



University of London

The future of higher education in the UK: a longer-term perspective

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Was February 2010 that long ago?

- Origins of this talk
 - Libraries of the Future Workshop February 2010
- Asked to do same talk for RLUK
 - but so much has happened in last 9 months
- Revisited presentation – would have to be rewritten
 - but how much in longer-term view had changed?
- Danger of short-term responses
 - The future is more than just tomorrow...*
- Have had to change remarkably little



The challenges of prediction

- Invited to look 20 years into the future
- Prediction an imprecise art
 - extrapolate own preoccupations into future
- Historian knows weakness of prediction
 - what did Robbins predict on mobility, technology?
- Aim: to look 15-20 years into future
 - what do current trends presage for future?
 - not what I *want* but what I think will happen
 - utopian or dystopian?



Headlines from *Higher Ambitions*

- Good days for HE funding over
- Flexible and diverse modes of learning
- FE colleges to have greater role
- Competition for T funding (*what T funding!*)
- Quality in customer-driven system
- Postgraduate education as strategic issue
- Concentration of research funding
- Distinctive missions - *a disintegrating sector?*
- It still looks pretty valid even with Browne & SR



What lies beyond the recession?

- Recession will end, but scale of crisis public finances
- Clear in February that future would be v. different
last decade's HE funding unrepeatably
balance taxpayer & graduate input would shift
would require business model of univs to change
- Historians aware of timescale....
longer-term change of events and crisis
The future is more than just tomorrow
will HE system that emerges be fit for purpose?



Resourcing of teaching

- Taxpayer contribution will decline
tame prediction cf what has actually happened!
- Student support will be fairer and cheaper
- Business contributions?
just purchasing training
- Fees as investment in own future
earnings premium will influence fees by subject
setting of fees high-risk activity for universities
- 2030 high-fee univs have means-blind admissions
- Sector will differentiate - varied business models



The move to a mixed economy

- Financial & legal context opens HE to new providers
- Funding low, fees high, private competition inevitable
- Hard to keep private providers out
 - trade treaties, online provision + govt policy
- Like now but for-profit? Too limited a vision embraced by public univs in new partnerships
 - mixed economy will emerge in complex ways
 - when will a corporate buy a university?
- How will quality & standards be secured?
 - Caveat emptor* or a role for HEFCE in new world?



Globalisation of higher education

- Sloganising about globalisation: what will it mean?
- Where people *travel* to study: transnational educ
UK students will be far more mobile
- Where people *stay* to study: online learning
- *What* is it that people study
internationalisation of curriculum: cosmetic or real?
- Overseas students critical to business model UK univs
happened without public investment or direction
imp for diversity, vibrancy, creativity: not just finance
will business & educational model survive?



Transformation of constituency

- Demography won't drive student numbers 2030
- HE even less than today about 18-21 year-olds
- Flexible learning, work-based learning, credit accum
- End trad framework & boundaries of HE will break
HE as life course stage will be narrow again
rest will be advanced learning variously obtained
- Government abandon control of numbers in HE
- PG learning much more imp
specialisation & market differentiation if able to pay
intensive CPD programmes for rest – online, etc
- No 'student experience': customers too diverse



How many divides more than binary?

- Massive diversification of sector under these trends
- Current conception university unaffordable
- Traditional education some universities
 - special character UK graduate concentrated here
 - very labour-intensive model, assumes continuity
- Skills delivery elsewhere
 - no flat-rate for teaching, competitive pricing
 - HE in FE? or will divide vanish in learning flux?
- Diversity of provision, institutional base explodes
- Far more higher learning – but only part in *univs*



HE as a medium for social mobility?

- End of HE as a medium for social mobility?
role already contested (Milburn Report)
only worked when passage upwards narrow
as with grammar schools
- New diversity sector will reinforce inequalities
costs of 'going to university' + flexible local learning
- Robbins ideal only worked when selective
as higher learning diversifies, ceases to be special
so its role in social mobility will diminish
no longer who gets higher educ and who doesn't



New business models for univs

- Fewer ‘universities’ and more ‘providers’
- Business model of universities will diversify
match mission to finances, activities in new ways
managing risk will become much more important
‘play to your strengths’? pale imitation of future
- HR challenge
end national pay, new ways managing staff
- Bulk of HE no longer provided by distinct organisms
most out of complex network provision
language of collab/merger will survive in retro way
only make sense for smaller number elite univs



Research as a specialist function

- Research specialist function in 25/30 universities
- UK's strength seen as knowledge and imagination
- Relative decline research funding but vital to econ
- Research councils will dominate research funding under greater govt direction – whither Haldane?
no QR so RCs will fund time & speculation
- Interdisciplinarity will become ever more important funders will run to catch up with researchers
- STEM obsession will be seen as product of moment imp but govts will see dangers of dividing science knowledge econ will not narrowly focus on STEM



Univs & business: a new maturity

- More adult relationship over research & KT
- Government & univs will end obsession with univ IP
rare to make serious money – even MIT
current models KT/tech transfer distort behaviour
- Univs will see IP value as not direct exploitation
co-production of knowledge
univs won't shut down IP too soon
rewards in other ways from research/business links
- Research univs funded for public good activities
- Other univs will provide applied services to business
in new diverse business models



Individualisation of information

- Access to digital information anywhere, anytime
- Digital will be normal and we'll stop talking about it
 - less arts/humanities: practice, research materials
 - challenge of access to huge digital data sets
- Means individualisation learning, research, creativity?
- Each generation thinks its technological change....
 - ..means world will never be the same again. But it is.
- People will meet: to learn, research, share knowledge
- Quality of information will become key issue univs
- How to make money when all content free?
- Dystopian future: digitised info, no money to exploit it



Disintegration of university sector

- Global comp, flexible provision, new business models
- Stable univs fewer, more elitist, where research done
- Higher learning for rest varied, networked, mixed econ
- Will grow as % GDP
 - as higher learning mainstreamed across economy
 - spending will grow but won't all be visible as 'univs'
- But idea of a higher education sector will be no more
 - will have disintegrated, survive only in online *THE*
- Is it a utopian or dystopian vision?
- And what will it mean for libraries....?



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