990 cited in Watts, 2000, p. 12). It could be said that in medieval times the only professions were the church, medicine and law, and that universities played their part in training for these roles. However, in a modern society the industrial revolution and the creation of the middle classes led to the creation of new occupations, and new ‘professions’ such as engineering, nursing and teaching. Even in the twenty-first century, royal charters are still being granted to new professional bodies, for example the Institute of Public Relations in 2005, signalling the ever changing concept of ‘professions’. This is reflected in University curriculum through the introduction of new courses of study such as BA Fashion Styling (Southampton Solent University), BA Entrepreneurship (Staffordshire University) and BSc Real Estate (University of Reading). Smith and Webster (1997, p.99) argue that the adaptation of university curriculum to meet the demands of society is not confined to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and they refer to the nineteenth century introduction of English Literature and Natural Sciences as evidence.

Some argue that the changes in society, such as massification, the IT revolution and globalization have signalled a shift to a postmodern society (Delanty, 2001; Scott, 1998; Barnett, 2000) which is characterised by flexibility, fluidity and fragmentation, which is a shift from the rationalized modern society that developed out of the industrial revolution.

In line with this shift to a postmodern society, Scott (1998, p.2) believes that British ‘higher education is in the middle of a probably irreversible and fundamental transition’. Similarly, Smith and Webster (1997, p.3) argue that the purpose of the modern university has
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changed, perhaps beyond recognition. Readings (1996) describes the university as in ‘ruins’ and adopts the term ‘post-historical’ rather than postmodern to reflect how the university in contemporary society has ‘outlived’ its primary purpose, deriving from the Enlightenment, to cultivate the mind. Delanty (2001) does not agree that the university is in ‘ruins’, but does suggest that the founding ideas of the modern university are being undermined by social change and are becoming irrelevant.

In this complex-or as Barnett (2000) describes ‘supercomplex’-postmodern society, Delanty (2001, p.6) stresses that the university must reflect the ‘new social bond’ of communication. Similarly Bourdieu and Passeron (1964) suggest there has been a significant change in the cultural capital required to enter the middle class job market; a move from bureaucratic to charismatic (Brown and Scase 1994, p.89). This is evidenced in the requirements for entry onto the graduate programmes of the top ten graduate recruiters, none of whom specify a discipline for most or all of their programmes (The Times 100 Graduate Employers). For employers, it appears that the skills gained are equally, if not more, important than the particular subject studied. The uncertainty of postmodern society makes career planning difficult as there is rarely a notion of a job for life anymore and progression routes are not always clear. The implications of this for the purpose of the university are that they will need to focus on a broader range of skills including developing interpersonal and team working skills, to ensure that students are employable; not just in their first graduate job, but beyond.

Zygmunt Bauman (1997) looks at the diversification of university education in the postmodern society and suggests that whilst universities of the past had something in common, there is no common denominator across UK higher education institutions today, nor even across departments within the same institution. He suggests that the university has become more fragmented, in the same way that society has, but does not believe this is a negative thing. In a postmodern world, he claims, where the future is uncertain and quick to change, the university system also needs to be diverse in order to ensure that the needs of society are met. Others agree that it is no longer appropriate to talk of one overarching ‘idea of the university’ and some claim that in reality, there has rarely been only one type of institution operating in an historical period, despite grand ideas; after all, in the nineteenth century Oxford and Cambridge coexisted with redbrick universities whose purpose at the time was vocational (Smith and Webster, 199, p.99).
Conclusion

Even if we accept that there was a period when the role of training students for the workplace was not the primary purpose of the University, it is evident that it has always been a part of what a university has been for, regardless of the ‘idea of the university’ at the time. Whilst the role of training students for careers and employment, which was once a prominent feature of a university, dwindled in the established universities in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there is no reason why UK institutions today cannot emphasise the part it plays in this, without compromising the quality of higher education provided, or risking academic prestige. Anderson (2006) points out that ‘there is no single, predestined line of university development’ and Engle (1983) gives credence to this point by highlighting that while English Universities may have moved away from their role in training people for the workplace, the universities of Europe and Scotland never gave up this role, and their reputation continues.

A changing emphasis on the purpose of the university should not be seen automatically as negative. Wittrock (1993) illustrates how the university has transformed its nature and purpose in the past: first the rebirth of the university in the eighteenth century; then the growing focus on research; and, now a further transformation as we move into a new society. The university has transformed itself before to meet the needs of society and it can do so again, and such a change should not be seen as a crisis; universities need to embrace change. Essentially what is needed is a move away from one single ‘idea of the university’ and recognise that there can be multiple ‘ideas’ at the same point in time.

I have tried to argue that universities of the past have always had a role in preparing students for the workplace, either for entry into specific professions or the general labour market, but that the importance of the role has been emphasised differently in different historical periods. Warnock (1996) criticises those who believe that the development of skills and vocational training is corrosive to the nature of higher education and suggests that they take a historical perspective to realise this is not such a radical proposal (cited in Watson, 2000, p.3) and therefore a move towards ‘careers training camps’ does not present a crisis for the university. Bauman’s reference to the diversification of the UK higher education sector in a postmodern
society is key. The historical perspective shows how there have been differences in the purpose of the university in several periods in the past. There is room for the UK higher education sector to become more like ‘careers training camps’ without compromising what some deem to be the ‘traditional’ purpose of the university, to cultivate the mind – which we see has never actually been the sole purpose of a university, despite the grand ideas of the time. What is important is that diversification in missions is not translated into hierarchy. There must be recognition that training students for work is neither a new function of the university nor an inferior mode of study. As David Watson states ‘A little bit of calm reflection on what is actually going on now in historical perspective is quite important.’ (cited in Fearn, H. Times Higher Education, 27 November 2008).

Readings (1996, p.192) encapsulates this notion well when he says there is ‘considerable room for manoeuvre, provided that students and teachers are ready to abandon nostalgia.’

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3 Constructing a Professional Identity as a Contract Researcher in Biology

Dylan Sweetman

‘All researchers engaged in a research career should be recognised as professionals and be treated accordingly. This should commence at the beginning of their careers, namely at postgraduate level, and should include all levels, regardless of their classification at national level (e.g. employee, postgraduate student, doctoral candidate, postdoctoral fellow, civil servants)’. (The European Charter for Researchers, 2005)

The question of what constitutes professional identity and how this is formed is perennial and has generated volumes of commentary. In the context of academics much of this has focused on the various roles that academics have as teachers, researchers and public intellectuals and how tensions between and coherence across these different functions can generate a professional academic identity, especially as increasing central control of academia erodes traditional notions of academic freedom (Henkel, 2000). In the context of how junior academics within a discipline come to develop a sense of themselves as professionals much of this work has addressed the social sciences and humanities (Abbas and McLean, 2001; Archer, 2008; Goode, 2006) but rather less has been written about the experiences within science, especially at the junior levels where notions of what it means to be a professional in an academic context are first being formed.

The impetus for this essay came from my own experience. Until recently I was employed on a succession of short-term contracts as a researcher in Biology. These ran over a period from 1997 to 2009 and included working in three different research groups in the University of Dundee and University of East Anglia (UEA). While at the UEA I was involved in the drawing up of a code of conduct for the employment of research staff which was an attempt to construct a University wide set of principles to help researchers in their career development. During this time the unproductive tension between my activities as a professional researcher and the status given to me by colleagues and the Universities was striking; this is the issue I wish to explore in this essay.

Naturally many of the issues identified here are not specific to biology but apply across academic disciplines and disciplinary cultures.
However I will focus on the problems facing early career researchers in life sciences as an example of how the conflicting accounts of academic life can affect the ways in which we are able to develop a sense of ourselves as academics and researchers at the cutting edge of our fields.

Professional identity in the life sciences

What does it mean to be a professional biologist?
We live in a world where the life sciences play an increasingly important role. Understanding the problems and opportunities raised by advances in fields such as genetic modification, stem cell biology and personalised medicine requires an understanding of biology. The basic research that underpins these advances is often carried out by researchers employed on fixed-term contracts (or indefinite contracts linked to fixed-term funding) who have low status and poor career prospects (Farrar, 2002; Sanders, 2005). This creates a tension between the expectations of the role, where high quality cutting-edge research is produced, and its ‘rewards’ which are insecurity and low academic status.

Contractual inequality and research staff
The hierarchical nature of academia has been interrogated in a number of ways with questions being asked about the roles of gender, power and identity.

Gender roles in contract research
Analysis of issues around gender and inequality in the treatment of research staff has sought to explain the inequalities experienced by researchers. These analyses work from the assumption that the majority of contract research staff are female and that this underlies the mistreatment of this group by a largely male management. Hey (2001) describes this as the “feminization of contract research“ and characterises a management style which systematically undervalues these contributions as the staff who produce them who are disproportionately female and part time. Similarly Reay (2004) argues that contract research is a feminized role and contrasts this with an elitist and masculinised academy which disregards the contributions of contract researchers and denies them the cultural capital they have helped to generate (Hey, 2001, Reay, 2004).

There is no doubt that there is some truth to this analysis. However it is not the whole story. Figures from the Higher Education Statistics
Agency (HESA) show that in biosciences across the UK higher education sector 48.9% of researchers and 41.8% of lecturers are female (HESA, 2009). These proportions are lower at higher grades such as senior lecturer (30.7%) and professor (14.7%). In this context it seems that gender is not necessarily a bar to the initial step of acquiring a permanent post at the level of lecturer although further progression is clearly influenced by gender. It is also striking that, in biosciences at least, research staff are as likely to be male as female.

Power, status and hierarchy

It is clear that gender discrimination alone is insufficient to explain the problems faced by researchers. An obvious source of distinction between the different academic groups is to be found in their contracts. As many researchers are employed on contracts linked to fixed-term funding they can experience particular problems. Collinson (2004) describes how some researchers internalise these insecurities leading to feelings of inadequacy and marginalisation. Over time this can erode confidence and undermine the ability of researchers to value their contributions to academic life (Collinson, 2004). This lack of confidence can continue into later posts and it is not uncommon for junior academics to feel that they do not deserve their posts and are impostors masquerading as ‘real’ academics despite their having achieved some measure of success (Kaplan, 2009).

The effects of this on critical thought and the ability of research staff to contribute to the wider academic life of a department can be chilling. In sociology it has been documented that junior staff on insecure contracts feel unable to examine practice critically because they are required to follow the orthodox line within a department (Abbas and McLean, 2001). Academic identity is developed by interactions between the individual, the department and the employing institution; thus it is formed in the context of a discourse within a larger community that provides the opportunity to acquire academic and cultural capital. Henkel (2005) suggests that this identity is under threat as HEIs become ever more centrally controlled and controlling, limiting the opportunity of the academic to develop in that professional discourse. This limitation is even more pronounced for research staff who are even less able to interact meaningfully with HEIs as they rarely have any formal roles or representations at the strategic levels of these organisations (Dearlove, 1998, Henkel, 2005). It can also be difficult for research staff to generate their own cultural capital in these circumstances as research outputs are often seen as being owned by
the principle investigator who generated the original proposal rather than the researcher who did the hands on work.

**Academic identity in the lower ranks**
The basic question for research staff is how to develop their sense of themselves as academic professionals in the context of an environment that systematically undervalues their contributions and provides them with little career stability. In this essay I will examine how national and local policies can affect the perceptions of what it means to be a researcher. Researchers are often referred to as contract research staff or CRS. I will avoid this terminology as it reinforces the link between the researcher and a specific contract and instead refer to research staff or researchers.

**The context for research staff: national policies**

**Identifying the issues affecting research staff**
In April 2002 the Treasury published ‘SET for Success’ (Roberts, 2002), the report of a review carried out by Sir Gareth Roberts to examine how well the UK was generating people with science and technology skills. This report was grounded in the idea that the economy depends on these skills for its productivity. Similarly a review by Nigel Thrift on research careers for the Department of Innovation Universities and Skills started with the assertion that “Researchers form a fundamental element of the supply of skills which will be required if the UK is to maintain its leading position in the world” (Thrift, 2009). Although it can be difficult to demonstrate direct contributions from basic science to the economy (debates about ‘impact’ notwithstanding) it is clear that governments have been concerned to ensure the supply of well-trained researchers (Farrar, 2002) and, as a result, have implemented a number of policies designed to achieve this.

Researchers and the knowledge economy

It is notable that the driving force of these discussions has focused on the role of science and technology as drivers of economic production (Roberts, 2002, Thrift, 2009). Little, if any, attention has been paid to the potential role of trained scientists in wider society despite the importance of biology in understanding issues such as stem cell usage, genetic modification, emerging pathogens and vaccination and the various pseudosciences that offer dubious cures in exchange for money. It is difficult to escape the notion that one’s value as a scientist
consists purely in contributing to the knowledge economy and not in any wider sense of public engagement. For many researchers arguments about their role and value as public intellectuals (Nixon, 2001, Nixon et al., 2001) have taken second place to the more basic issues of job security and status. It is difficult to reflect on the role of the academic and issues of academic freedom and responsibility while being primarily concerned with the ending of one’s contract.

Instability and insecurity

The central issue that affects research staff is the lack of stability. Figures from the Higher Education Statistical Agency (HESA) show that across the UK 76% of research-only staff in higher education institutes were employed on fixed term contracts in 2007-2008. This compares with 51% of staff on teaching-only contracts and 11% of staff on teaching and research contracts (HESA, 2009). These statistics have led to the characterisation of contract researchers as the lumpen proletariat of academia (Hey, 2001).

Although changes to employment regulations have meant that many researchers are now on nominally permanent contracts (Newman, 2008) it is not clear that these are genuine permanent posts and this change may mask an unchanging reality. There has also been some resistance to the idea that research staff should be retained beyond the end of their contracts from within universities; there are clearly some who regard the casual nature of research staff employment as a good thing. In this context it is perhaps worth noting that there are concerns about the increasing age profile of staff within HE (Fearn, 2010) with the implication that a younger generation of academics are being excluded which will lead to a shortage of replacements when the ‘baby boomers’ born after the second world war start to retire in large numbers.

National attempts to address problems faced by research staff

The Roberts Report

In 2002 Gareth Roberts published SET for Success, a report prepared for the Treasury on the career pipeline providing science and technology professionals for the UK (Roberts, 2002). He identified three main problems affecting contract researchers: lack of career structure, unsatisfactory training and uncompetitive salaries which combined to make academic research unattractive. His contention that this would, if left unaddressed, lead to a long term decline in the
quality of the UK research infrastructure was widely accepted and his report has formed the basis for a number of subsequent initiatives. A direct consequence of this review was the introduction of ‘Roberts’ money’, funding designed specifically for career development of researchers at both postgraduate and postdoctoral levels (Corbyn, 2009b). One problem with Roberts’ money was that it was not clear how best to spend it to advance career development. As a result there was uncertainty across the sector about how to use it and hence it could almost certainly have had a larger effect if it had been used in a coordinated manner. Now the Roberts’ funding has come to an end, a review commissioned by Research Councils UK (RCUK), the umbrella body representing the research councils, suggests that benefits consisted mainly in consciousness raising and training skills; and future plans appear patchy across institutions, so it has yet to be seen what the removal of funding will have and what will happen to existing schemes and posts- RCUK will report in 2013 (RCUK, 2011).

The Concordat
The Concordat (Concordat, 2008) is a document signed by a range of both funding bodies and employers organisations which replaced a previous concordat from 1996. The aim of the Concordat is to provide a unified framework for the career development of research staff. It explicitly recognises that there are specific problems in the career structure of research staff and provides a set of principles designed to help tackle some of these issues (Sanders, 2005). Perhaps inevitably for a document endorsed by the funders and employers of researchers it contains few practical ideas and has no real bite. Even where it has been used as a basis for staff development policies it has produced little real change as it does not address the central financial questions that underlie the instability common to researchers. As such it represents another missed opportunity to help improve the standing of research staff.

Fixed-term contract regulations
The introduction of the Fixed Term Employees (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations in 2002 was hailed by many as a watershed in the way in which research staff would be treated (Bunting, 2004, Goode, 2007). In brief these regulations state that no one should be discriminated against because of being employed on a fixed-term contract and that anyone employed for over four years on more than one fixed-term contract should be given an indefinite contract. That this applied to researchers funded on fixed-term external
grants was established in the court case Ball vs. The University of Aberdeen. This regulation offered a new vision for researchers where Universities would retain their research staff and develop a career structure for them and, in response to this, the numbers of staff on permanent contracts has increased (Newman, 2008). However, universities have simply increased the use of routine redundancies and the treatment of the staff concerned is unchanged; after all, an indefinite contract with an inbuilt end date is not substantively different from a fixed-term contract and it is increasingly clear that on the ground little has actually changed. So the regulations have not had the expected impact and it remains the case that researchers who wish to stay on still require the support of more senior academics who will work to obtain funding to renew their contracts.

**Expectations of funding organisations**
The funders of research have tended to take a back seat in the development of career structures for researchers because they regard it as an issue to be left to employers. Meanwhile HEIs have failed to address career development meaningfully and continued to treat researchers as short-term employees (Pathways to the Future, 2007).

RCUK has repeatedly said that it expects universities to embed researcher development into their normal activities. It has also indicated that it expects training to be included in research proposals and has indicated its willingness to pay these costs. What it has not done is provide any ideas about how these mechanisms should operate to improve the career prospects and status of researchers for it is a role they have deliberately delegated to universities. It has also failed to clarify the amount of time that researchers should be allowed to devote to their own career development at the expense of the research project they are working on, a common source of tension between researchers and grant holders. In short it has passed the buck to the universities and has had little impact on changing the culture of research staff employment.

**Summary**
In response to concerns about the supply and quality of research staff the government has emphasized the need for improved career development structures. The regulatory landscape has also changed with potentially profound implications for the employment of researchers. One aspect of increased stability is likely to be the range of skills required of researchers. Those wishing to remain in long-term posts may well need broader skill sets as they are moved between
different projects over the course of their careers. The effects of this on the national supply of trained researchers could be profound. However in general attempts to change the culture in which researchers operate have been fragmented and largely ineffective and a more coherent approach is still required (Thrift, 2009).

University policies and research staff

Responsibility for career development

A fundamental problem for research staff is the issue of who is responsible for their career development. This was explicitly recognized in the concordat which aimed to ‘provide a single unambiguous statement of the expectations and responsibilities of researchers, their managers, employers and funders’ (Concordat, 2008). It was hoped that this would avoid the problem of employers and funders each blaming the other for the lack of support for researchers, which is a longstanding problem. Funding bodies make it very clear that the responsibility for staff issues lies with the employers. Employers, in their turn, shrug and say it is impossible to plan for the long-term retention of staff when funding operates in short-term tranches. It was for this reason that the concordat was drawn up to clarify who had responsibility for various aspects of research staff career development. Not surprisingly the emphasis was primarily on the staff themselves with only a few vague aspirations towards providing enhanced stability from the funders and employers.

Despite the lack of support from funding agencies many HEIs have begun to accept that they have a role in supporting their researchers. As part of this process there are numerous examples of policies and codes of conduct which specifically apply to research staff (White et al., 2007). On one level this reinforces the distinction between researchers and permanent academic staff and can feed into the devaluation of research staff who appear as a vulnerable group in need of special care. However, the perception that if researchers are unable to progress without special measures then they should either toughen up or move on is, happily, not universal and some minor progress has been made in some areas.

Developing and examining these policies can give useful insights into the perceptions of the problems that research staff face. For example, the policy I helped develop at the University of East Anglia is divided into seven areas chosen to reflect the concerns of these staff:
accountability; contracts; status of researchers; support for researchers in developing and submitting grant proposal; teaching and knowledge transfer; career development; and, implementation. These areas illustrate an important aspect in which the development of a professional identity can be problematic: for permanent academic staff they are implicitly dealt with in the normal functioning of a university and university policies tacitly assume that this is the group for whom they are written. This division further marginalises researchers whose needs are not addressed by general policies. That a policy was needed to address problems specifically affecting research staff shows that they were not fully integrated into academia.

Managerialism and collegiality in the management of researchers
The conflict between managerial and collegiate approaches to governance in UK universities is a matter of longstanding discussion (Dearlove, 1998, Harley and Lee, 1997). However collegiality may have little place within the daily management of an active research group. In sciences these typically have a thoroughly hierarchical structure with the Principle Investigator(PI) at the top. Below the PI are the researchers (who generally have doctorates), then research students and technicians. In addition, there are various others who contribute to a research group (such as undergraduates, visitors, medical professionals doing research etc.) who also need to find a place in the lab organisation. Needless to say, the reality is far less straightforward and within any research group there will be a dynamic network of competing interests.

Much of the dynamic of the research group is determined by the approach to management of the PI. These can vary enormously from those who give research staff freedom to address the project as they wish to those who micromanage every detail, engaging in managerialism. Of course there is no single ideal approach, but how s/he is managed can have a great effect on the capacity of the researcher to develop as a professional. This is entirely out of the control of the researcher and, if problems arise, it is often easier to deal with them by allowing the researcher's contract to end than to tackle problems arising from poor management and managerial styles.

It is interesting to note how the rise of managerialism in UK universities has affected the status of research staff. In general, academic responses to the human resources agenda are that it has been a disaster and has led to the loss of real academic freedom and
activity (Harley and Lee, 1997). In terms of research staff status this view can be contested: initiatives concerning staff development and advancement, especially as regards adherence to changing employment regulations, have tended to come from HR and, in some cases, been opposed by senior academics (Gill, 2009).

**Roles & status of research staff**

**Research and other academic activity**
The role of a researcher is, on the face of it, straightforward as it is to carry out a programme of research as directed by the PI, generally funded by a grant for that purpose. Matters are rarely that simple. Researchers are also involved in teaching, supervising undergraduate and postgraduate students, managing technical staff, writing papers and grants and all the usual tasks associated with academia. The only exception is perhaps administrative tasks that are more usually given to permanent staff.

This diverse range of activities is at odds with the usual job descriptions of research staff which state that they are there to do research. Some universities have explicit policies describing this, such as St Andrew’s University which states: ‘Unless indicated in the conditions of service, there is no requirement for those with specific research contracts to participate in non-research duties’. However statements such as this are usually followed by an acknowledgement that additional tasks, such as teaching, should be made available to staff who wish to expand their skills base as part of career development.

The lack of security (Goode, 2007), and low status of research staff (Johnston and Langsten, 2007) can make it difficult to refuse to perform these extra tasks even if they are not contractually required. There are no national frameworks to address this problem and so researchers frequently find themselves being obliged to take on extra work for no additional reward. In general, this is justified as being useful for career development and thus presented as an opportunity rather than additional workload. This acts to devalue these contributions as they can then be presented as an additional development activity rather than as participation in the academic life of a department. Of course the reverse situation can also occur where researchers who do want to develop their skills are not provided with the chances to do so. There can be a fine line between offering staff
development opportunities and exploitation and this illustrates the difficulty researchers can experience when attempting to negotiate their professional roles within a discipline.

**Status within Universities**

The status of research staff within Universities, especially those on fixed term funding, is a contested topic (Archer, 2008, Goode, 2006, Goode, 2007, Hey, 2001). In general University policies tend to acknowledge the contributions of these staff in warm terms. Examples of this are the University of Oxford’s ‘very significant contribution made by the wide range of researchers on externally funded contracts to the research undertaken in Oxford’; the University of Edinburgh’s ‘make a huge contribution to the University’s international standing and reputation. [Researchers] are a crucial and highly valued part of the dynamic and thriving research environment at Edinburgh’; and, the University of East Anglia’s ‘vital role in maintaining and developing the research reputation of the University’. Statements such as these are easy to find in University policy documents. Actions to improve status and job security are more elusive.

At a basic level, academic status can be signalled by the provision of office space. Researchers often share small offices and rarely even get their names on the door. At the University of East Anglia recently new doorplates were ordered. Those for the labs and offices used by research staff said simply “research lab” or “office”. This is of course common across disciplines (Abbas and McLean, 2001) and reflects the invisibility and low priority given to these low status staff.

An interesting area is the question of the job titles given to researchers. These include ‘research assistant’ and ‘research associate’, sometimes with the modifier ‘senior’. These monikers imply that one is merely assisting or associated with research which is often far from the case. Informally, researchers are often known as ‘postdocs’ thus defining them purely in terms of their qualification rather than their role, as opposed to ‘lecturer’, ‘professor’ and so on (Johnston and Langsten, 2007). The very phrase ‘Contract Research Staff’ implies temporary staff with no long-term prospects beyond the ending of the contract. Interestingly this issue has been acknowledged by the University of Edinburgh which distinguishes between ‘early career’ and ‘long-term’ researchers in its code of practice for the management of research staff. However the problem of the ‘disposable postdoc’ remains embedded within academia.
Part of the question about status derives from the uncertain future of researchers. Are more senior academics dealing with future colleagues, potentially worthy of respect, or mere underlings who must be managed? The uncertainty is built in from the very beginning as it has been estimated only 5% of PhD students will end up running their own lab (Newman, 2007). However 60% of these newly qualified PhDs will start out working as researchers in biology (Vitae, 2009). Given that the majority of those who obtain PhDs in biology are destined to leave academia it is difficult for long-term researchers to assert themselves as professionals deserving of status and respect when most of their peers will leave the discipline. Reliable figures are difficult to obtain, and there are probably large differences across disciplines, but there are some estimates available. An often quoted figure is that 10% of researchers in HE will obtain a permanent academic position (EPSRC, 2002). Other estimates range from the wildly optimistic one in three (Smaglik, 2006) to one in seven (Newman, 2007). In biological sciences departments nationally there are more researchers employed than the combined number of lecturers, senior lecturers and professors (HESA, 2009). This has led to the production of ‘an embittered tribe of postdocs’ who have little or no long-term career prospects in science (Newman, 2007). This leads directly to the problem of uncertain status within university departments as established academics must decide if it is worth spending their time and effort on people who may not remain in their area.

In the US the issue of postdoc pay has been a central battleground in the debate about status, perhaps because this varies much more widely across institutions than is common in Europe. In 2000 a report from the National Academy of Sciences, subsequently accepted by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), recommended large increases in researcher pay. By 2008 there had been no increase and the National Postdoc Association launched a campaign to try to have these changes implemented (Russo, 2008). More recently, the latest NIH budget has offered fewer grant funded positions but with increased pay for those grants that are awarded (Kaplan, 2010). The response of senior US academics to this has mirrored that of UK academics to proposed changes to improve researcher job security. Although there are some who support their colleagues and are happy to see conditions improve, there are also those who resent these changes and, for whatever reasons, seek to oppose them, often by belittling the researchers and thereby suggesting they are not worth the investment. It is negotiating
this attitude that can make the construction of a professional identity so problematic for research staff.

Of course the issue of pay and status is not limited to the US. A comparison of European pay rates comparing postdoctoral scientists with similarly ranked (although often less qualified) professionals in law, medicine, teaching and management showed natural scientists paid less than all of these (Parker, 2002). This is hardly surprising when looking at academic pay but the contention that one has to work for love of the subject rather than material reward makes it harder to argue for improved conditions for one can then be accused of lacking seriousness towards the subject; after all academic work is predicated on the notion that the work itself is the reward, not the pay or career.

**Discussion**

These problems are far from unique to researchers in the life sciences. Similar problems are faced by junior academics in many fields. However within science the hierarchies are especially pronounced as researchers are often not eligible to apply for their own funding. This makes the researcher dependant on the PI and encourages a feudal system within departments as all power (and of course funding) is controlled from the top. In these circumstances researchers find it difficult to engage with those who argue that higher education should encompass a moral mission towards the whole of society or those who exhort academics to reach out to wider society (Nixon, 2001, Nixon et al., 2001).

This situation creates a problem for researchers in the formation of their academic and professional identity. Collinson (2004) documents the self-doubt that can be invoked in research staff as uncertainties about their roles and positions are internalised and describes a situation where researchers’ self-confidence is undermined by the fact that they have chosen to adopt marginal roles which offer so little security. Archer (2008) describes the quest for authenticity and success in junior academics as an on-going struggle with a system that constantly threatens to deny them validations. Even when the goal of a permanent academic position is reached it is common for junior academics to feel like impostors who do not deserve their place, despite the fact they have had to work hard and struggle to reach those positions. This is a natural sequel to the uncertainty and low status of the researcher which can be difficult to throw off, even when

Within academia the position of research staff remains uncertain and insecure. Their role has been described as 'the housework of the academy' (Hey, 2001) and, like all housework, across disciplines it is likely to be undervalued. Moreover, the work is likely to come to an end. For many researchers life in academia remains nasty, brutish and short.

**What is to be done?**

Given the bleak prospects for researchers it is reasonable to ask if there is any prospect of improvement in the immediate future. There are some signs of hope. Increasingly universities are implementing policies to try and retain researchers at the end of their contracts. These generally require additional external funding and are resisted by some academics but, even so, represent a small step forward. Universities have also become far more proactive in seeking to work with researchers in career development. However, university funding becomes ever less secure it remains to be seen to what extent these small advances mad when there was the Robert’s funding will remain in place and whether, in the future, further improvements are made. It is important to continue the struggle for improved conditions and prospects as researchers are at the core of academic life and deserve both respect and decent career prospects.

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4 Recapturing Marketing from the Marketisation of Higher Education Discourse

Adrian Mateo

Critics of marketing in higher education (HE) argue that a fundamental and inexorable conflict exists between the intrinsic purposes and values of education and what has been described as an increasing shift towards marketisation or corporatisation, that is treating HE as a commodity open to market forces with students as its primary customers (Bruce, 2006; Gibbs, 2001). Some have asserted that marketisation is an attack on the liberal structures and values that have enabled universities to flourish academically and intellectually (Smith, 1997; Pears, 2010). Others have maintained that the quality of HE, traditionally judged on the basis of inputs such as teaching and research excellence, are being undermined by the imposition of artificial benchmarks based purely on outputs and economic performance. Molesworthy et al (2009) argue that the notion of a university as an agent for change, transforming the individual into someone who thinks critically has been replaced by focusing on the content students want at a market rate, decreasing intellectual complexity if this is not in demand, and increasing connections with the workplace if this is desired ‘Once, under the guidance of the academic, the undergraduate had the potential to be transformed, but in our consumer society such “transformation” is denied and “confirmation” of the student as consumer is favoured’ (ibid. p. 277). Lynch’s (2006) analysis similarly declares that the university is being pressurised to transfer its allegiance from the academic to the operational and encoding the values of the commercial sector almost without reflection. Hooley (Australian Association for Research in Education, International Educational Research Conference: Establishing Professional Identity: Narrative as Curriculum, Sydney Australia, 27 November – 1 December 2005, pp. 2) even claimed that marketisation was an assault on the academic profession itself: ‘Do teachers still see education as a public good, of personal and democratic importance in its own right regardless of the socio-economic background of students, or is education a critical component of material gain and individual, competitive advancement?’.

The bleak canvas painted by detractors implies the existence of a once superior and fairer epoch, an apotheosis where universities focussed on pursuing pure intellectual enquiry with appreciative and compliant
students, and in which state intervention was primarily directed at providing financial support. But is this rose-tinted perspective an accurate and indeed desirable interpretation of higher education or merely visceral rhetoric fuelled by perceived disempowerment - a sort of professional bereavement, or perhaps simply a fear of change?

In this essay, it is argued that whilst there is a close and often symbiotic relationship between ‘marketisation’ and ‘marketing’, they nevertheless represent distinctive aspects of the HE managerial discourse yet have somehow become part of an indivisible vocabulary habitually misunderstood by universities. The aim of this essay is to recapture marketing from the marketisation discourse and demonstrate its contribution as a valid ideological perspective in HE.

**Marketisation versus marketing....is there a difference and does it matter?**

Wikipedia defines marketisation as a process that enables state-owned enterprises to act like market-oriented firms through reduction of state subsidies, organisational restructuring, decentralisation and in some cases privatisation. These steps, it is argued, will lead to the creation of a functioning market system. Opponents of marketisation often cite deregulation under the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, as a defining moment in the transformation of UK HE from public interest institutions into consumer-oriented corporate networks, whose public interest values have been seriously challenged (Rutherford, 2005). What is clear is that the post 1992 deregulation of HE, coupled with the subsequent introduction of student fees following publication of the Dearing Report and government policy aimed at encouraging increased participation inexorably set in motion the wheels of marketisation in UK higher education, a direction which seems destined to continue for the foreseeable future. Molesworthy et al (2010) underline this perspective:

‘Given the latest government funding cuts, the most prevalent outlook in Higher Education today is one of business, forcing institutions to reassess the way they are managed and promoted to ensure maximum efficiency, sales and "profits". Students view the opportunity to gain a degree as a right, and a service which they have paid for, demanding a greater choice and a return on their investment’. (Preface)

In many ways, marketing is a by-product of marketisation, an inevitable consequence of managing rapidly increasing competition and
shifting stakeholder demands effectively. Early definitions of marketing reveal a mainly transactional orientation, ‘Marketing is the management process that identifies, anticipates and satisfies customer requirements profitably’ (The Chartered Institute of Marketing 2010) or, ‘The process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion, and distribution of goods, ideas, and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organisational goals’ (Small Business Notes 2010). Most practitioners were comfortable with this definition right up to the 1990’s. However, rapid changes in technology, an increased awareness of customer synergies, and a greater understanding of lifetime value compelled new ways of regarding the discipline. Marketing guru Kotler (2009, pp. 4) describes marketing as ‘a social process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating and exchanging value with others’. The American Marketing Association (2010) also redefined marketing as ‘An organisational function and a set of processes for creating, communicating, and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organisation and its stakeholders’. Finally, marketing had been recognised as a social process in which a mutually beneficial relationship exists between consumer and supplier and both are collaborators in the co-creation of value. More importantly, this reconceptualisation provides relevance and acceptability in a traditionally sceptical environment.

The notion and application of marketing may be regarded as an emerging field within HE (Hemsley-Brown et al, 2006), but arguably has resided within the consciousness of universities for centuries. Long before a recognition of marketing’s role in identifying the issues and implications of global competition (Conway et al, 1994; Allen et al, 1999; Mazzarol et al, 1999; Mok, 1999; Ford et al, 1999; Armstrong, 2001; Coates et al, 2003); social segmentation (Ball et al, 2002; Reay et al, 2002; Brookes, 2003; Farr, 2003); research into student choice (Foskett et al, 2001; Baldwin et al, 2000); institutional image and reputation (Nguyen et al, 2001); or, the development of market positioning (Binsardi et al, 2003), universities intuitively understood the importance of such key marketing concepts as branding, albeit this understanding was not publicly or formally articulated. Coats of arms, mottos, logotypes, proprietary livery and colours, even uniforms, have and are still used, not only to aid corporate identification, but also equally, if not more significantly, as powerful subliminal symbols to confer perceived status. Similarly, the concept of brand is not confined to the organisational level; individually academics have also
appreciated the benefits derived from nurturing an illustrious reputation. Yet, despite this exploitation of marketing (inadvertent or otherwise) it is frequently maligned, or misunderstood, by those same organisations or individuals (Delanty, 2002; Fuller, 2005; Grey, 2001; Prichard et al, 2003; Trowler 2002; Willmott, 2003).

Disentangling marketing from the marketisation discourse is a tricky business. There is considerable internal resistance to the marketisation of UK HE, manifesting itself in negative attitudes and responses to the idea of marketing. Moreover, universities have failed to domesticate the marketing idea and make it into a home-grown philosophy (Gray, 1991) resulting in the application of alien ideas borrowed from the business sector. Finally, the apparent inability of HE to identify itself with a specific offering, epitomised in the battles between competing positions on research versus teaching and learning, has exacerbated doubts about the relevancy of marketing in the sector (Maringe, 2005). However, as this essay has revealed, whereas marketisation is a relatively recent and to an extent organic societal phenomenon, marketing is not just a set of techniques designed to improve corporate competitiveness but a philosophical framework guiding the institution in the development of its offering and its relationships with internal and external stakeholders. From this perspective it is clear that reconceptualising marketing is key to its successful long-term survival and recapture from the current marketisation of HE discourse.

Reconceptualising marketing in higher education

Research undertaken on HE marketing in universities has identified that whilst senior executives value marketing, it is generally narrowly perceived as publicity or promotion and concepts such as relationship management, customer satisfaction and marketing research seldom feature in strategic discussions (Ivy, 2001; Maringe, 2005). In the majority of UK HE institutions responsibility for marketing is the domain of senior personnel yet often they do not possess relevant marketing qualifications. Similarly, few strategic university documents include marketing as an integral component, suggesting that it remains at the operational rather than the strategic level in the majority of institutions.

As previously discussed, a fundamental source of discontent is that marketing is regarded as a concept introduced from the commercial world or even an ‘American’ idea, and as such has limited significance within the UK HE sector. The prevailing perception and
conceptualisation of marketing in HE by and large echoes this notion of imported wisdom, consigning it to the margins of organisational policy and confirming its use as an effective response mechanism but not as a key strategic tool.

Several marketing conceptualisations or orientations have been postulated and the extent to which institutions apply marketing practices is generally a reflection of their individual perspectives. A product led conceptualisation is one in which the institution develops its offering based on what it is good at doing, rather than necessarily what the student actually might want. This ‘expert’ model holds true for many UK universities driven by a desire to offer high quality and excellence. This approach can be seen in many research-led institutions such as the Russell Group of universities. A production orientation is characterised by a primary concern for the creation of products and services, e.g. courses. Institutions perceive the key challenge as developing and promoting these products and services in order to compete more effectively. This approach is often exemplified by newly emerging HE institutions, who typically also establish niches in specific subject areas or disciplines in a desire to become more competitive. A sales orientation focuses on the external promotion of the university and its offering. The emphasis is on managing image and reputation, providing information and maintaining applications through promotional activities such as external relations, advertising and even direct selling. Acknowledgement of this approach tends to be underplayed, yet is prevalent in the external activities of most institutions. A marketing orientation is an organisational philosophy that focuses on identifying and meeting the needs of its customers and believes success is most effectively achieved by satisfying these demands. In this respect it differs considerably from the other orientations discussed as it places the customer or student at the heart of decisions, making the institution more accountable. Initial research to identify student needs is a prerequisite in the development of courses and services as opposed to the ‘take it or leave it’ attitude characteristic of other approaches. Elements of a marketing orientation in HE are increasingly detectable at both institutional and national level e.g. graduate research initiatives and the National Student Survey. However, the wholesale application of this approach remains problematic as universities wrestle with whether students should even be seen as customers, whether HE should concern itself solely with delivering customer satisfaction at any cost without regard to what may be right or wrong, and whether embracing a customer
centred focus will shift the balance of power from the educators to the learners (Aaker et al, 1995). Nevertheless, institutions collectively and academics individually recognise and enthusiastically accept the need to satisfy external stakeholder demands (e.g. students, funders, business partners, government departments etc.) both as an ethical responsibility and as a business imperative. Presented and applied appropriately, this orientation may help reframe and reconceptualise marketing in an environment dominated by conservatism and apprehension. Two emerging orientations may also help reinforce a reconceptualisation of marketing in HE. A societal marketing orientation adopts the notion of ethical business and social responsibility, rejecting the idea of promoting products and services at any cost. Finally, a customised marketing orientation builds on the marketing philosophy of satisfying customers but treats them as individuals rather than homogeneous groups. This approach is likely to hold great appeal to HE as it would accommodate the idea of inclusion and differentiation simultaneously, in key areas such as individualised learning programmes and widening participation.

**Applying a new marketing philosophy**

Having hypothetically reconceptualised marketing, the institution must now find a way to determine the appropriateness of its orientation. ‘Transactional’ models based on market efficiencies and exchanges and ‘Relational’ models based on involvement and relationships have been identified by several authors (Gibbs, 2002; Li et al, 2000; Hemsley-Brown et al, 2006) and these are now considered further.

**Transactional marketing model**

Conceptualised as a market, the primary role for HE institutions is the production of educational products and services for students in their defined target markets. The fundamental exchange at the core of this proposition is the acquisition of students and funding in return for products and services that increase the human capital of their customers (Gibbs, 2002). The underlying premise of this model is that HE is a commodity that can be managed through an exchange mechanism whose currency is purely transactional.

Typically the application of this transactional view of marketing is expressed through the deployment of a traditional 4 P's model of the marketing mix i.e. product; price; place; promotion. Each element is emphasised and adjusted to optimise efficacy of the exchange and
maximise value to the institution. The product element may include considerations such as the range of courses offered, the diversification and development of new courses and the structure and methodology of current provision. It may also cover issues such as the physical infrastructure (e.g. facilities and resources, use and maintenance of display areas, signage etc.) and branding (e.g. is it clear and consistently applied across all media?, does it reflect and reinforce core values?, does it enable prospective students to identify quickly the institution and differentiate from other competing providers?). The price element may include ideas around pricing structures and variances to reflect perceived competition or different target markets (e.g. undergraduates, postgraduates, international etc.), discounts and incentives to encourage increased applications or conversion, and ordering and application procedures. The place element may include strategies on the location and delivery of courses, how to increase accessibility and convenience (e.g. modularisation, online delivery, flexible timetabling etc.) and support systems such as enquiry handling and web support. The promotion element is generally regarded as the ‘coal face’ of the institutions marketing mix and accordingly given prominence strategically and in the allocation of resources. Typically, it will include considerations about how to position the institution and make use of traditional publicity, mailing, public relations, events, branding, online marketing, advertising and sponsorship.

The 4 P’s marketing mix dominates current marketing approaches within HE institutions, and with its organisational focus and simple to implement solutions it is not difficult to understand why it has gained such widespread acceptance. However, the four P’s represent what Kotler (2009) describes as the ‘seller’s’ view of marketing tools. In other words it focuses on what the organisation wants to produce, how it wants to price its offering, where and how it chooses to deliver its products and services, and to whom and with what means it chooses to convey information. Given the resistance to the marketisation agenda discussed previously, it is clear that universities do not view HE as a market commodity but rather a learning community in which their role is to act as agents of transformation. It is little wonder then that many academics have shunned the concept of the 4 P’s marketing mix and its negative connotations associated with a product-orientated commercial world. The application of marketing in HE therefore seems best built on relationships in which the institution assumes a shared responsibility alongside their learners for the choices and transitions they both make (Gibbs, 2002).
Relational marketing model

Conceptualised as a community in which both the organisations and its customers co-create mutually beneficial value, the HE institution seeks to develop deep relationships where the deployment of organisational capabilities and resources proactively embrace the notion of supporting the widest constitution of learners. This humanistic approach to marketing is founded on the premise that the purpose of the institution is to advance the interests of both human experience and human capital. According to Gibbs (2002 pp. 329)

‘This differs from any neo-liberal definitions of markets and its derivative marketing in that learners’ interests are satisfied even to the disadvantage (in the financial sense) of the institution. This notion of a community rather than a market would not commoditise the learning experience but celebrate it as essential to humanity’.

The 4 C’s, a reinterpretation of the traditional 4 P’s marketing mix, has been suggested by Bruner (1988) and later Lauterborn (1990), as a means of applying the relational marketing perspective. Product becomes customer solution, customer value or concept; place is replaced by convenience or channel; price is cost; while promotion becomes communication. The customer solution element focuses on the underlying needs and aspirations of students and other stakeholders (including the institution itself) in order to identify how to create value across the whole learning and research community. The cost element recognises that the monetary price is only one part of the cost to satisfy and aims to understand the full cost of consuming the institutions’ products and services in terms of time, effort and even individual conscience. The convenience element turns the conventional view of location and distribution on its head and reframes this in terms of issues such as accessibility, user-friendliness and flexibility. The advent of the Internet has revolutionised traditional supply chains and universities are certainly familiar with idea such as e-learning and podcast lectures etc. The communication element rejects the notion of manipulative one-way promotion in favour of shared and interactive two-way dialogue and proactively listening to students and other stakeholders.

In an effort to create greater relevance to the HE context, Newman et al (2009) have extended the 4 C’s marketing mix model further by including three additional elements: Calibre (or Champions);
Capabilities; Charisma (or Collateral). Calibre refers to people and maintains that the quality of an institution’s staff plays a major role in attracting and retaining students. Capabilities refers to processes and suggests that institutional practices and procedures, exemplified by things such as good communications, ease of accessibility and the involvement of students in the institutions’ marketing, can build a significant competitive advantage. Charisma refers to physical evidence and is the visual representation of the institution as well as its tangible manifestation in buildings, facilities and amenities. Corporate identity and brand can be seen to represent an important part of the institutions charisma or collateral but in order to gain genuine credence this needs to extend beyond the use of a logo and corporate strapline and be part of its inherent values, or what Newman et al (2009 pp. 6) describe as a ‘value foundation’.

The 4 C’s model of the marketing mix reflects a student-oriented marketing philosophy, providing an enduring reminder of the need to focus on long-term relationship building in order to create mutual value. In terms of reconceptualising marketing in HE, one of its distinctive and desirable features is not only putting the student at the centre of marketing decisions but also involving them as part of the process itself, Kotler (2009) describes this as the ‘buyer’s’ view of marketing tools.

**Can a relational marketing model work in practice?**

In 2003 US researchers investigated whether there were benefits for universities in adopting a relational marketing model (Arnett et al, 2003). They examined the nature of the exchange relationship in higher education for individual students, and argued that for HE marketers, encouraging students to be actively involved in school activities and improving or maintaining a level of university prestige encouraged the formation and development of a university identity, which in turn encouraged students to engage in supportive behaviours in the future. Relationship marketing was considered to be a viable strategy but success required a focus on the social benefits of participation in HE such as emotional satisfaction, spiritual values and the sharing of humanitarian ideals and not just the economic rewards that may subsequently accrue as a result of obtaining qualifications. Similarly, Binsardi et al (2003) demonstrated strong support for applying the relationship marketing approach based on a comprehensive literature analysis which linked relationship marketing
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to the marketing of services. Hemsley-Brown et al (2006 pp. 329) also recognised the compatibility of a relational model with the nature of the HE services because ‘It is an approach that promotes the involvement of students in the marketing and image-building of their institutions’.

The research highlighted certainly indicates that there is widespread institutional support and willingness to adopt a relational based marketing model, suggesting success in its practical implementation. However, whilst support for the relational model amongst theorists appears to be consistent, Gibbs (2002) argues that the complexity of the education product, the economic role of HE institutions and the current pressure to perform financially may inhibit the notion of relationship marketing and these factors need to be considered before a reconceptualisation of HE marketing can occur. Gibbs describes three ‘pillars’ that support the notion of relationship marketing in HE i.e. learners’ temporality, ‘existential trust’ and self-confidence, which are now critically examined.

**Temporality** - the perception and experience of learning is based on a future goal that extends beyond the present and therefore institutions need to go beyond normal temporal horizons. Gibbs proposes that an understanding of the preferences and successes of learners in formal learning would offer an insight into both the phenomenology of the learner’s own temporality and that embedded in the product or educational service being experienced. To develop a better understanding of students long term goals and attempt to harmonise these with those of the institution firmly resonates with the relationship concept of placing the student at the heart of decision making, however, it seems ironic that Gibbs is openly critical of the economic market philosophy in favour of a more humanistic approach, surely a key objective for most students in HE is the currency it provides in terms of future employability.

**Existential trust** - Gibbs claims that the marketing of education has to provide the confidence that trust can be invested in teachers and their institutions to face learners’ futures yet to be known or articulated, a trust built on mutual respect, empathy and compassion. Again, the notion of mutuality dovetails neatly with the relational model but the idea of students investing unquestioning confidence in their institution smacks of an archaic view that the institution knows best.

**Learner self-confidence** - Gibbs (2002 pp. 332) describes this as ‘... best achieved through the application of practical reason to establish what is feasible for oneself given the potentialities and competencies one has’. An understanding of students’ self-confidence in relation to learning is clearly an important component in
a relationship based model but, is only one element of something far more complex and multi-faceted and difficult to distil in terms of the practical application of marketing. Furthermore, to focus on a single aspect may detract from other issues of greater significance within the relationship model.

Gibbs (2002 pp. 333) offers the marketer a useful insight into the nature of relationships and is right to suggest that marketing HE is ‘best undertaken within a model of collaborative relationships whose vision is of a humanistic process of change not a transactional market’. However, marketers must also reflect issues of institutional background, the nature of the manpower base and the available resources (Gray, 1991). To this extent, HE marketing also needs to base itself in practicality and achievability if it is to succeed in repairing a damaged reputation. It is the author’s view that the successful application of a relational model lies in the individual institution’s ability to domesticate the reconceptualised marketing philosophy as discussed earlier in this essay. The institution should reject any notion of slavishly following marketing practices designed for business organisations or reproducing the position and strategy of competing institutions, in favour of pursuing its own unique mission. Key requirements to support a developing marketing orientation include: the creation of a distinct professional marketing structure; the introduction of robust communication systems; the systematic collection of marketing information through research; the support of senior management; the propagation of internal marketing to garner collaboration and understanding from colleagues across the organisation; and, the involvement of students and other stakeholders in marketing particularly in relation to brand building and reputation management.

The idea of domesticating the marketing into the strategic focus of HE is however further threatened by a failure within universities to identify with their real core product. This is largely manifested by the debate whether universities should be research or teaching focused faced.

**Conclusion**

Like it or not, marketisation is now a feature of UK higher education and will continue to polarise opinions and stir emotions. However, regardless of position on this debate, the unprecedented expansion of the sector over the past 20 years has brought about significant benefits
to the entire learning community. In 1994 there were around 1.4M students participating in higher education, according to the most recent figures released by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) this now stands at 2.5M, a staggering increase of almost 80%. Widening participation and diversity are also key features of this expansion. There are more students from state schools than ever before, a greater number of international students, greater cultural diversity in the home student population, more disabled students and the largest number of mature students than at any other time. This phenomenal growth has also resulted in massive investment programmes to support teaching and learning and develop the physical infrastructure. The range and variety of course provision is unrecognisable from a generation ago, choice was often limited to a relatively few well known academic or vocational subjects. 20 years ago it was unthinkable to have done a degree in Popular Music Studies (Liverpool), Hairdressing Salon Management (Derby), Fashion and Lifestyle Products (Southampton Solent), Watersports Science and Development (Portsmouth), Contemporary Circus and Physical Performance (Bath Spa), Surf Science and Technology (Plymouth) or Puppetry (Central School of Speech and Drama, London). And it’s not only post-92 institutions who have exploited new market conditions, Russell Group universities have also actively developed new courses such as Folk and Traditional Music (Newcastle), Profound and Complex Learning Disability (Manchester), Motor Sports Engineering Management (Sheffield) and Viking Studies (Nottingham). Seen like this, marketisation appears to have enabled new channels of intellectual enquiry and research rather than restrict academic freedoms and interests. A critical discourse on the marketisation of HE is desirable and essential in questioning the intrinsic nature and purposes of education, however juxtaposing the arguments in opposition to marketisation against the realities of some its outcomes as outlined seems tinged with a degree of irony. For example, the dismantling of elitism, so prevalent in HE, especially prior to 1992 (Woodrow, 1998), is surely a universal aim for higher education. According to staunch opponent of marketisation, Lynch (2006 pp. 12)

‘As Europe has become increasingly dependent on higher education to drive the social, political, cultural and economic infrastructure of society, access to higher education is increasingly becoming a prerequisite for survival. We need to challenge the neo-liberal agenda in education, not least because higher education is increasingly a necessity for the majority rather than a privilege for the few’. 
Marketing in HE is still a relatively underdeveloped concept. Its strategic importance within HE has been widely acknowledged by Vice Chancellors and senior personnel but not matched by occupying a place at the strategic table within most institutions or becoming fully embedded within their strategic vision and operations. The potential contribution of marketing to the strategic agenda in HE is significant, it is about extending and defining choice, more accurately meeting the needs of stakeholders and enhancing quality in provision. From this perspective, marketing can be seen as expansive, innovative and responsive, not reductionist or intransigent. However, the prevailing view of marketing is narrow and dominated by a belief that it is based on imported ideas from the business world and whose fundamental purposes are to increase demand, beat the competition and achieve economic goals. Moreover, an emphasis on promotion and external relations activities remains dominant at key levels of university administration. Set against this background, marketing has become inextricably entangled within the marketisation discourse, encountering internal resistance and negative responses towards the concept of marketing.

Recapturing the relevance of marketing from the marketisation of HE discourse will largely depend on two key foundations: reconceptualising the marketing philosophy; and domesticating the concept of marketing at an institutional level. If marketing can drive the institutions’ agenda to build a learning community based on long-term relationships, open communication, and the co-creation of mutual value, it can justly assume its place at the strategic table.

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