



EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES – CRITICAL FUTURES

Conference Programme

23-24 October 2023. 10.00-18.00
Room Francqui, University Foundation
Egmontstraat 11 rue d’Egmont - 1000 Brussels
and Online

This is the concluding conference of a project, ‘European Universities – Critical Futures’, about the critical roles universities can play on issues facing the future of Europe. Six working groups will share the results of their research and deliberations. Sessions are designed to generate dialogue among researchers and with members of the policy community on ideas for future research and action. ¹

Programme Overview

Day1 23 October

10.00-10.30 Introduction and welcome
10.30 – 12.00 COVID 19, open science and collaborative research
13.00-14.30 Trust - alternatives to metrics
15.15-16.45 Impacts of management technologies on university work

Day 2 24 October

10.00-12.00 Gender inequity and precarity
13.00-14.30 Refugee access to higher education
15.15 – 16.45 Alternative internationalisms
16.45-17.30 Closure and future actions

¹ The project is funded by the Danish Council for Free Research. The project’s website is <https://projects.au.dk/european-universities-critical-futures/> Project PI and conference organiser: Susan Wright, Aarhus University suwr@edu.au.dk

Day 1. 23 October

9.30-10.00 **Arrival, registration and coffee**

10.00-10.30 Session 1. **Introduction**

Presenter:

Susan Wright, Professor of Educational Anthropology, Circle U Chair and Co-Director of the Centre for Higher Education Futures (CHEF), Aarhus University, Denmark

Brief introduction to the project on which the conference is based and the aims and organisation of the conference and a quick round of introductions between the participants.

10.30-12.00 Session 2. **COVID-19, open science and collaborative research**

Presenters:

Amélia Veiga, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences, Centre for Research and Intervention in Education, University of Porto, Portugal

Tim Seidenschur, Senior researcher, International Center for Higher Education Research, University of Kassel, Germany

This session explores how open science principles were adopted in a higher education research project during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how this generated new understandings about knowledge production in an ever-changing environment.

The project identified how the roles of universities were changing during the pandemic, and how several new forms of collaboration developed, that should be fostered in future:

- Collaboration between academics, students and support staff to organise day-to-day operations
- Collaboration between different disciplines in open-science research, revealing the transformative potential of collaboration, data sharing, and transparency in disseminating results
- Collaboration between academics and the public, especially when academics learnt to translate their scientific research into practical knowledge for policy makers and society.

After briefly presenting the research results, the session will take the form of an open discussion focused on the following questions:

- How can we further develop these new collaborative relationships?
- How can European, national and institutional levels support open-science practices in higher education research?
- How to develop the relationships and practical arrangement for academics to continue to be knowledge translators, not just for students, but for society.

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic was a turning point in fostering open science principles, especially in the health sciences. This unprecedented sharing of research data enabled health authorities to make rapid progress in understanding the virus, developing diagnostics, treatments and vaccines, and informing public health interventions. We used similar open-science methods to design, carry out and disseminate the results of an exploratory project, *The Role of European Universities in an Age of Pandemic*. Eight participating research teams based in England, Denmark, France, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, and Portugal collaboratively designed the research instrument and shared data. They collectively analysed the results and disseminated them in open-source publications. The project identified the effects of the pandemic on education, research, and engagement with society and pointed to visions about the future roles of higher education institutions and systems, which are addressed in this panel. Full research results are available at:

https://dpu.au.dk/fileadmin/edu/Forskning/CHEF/Publications/CHEF_Working_paper_Pandemic_study_2023_Final_Version.pdf

12.00-13.00 **Lunch**

13.00- 14.30 Session 3. **Pursuing alternatives to the metrics-driven University**

Presenters:

Krystian Szadkowski, Researcher, Scholarly Communication Research Group, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poland.

Jakub Krzeski, Assistant professor, Department of Philosophy and Social Sciences, Nicolaus Copernicus University, Poland.

Tim Seidenschnur, Senior researcher, International Center for Higher Education Research, University of Kassel, Germany.

This session makes a collective call to action to redefine the universities' current metrics regime. Research on the prevalent use of quantitative metrics to steer higher education institutions has revealed their profound impacts on the worlds of teaching and research and how they are vehicles of marketisation. However, embracing alternatives to quantitative metrics demands comprehensive structural changes, as isolated remedies prove limited and enmeshed in inherent contradictions.

In the session, two cases of European institutions that have pursued alternative means to quantitative metrics will be presented. The first focused on internal processes, how the institution reimagined the evaluation of academic staff beyond quantitative metrics and what impact that had on the academic community. The second case focuses on the external process and discusses opting out from university rankings as a trust-building device in communication with external stakeholders.

An interactive and open panel discussion will explore the question:

- How can institutions develop local alternative ways of building trust and accountability whilst still embedded in a context that relies on metrics.

Background

The four members of this working group (from Norway, Germany and Poland) have conducted research in two phases. First, an extensive literature review revealed two modes of organizing the relation between trust and metrics within European higher education from a historical perspective. In the first mode, trust is a precondition for interactions within the sector, whereas in the second mode, as metrics became the dominant lens through which to view the sector, building trust became an outcome. In the second phase of the research, members conducted fieldwork in three European higher education systems (Germany, Netherlands, and Belgium) on attempts by higher education institutions to go beyond the metrics regime and seek new modes of organizing the relation between trust and metrics. These case studies pay particular attention to how dropping metrics affected the institutions' ability to generate relations of trust in the context in which they are embedded.

14.30-15.15 Break

15.15-16.45 Session 4. **Management Technologies and Unforeseen Disruptions of University Work**

Presenters:

Puša Năstase, Senior Program Manager at the Yehuda Elkana Center for Higher Education and Visiting Lecturer at CEU's Department of Public Policy, Vienna, Austria.

Susan Wright, Professor of Educational Anthropology, Circle U Chair and Co-Director of the Centre for Higher Education Futures (CHEF), Aarhus University, Denmark.

Sonja Trifuljesko, Postdoctoral Researcher, Centre for Consumer Society Research, University of Helsinki, Finland.

Research shows how the quality of academic work depends on effective relations between academics, administrators, support staff and students. Yet these relations have been severely and deleteriously disrupted by a range of technologies intended to improve performance and efficiency.

In the session, three case studies will be presented where management technologies have been introduced for the comprehensive administration of a university, for teaching, and to improve the research output of a whole national sector. These technologies aimed to have 'whole system' effects but were introduced without thinking ahead about the way they would affect professional relations that sustain the work of the university.

The presentations will open a discussion addressing the following questions:

- How can maintaining crucial and effective relations between academics, administrators and support staff be built into the design of new management systems?
- How to ensure that implementation processes seriously incorporate the experience of people operating these systems so they enhance, not damage, working relations central to supporting the university's core research and teaching?
- How can universities learn from each other about the mistakes to be avoided in designing new systems, working with external companies and consultants, and handling implementation crises so as to avoid excessive delays and cost over-runs?

Background

Members of this working group reviewed existing knowledge and conducted new research on three contrasting cases. The first case traces attempts over four years to implement an expensive technology aimed to streamline operations and provide a bird's eye view for managers on all university processes. It shows the serious negative impacts on the university's budget and on relations between leaders and staff, and between academics and administrators, while leaving students out of a major institutional decision.

The second case concerns the local administration of a new national technology for measuring the research performance of each academic and ultimately increasing the sector's standing in international rankings. In the process, the role of a librarian changed from supporting academics' research and teaching to policing them and providing a management tool for the head of department. This disrupted relations underpinning the quality of academic work and undermined the librarian's professional identity.

Third, a case study of the use of remote technologies for doctoral defences during the COVID-19 pandemic shows that they reconfigured the social space by simultaneously expanding its spatiotemporal boundaries and contracting them. This research confirms the importance of paying attention to specific practices pertaining to the deployment of new technologies in academia and going beyond both utopian and dystopian discourses in our critical engagements with the university futures.

16.45-17.15 Break and refreshments

17.15-18.00 Session 5 **Discussion of film on academic precarity**

Academic Puszi is a documentary about academic precarity by writer and director, Georgiana Turculet. Extracts from the film will lead to an open discussion.

This supplements the next day's Session 6.

Website <https://www.academic-puszi.com/>

Trailer: <https://youtu.be/HWf37gHT27k>

Full documentary: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=APm_Mfw5SRk

Day 2. 24 October 2023

10.00-12.00 Session 6 **Gender inequity and precarity in European academia: Current issues and future directions**

Presenters:

Charlotte Morris, Senior Lecturer, School of Area Studies, Sociology, History, Politics and Literature, University of Portsmouth, England.

Katalin Tardos, Senior Research Fellow, Department for Social and Public Policy, The Centre for Social Sciences, Hungary

Veronika Paksi, Assistant Research Fellow, Institute of Sociology, Centre for Social Sciences (Hungarian Academy of Sciences Centre of Excellence), Hungary.

Sevil Sümer, Professor, Department of Teacher Training, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Norway.

Online

Marie-Pierre Moreau, Professor, Centre for Education Research on Identities and Inequalities, Anglia Ruskin University, UK.

Barbara Read, Professor in Gender and Social Inequalities, School of Education, University of Glasgow, Scotland.

A growing percentage of academics are now employed on short-term or hourly contracts and a well-established body of research has identified that precarity has effects on gender inequality and knowledge creation in universities as well as individuals' well-being.

In this session, contributors will use their research to discuss ways of bringing about change through research, activism, policy and practice. The focus will be on ways to remedy the situation by addressing three questions:

- Although there are concordats and policies regarding precarity and inequalities, how can universities ensure they are enacted and how can they be held more to account for their implementation?
- The expansion of PhDs in Europe was predicated on labour markets recognising and harnessing the multiple skills and capacities of diverse postdoctoral scholars, but how can universities work towards more equitable career pathways within and also beyond academia?
- Recognising ways in which precarity exacerbates unequal gendered power relations in academia and research, how can we collectively work towards more equitable academic cultures and processes of knowledge creation?

It is anticipated that this session will contribute to agenda setting for future research and initiatives.

Background

Through a 16-member working group, over two years, researchers from nine European Countries (Sweden, Norway, Finland, the UK (England, Scotland and Northern Ireland), Hungary, Portugal, France, Switzerland and Germany) have shared their findings and discussed them with a network of 50 academics. They identified the deleterious effects of precarious employment on individuals, institutions, the wider sector and knowledge creation. A review of recent literature spanning the whole continent has also been undertaken. Consequences of precarity are unequal gendered power dynamics that lead to inconsistencies and lack of clarity in relation to

career pathways. Women in particular are trapped in lower-level roles and denied developmental opportunities that bar them from progressing their careers within academia and there are barriers to moving into alternative careers. In short, current neoliberal and hierarchical employment practices are inequitable, harmful and unsustainable.

12.00-13.00 Lunch

13.00- 14.30 Session 7: **Refugees' access to higher education**

Presenters:

Marie-Agnès Détourbe, Professor, Centre for Anglophone Studies, INSA Toulouse, France.

Gaële Goastellec, Professor, Institute of Social Sciences, University of Lausanne, Switzerland

At a time when forced migrations are increasing in numbers and complexity, this session aims to identify ways to improve refugees' access to higher education and their successful completion of courses. The session builds on discussions between researchers, refugee students, and teachers and administrators of access courses. It aims to include members of the policy community in the discussion and pave the way for further collaboration to widen and improve refugees' access to higher education across Europe.

The session will address three key issues that affect refugees' access to, and successful completion of, higher education courses:

- 1) Refugees have diverse educational and social backgrounds, aspirations and needs, and each navigates a complicated pathway into residency and higher education. Yet this diversity tends to disappear under generic administrative categories like 'immigrants' or 'international students'. How can the individuality of students with a forced migration background be better recognised and valued through more coherent and better aligned European and national policies?
- 2) There is a complex array of state, civil society, NGO and higher education actors involved in facilitating refugees' access to higher education. Yet this web of actors is hard to identify, and therefore hard to navigate, and varies from one context to the next. How can these ecosystems of information, guidance and support be made more visible and accessible, and their gaps better bridged?
- 3) How can universities get better European and national support to become safer places and sanctuaries for these students, to amplify their voice and strengthen their agency?

Background

The working group has held eight monthly seminars which opened up an original conversation space for students with a forced migration background, practitioners who provided access courses and other support for refugees in higher education and researchers from across Europe. Fourteen contributors from Belgium, England, France, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Switzerland, shared their insights and experiences on the complex web of administrative hurdles that students with a forced migration background face both inside and outside universities. They considered the changing rules regarding migration and eligibility to higher education and students' struggles with both aspirations and trauma. They identified gaps in support and disconnections between stakeholders and student-led initiatives for shifting the curricula towards more inclusive classroom practices. This led to broader analyses of the social purpose and role of universities and how higher education intersects with social rights and citizenship frameworks, with specific ideas about who is eligible for entry into higher education evolving over time. The webinars were recorded and full summaries were written for each

session. A Working Paper synthesizing and putting into perspective the important topics covered during the webinar series will be available at

<https://dpu.au.dk/forskning/forskningsprogrammer/chef/publications/working-papers>

14.30-15.15 Break

15.15- 16.45 Session 8: **Alternative internationalisms – a panel discussion**

Facilitator:

Taina Saarinen, Research Professor and Director of the Finnish Institute for Educational Research, [University of Jyväskylä](#), Finland.

This session will explore how to re-think the internationalisation of higher education in order to take a stand on equity and sustainability.

Keeping an eye on the EU's Social dimension targets, we argue that nation state-centred internationalisation based on the physical mobility of students and staff has reached its expiration date. It reproduces uneven geo-political relations and is Western- and Anglo-centrist, focused largely on English speaking contexts. The aim of the panel is to create a space for discussion and dialogue between researchers and members of the policy community on how to co-create more equitable and sustainable internationalisation.

The session will take the form of a panel discussion focused on the following questions:

- If the internationalisation of higher education was based on the principle of equity within Europe and between world regions, what forms could it take?
- What is sustainable internationalisation and who are we doing it for?
- What benefits would more equitable and sustainable internationalisation bring to universities, their students and staff?

Panel members

Anna Grönlund Head of Internationalization & Higher Education Policy, Jyväskylä University, Finland and member of Board of the European Association for International Education

Miguel Antonio Lim, Senior Lecturer in Education & International Development, University of Manchester, UK

Natalya Steane, Cotutelle PhD student, Aarhus University, Denmark and Coventry University, UK

Background

The Alternative Internationalisms working group has met monthly for almost three years to examine the ways in which new kinds of internationalisation policies and practises could and should be formed in higher education. The group, consisting of 60 mostly early career researchers from all over the globe, has discussed:

- New understandings of what internationalisation of higher education is and could be
- New ways of including previously excluded decision makers and participants

16.45-17.30 Conclusion

Summary of the conference's achievements and future actions