



SRHE News

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SRHE

Society for Research into Higher Education

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Editorial: Irregularity: is the Office for Students fit for purpose?

The House of Lords Industry and Regulators Committee has [decided to investigate the OfS](#). The Committee, with a remit “to consider matters relating to industry, including the policies of His Majesty’s Government to promote industrial growth, skills and competitiveness, and to scrutinise the work of UK regulators”, published 12 questions on which it invited evidence. The first three questions nail it:

1. *Are the OfS’ statutory duties clear and appropriate? How successful has the OfS been in performing these duties, and have some duties been prioritised over others?*
2. *How closely does the OfS’ regulatory framework adhere to its statutory duties? How has this framework developed over time, and what impacts has this had on higher education providers?*
3. *What is the nature of the relationship between the OfS and the Government? Does this strike the right balance between providing guidance and maintaining regulatory independence?*

[Michael Salmon, News Editor for Wonkhe, said](#) on 3 March 2023: “This is much of what sector groups have been calling for, and reflects concerns raised in OfS’ [recently published review](#) of its engagement with universities.” The HE sector’s ‘mission groups’, memorably labelled ‘gangs’ by the late David Watson, [wrote collectively to the new Education Select Committee chair Robin Walker](#) on 16 January 2023 to ask for a proper review of the Office for Students: “... there is growing concern that the OfS is not implementing a fully risk-based approach, that it is not genuinely independent and that it is failing to meet standards that we would expect from the Regulators’ Code.”

The concerns are not limited to people within the sector. Ian Mansfield, now at *Policy Exchange*, former special adviser in the DfE to Gavin Williamson and Michele Donelan, [wrote for Times Higher Education](#) on 16 February 2023 complaining that “The OfS has thus far failed to live up to the ambition of its creators to be light-touch and proportionate. ... However, universities must take their share of responsibility. Despite being part of a mass participation system, receiving significant taxpayer funding, too many do not accept the basic fact that they should be regulated.” Lawyer [Smita Jamdar of Shakespeare Martineau tweeted](#): “I come across v few institutions who resist being regulated. I come across more who are unhappy about the lack of pretty basic safeguards for procedural fairness. People like Mansfield who have egged the OfS on to rush to start investigations carry some (much?) of the blame.” She then wrote in *Times Higher Education* on 8 March 2023 that “the Office for Students’ [published approach](#) to monitoring the risk of breaches of registration conditions demonstrates that it lacks basic safeguards around transparency, fairness and accountability.” Sometimes if you are attacked from all sides you might be in the right place, but the OfS will struggle to argue that case: consider those three questions from the Lords Committee.

Are the OfS’ statutory duties clear and appropriate? How successful has the OfS been in performing these duties, and have some duties been prioritised over others?

This goes to the heart of the statute establishing the OfS, the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 (HERA). HERA explicitly aimed to institutionalise a market for higher education because former Universities Minister David Willetts believed that market competition would ‘drive up quality’. One of his successors Jo Johnson continued in that mistaken but fervently held belief as he steered HERA to become law. However the ‘disruptive’ innovators encouraged as new entrants have mostly created more problems than solutions, despite some small but distinctive successes like the Dyson Institute.

There is no space here to explore the failure of this kind of market, but one repeated motif in policy pronouncements before and since might be summarised as ‘Why won’t they do what we want?’. The answer is not that universities resist regulation (though some may do) but, more surprisingly, is that ‘You can’t buck the market’. There has always been intense competition between HE providers, for reputation and for the things which flow from that - students and research income - but often the competition is not overtly financial. Policymakers failed to understand institutional realities then, and even more so now. Policymakers introduced £9000 fees in the mistaken belief that a spectrum of fees would emerge reflecting quality differences. Anyone in any university could have told them, as many did, then that no self-respecting university would charge less than £9000, for the real reputational fear of declaring ‘low’ quality. The Higher Education Funding Council for England no doubt did advise just that, but HEFCE was of course abolished by HERA. Now we have a regulator which seems as ill-informed about institutional realities as policymakers continue to be.

Institutions actually respond rapidly to market forces and regulatory threats. At one end of the market, conditional unconditional offers by some universities were a predictable and rational response to accentuated competition for students. A combination of shame and regulatory threat forced their abandonment. At the other end, the declining real income from home undergraduate students drives expansion of international student numbers with higher fees at the same time as well-qualified home applicants are rejected - a saga which is yet to play out but may have [toxic consequences](#) for government. And there are growing lacunae of provision in some geographical areas and in some subjects, as market behaviour which makes sense for institutions delivers irrational distribution of provision across the country. This is market failure – because we have the wrong kind of legally-enacted market, and the wrong kind of regulation. The OfS’s duties may be clear, but they are not appropriate.

How closely does the OfS’ regulatory framework adhere to its statutory duties? How has this framework developed over time, and what impacts has this had on higher education providers?

[Andrew Sentance \(Cambridge Econometrics\) argued in The Times](#) on 14 February 2023 that there has been a broad failure of regulation since privatisation and it was time for a complete overhaul. The OfS may be an example, but it is probably untypical because it was so likely to fail. The history of OfS deserves to be written as a case study in regulatory failure, and one chapter will surely start with former Director of Fair Access [Les Ebdon’s accurate prediction](#) that “I can tell you exactly what the OfS will do. It will do whatever the government of the day wants it to do.” OfS shortcomings were at first masked by the skills and knowledge of its first chair, [Sir Michael Barber](#), and first CEO Nicola Dandridge. Barber had been in and around government and HE for many years, and though not popular in HE was deeply thoughtful and knowledgeable both about the sector’s performance and about the nature of regulation. Dandridge had been CEO of Universities UK with a broad appreciation of the contribution of the whole range of the HE sector. They were respected and trusted, or at least given the benefit of any doubt, as they sought to respond to the growing range of issues which the government laid at the door of the OfS, now including unexplained grade inflation, harassment and sexual misconduct, mental health and well-being, freedom of speech and increasing the diversity of provision.

The shortcomings of the OfS might even have been overcome through evolutionary change, but the government, with [Gavin Williamson](#) then still Secretary of State for Education, doubled down on its earlier mistakes when it replaced Barber and Dandridge (see below), destroying the relationship between the OfS and the sector as it struck entirely the wrong balance for a supposedly independent regulator.

What is the nature of the relationship between the OfS and the Government? Does this strike the right balance between providing guidance and maintaining regulatory independence?

[The notes to the 2017 Act](#) say: “This Act creates a new non-departmental public body, the Office for Students (OfS), as **the main regulatory body, operating at arm’s length from Government**, and with statutory powers to regulate providers of higher education in England.” (emphasis added). It was rumoured that Barber sought a second term as OfS chair but was denied. Former UUK chair Sir Ivor Crewe (former VC, Essex) was interviewed, as Sonia Sodha and James Tapper reported for *The Observer* on 14 February 2021: “Perhaps it was the long passage in Professor Sir Ivor Crewe’s book *The Blunders of Our Governments* about the way ministers’ mistakes never catch up with them that led Gavin Williamson to reject the expert as the new head of the [Office for Students](#). Or maybe the education secretary was put off by the section of the 2013 book, written with the late Anthony King, dealing with how ministers put underqualified, inexperienced people in charge of public bodies. The job of independent regulator of higher education in England was instead handed to James Wharton, a 36-year-old former Tory MP with no experience in higher education who ran Boris Johnson’s leadership campaign.”

The [Education Select Committee questioned Lord Wharton of Yarm](#) on 5 February 2021 and endorsed his appointment, which was [announced by OfS](#) on 8 February 2021. [Rob Merrick reported for The Independent](#) on 2 February 2021 that Lord Wharton had been subject to ‘hard questioning’, in the course of which he said he didn’t see why he could not retain the whip, nor why his role as Boris Johnson’s campaign manager should raise any conflict of interest issues. So the ‘independent’ regulator was to have a partisan chair who would retain the government whip. Conflict of interest issues raised themselves almost immediately, as Lord Wharton was revealed to be a paid adviser to a company seeking to build a cable connection through land at the University of Portsmouth, which had also made donations to several Conservative MPs.

[Wharton’s appointment was greeted with incredulity in HE](#), but with no signs of embarrassment on his part; he even brazenly secured the [appointment of Rachel Houchen, the wife of a friend and political colleague](#), to the OfS Board, which has just two people with extensive and current HE institutional experience, one from Oxford and one from UCL. [Chris Parr of Research Professional News](#) elicited the surprising information from the OfS on 13 March 2023 that the OfS Chair has only visited [five universities](#) since his appointment more than 2 years ago - Nottingham, King’s College London, Cambridge, Sheffield Hallam University and The Engineering and Design Institute in London.

OfS, ‘having regard to ministers’ as statute demands, started to leave HE realities behind. DfE wrote frequent letters to the OfS and the OfS jumped to respond. An OfS [consultation document](#) issued on 26 March 2021 put into practice the ‘instructions’ received earlier from Secretary of State Gavin Williamson, proposing to steer more funds to STEM subjects and, among other things, halve additional funding for performing arts, media studies and archaeology courses. *WonkHE*’s David Kernohan gave [his critical analysis](#) on the same day. [OfS announced](#) on 30 March 2021 that after the first phase of a review of the NSS, commissioned by Universities Minister Michele Donelan, there would be ‘major changes’ including dropping all references to ‘student satisfaction’. Consistent reports that 85% or more of students in most universities are satisfied with their experience would be embarrassing for a government determined to prove otherwise.

Not a buffer, an irregulator

In the past funding councils were statutorily responsible for in effect providing a buffer between HE and government, to regulate excesses on either side. There is no danger of ‘provider capture’ now that the arm’s-length relationship with government has such short arms. However the limitations of

the OfS are being increasingly exposed, not least by the remaining Lords Committee questions, especially No 4: *Does the OfS have sufficient powers, resources and expertise to meet its duties? How has its expertise been affected by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's decision not to continue as the OfS' Designated Quality Body?*

The QAA withdrew as DQB because the OfS expectations were incompatible with QAA's broader remit and international roles and indeed the requirements of the European Association for Quality Assurance (ENQA) – which makes it unlikely that an international provider in Europe would agree to [take its place as DQB](#). The OfS as 'interim' quality body has lived up to its threat to put '[boots on the ground](#)'; even though repeated tweaks of its [Key Performance Measures](#) have not yet produced any persuasive identification of 'low quality courses'.

Nor has OfS shown that it will take any notice of widespread HE opinion, as UUK's Charlotte Snelling reported in despair [in her Wonkhe blog](#) on 31 October 2022. On 9 March 2023 [OfS announced a consultation](#) on how it should have its investigations funded. The [OfS has powers to make such charges](#) following orders laid in Parliament only in December 2022, and "This consultation is not seeking views on the powers that the Regulations give the OfS or whether we should seek to recover the costs of our investigations. We are also not seeking views on matters relating to the OfS's approach to monitoring registered providers, which may lead to us opening or conducting investigations." The OfS plans to recover all staff and other costs attributable to the investigation, which it is entitled to do by those orders. It is a sham 'consultation', since [it is clear what is intended](#) and it is wholly predictable that the OfS will do almost exactly what is proposed.

The role of buffer was condemned as 'backward-looking' by Jo Johnson in his [recent evidence](#) to the Lords Committee; for good measure he also described QAA as a legacy from a previous era, even though he made clear the undesirability of OfS being more than an interim quality body. But we might at least expect the OfS to show some understanding and appreciation of the difficulties which institutions face, especially with rapidly declining levels of real income from tuition fees. Instead OfS put its fees up by 13%: Gloucestershire VC Stephen Marston, a former senior civil servant who also worked in HEFCE, said [in Times Higher Education](#) on 16 January 2023 that the increase was unacceptable. [John Morgan reported](#) in *THE* on the same day that the 'shameful' 13% rise would push the largest universities' fees above £200,000. OfS chief executive [Susan Lapworth blogged](#) shamelessly on 26 January 2023 about how OfS plans to 'refresh its engagement' with universities and other providers.

To sum up, in [the words of Paul Ashwin \(Lancaster\) and former Secretary of State Charles Clarke](#):

"Overall, we have a situation in which the OfS has become more interventionist to protect 'the student interest', apparently as defined by ministers and certain sections of the media, while its expertise to understand what such interventions involve has fallen significantly. Moreover, it is very unclear what forms of intervention the OfS considers could be effective in changing university behaviours in the desired direction. Together, these points represent a serious challenge to the legitimacy of the OfS as a regulator."

Effective regulation in higher education depends on the willing, or at least grudging, consent of the regulated, but that consent has been deliberately dismantled. Instead the Office for Students is collapsing in an orgy of partisanship and wilful disregard for the real interests of higher education and its students.

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Editorial policy

SRHE News aims to comment on recent events, publications, and activities in a journalistic but scholarly way, allowing more human interest and unsupported speculation than any self-respecting journal, but never forgetting its academic audience and their concern for the professional niceties. If you would like to suggest topics for inclusion in future issues, to contribute an item, or to volunteer a regular contribution, please contact rob.cuthbert@uwe.ac.uk. We aim to be legal, decent, honest, truthful, opinionated and informed by scholarship. We identify named individuals with their employing institutions. *News* content is written by the editor except where authors are identified or sources are acknowledged. *Comments and suggested additions to editorial policy are welcome.*

Future editions of *SRHE News*

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The SRHE Blog

We welcome contributions at any time for [the SRHE Blog](#), which is read in more than 100 countries across the world. Blog posts may also appear as items in *SRHE News*, and vice-versa. Some blog posts are now being published in more than one language, and contributions may be submitted in languages other than English. Please email contributions, in any language, to rob.cuthbert@uwe.ac.uk or rob.gresham@srhe.ac.uk.

Contributions and comments from SRHE members keep *News* in touch with what is going on in higher education research around the world: please let the editor know of any personal news or contributions you would like to submit for future issues. Just email rob.cuthbert@uwe.ac.uk.

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Government and Higher Education Policy

Policy and funding in England

Ministerial letter to universities

Yet [another ministerial letter](#), but to be fair it is the first from Robert Halfon, Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education, written on 18 January 2023. It ran to four pages and encouraged T-levels and degree apprenticeships, accompanied by a few platitudes on admissions.

[Jonathan Simons of Public First wrote for CapX](#) on 7 February 2023 that the Cabinet reshuffle involving creation of the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology had failed to solve the issue of what to do with universities, which remain under the supervision of the DfE.

New Chief Scientific Adviser

Government announced on 20 February 2023 that Professor Dame Angela McLean, currently Chief Scientific Adviser for the Ministry of Defence, had been appointed as the [new Government Chief Scientific Adviser](#).

Russell Group blasts government priorities

Tim Bradshaw, CEO of the Russell Group, [blogged for HEPI](#) on 21 January 2023, lambasting the government for promulgating real-terms cuts to student maintenance and a 13% increase in the OfS budget in the same week: "... the Government cares more about generating red tape than it does about whether university students have enough to eat."

Universities make cities great

HEPI and the UPP Foundation commissioned a survey leading to a February 2023 report on [Public Attitudes to Higher Education](#), launched at a seminar on 30 March 2023, and accompanied by [a HEPI blog](#). Well worth a look: "... there are sound reasons why it is sometimes said that **the difference between a regular city and a great city is the presence of a university.**"

Free speech bill

Josh Freeman brought us up to date [for HEPI](#) on 1 February 2023, and Andrew Boggs (Oxford/Kingston) asked some searching questions about how the Bill would actually work in [his Wonkhe blog](#) on 2 February 2023. Jim Dickinson was still hoping against hope that some sort of workable compromise might emerge, in [his Wonkhe blog](#) on 8 February 2023. David Kernohan of *Wonkhe* provided [another update](#) on 17 March 2023. Nick Hillman wrote an over-excited [review](#) of *Freedom of Speech in Universities: Islam, Charities and Counter-terrorism* by Alison Scott-Baumann and Simon Perfect (both SOAS), in which he said "the authors condemn the common idea that student unions should avoid political campaigning that is not focused on students. They envisage students backing a motion that devotes resources to protesting about a national economic policy and argue 'we think their students' union should have at least the possibility of enacting the motion if they so wish.' This sounds more like finding an excuse to divert charitable funds from their proper use than protecting free speech. If a group of students want to campaign against a national economic policy, there are plenty of existing and legitimate routes for them to do so (including joining a political party) aside from (mis)using their fellow students' charitable financial resources."

As and when the Bill becomes law it will create a role of free speech 'tsar' within OfS, and [John Morgan in THE on 31 January 2023 reported](#) on a supposed 'campaign' to install HEPI's Nick Hillman in the role, for which Arif Ahmed (Cambridge) had earlier been touted as favourite. Eugenics enthusiast Toby Young, [once briefly appointed to the OfS Board](#) and then the inventor of a 'Free Speech Union', favours Ahmed, which provides a sound guide as to which candidate would be preferable.

The adoption of culturally contentious innovations

Mir Usman Ali (Maryland) used the example of citizen oversight of the police for [his article in Policy Studies Journal](#) (online 23 February 2023), but he might perhaps have used the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill: “Cultural contentiousness is defined as an attribute of innovation due to which it encounters resistance because of its incompatibility with hegemonic cultural assumptions. ... culturally contentious innovations are likely to be adopted when antecedents have *productive symbolic force*, i.e., they reveal contradictions between dominant cultural assumptions and the material outcomes of existing institutions or empower social actors to resolve such contradictions. However, antecedents with *incapacitative symbolic force* tend to obfuscate the above contradictions or decrease social actors’ capacity to resolve them, encouraging the adoption of less contentious innovation.”

Are university campuses breeding grounds for extremism?

Wonkhe’s Jim Dickinson thought there was more evidence for it 20 years ago than there is now, in [his 8 February 2023 reflection](#) on the government’s long awaited (and internally delayed) [independent review of Prevent](#).

You’re not good enough. But would you mind carrying on for a while?

After the carnage of the ITT review, DfE added insult to injury by asking the previously ‘fantastic’, but no longer accredited, North Wiltshire SCITT if it would mind carrying on with another provider for a while, because otherwise there would be a ‘black hole’ of provision in the area. [Amy Walker had the story for Schools Week](#) on 20 January 2023. Predictably there are now stories of the managers and staff of dis-accredited providers being offered large sums to switch to new providers. Launching a new Titanic with the same deckchairs. Of course, the government sank the last one, and there was nothing wrong with the deckchairs. [Jack Worth \(NFER\) tweeted](#) on 27 February that ITT application statistics for 2023 were so bad that this year looks as if it might be worse than last year: “... primary 15% lower than same time last year ... secondary 2% higher despite big bursary uplifts”. [David Spendlove \(Manchester\) tweeted](#) about an Ofsted report published on 13 March about an ITT provider rated mostly ‘outstanding’ but denied accreditation: “Explain how this University Ofsted ITE report published today can be for the same provider who didn’t get accredited? Either [@Ofstednews](#) is irrelevant or [@educationgovuk](#) has an agenda (or both). Once again those implicated in the [#ITMarketReview](#) should be deeply embarrassed.” Steve West (UWE), [the UUK President, replied](#): “Another example of how ideology drives bad decision making in politics. With Teacher training at an all time low and shortages in the classroom why would anyone think that stopping good and outstanding providers continuing to deliver ITT is a sound decision?”

Why not a graduate tax?

Nick Hillman blogged for HEPI on 9 January 2023 recalling (many) previous debates on this topic, and in particular the 2003 document [Why not a Pure Graduate Tax](#), produced by the old Department for Education and Skills.

FE capital projects jeopardised by reclassification of FE colleges as public bodies

Shadow Skills Minister [Toby Perkins wrote in FE News](#) on 19 January 2023 about the consequences of the reclassification of FE colleges as public bodies, and the threat to current college plans from ‘Ministerial inaction’.

Are universities public or private organisations?

The question often posed by the late David Watson was addressed in a [superbly authoritative HEPI blog](#) on 21 March 2023 by Julian Gravatt, Deputy Chief Executive of the Association of Colleges. He notes that “Universities are currently classified as ‘not for profit institutions serving households’ in the

UK national accounts. They've been in this category for decades and this is the status currently under review. A review that is taking quite some time. The ONS first announced their review of the status of universities six years and seven higher ministers ago, in January 2017. In their most recent statement, [published on 28 February 2023](#), they say they expect to make a decision by the end of 2023." When the ONS recently reclassified FE colleges as public institutions it took just a few hours for DfE/Treasury to institute new financial controls, but Gravatt thinks that the same outcome is less likely for universities. But it would be as well to be prepared ...

When bureaucratic expertise comes under attack

The [article by Johan Christensen \(Leiden\) in Public Administration](#) said: "what constitutes relevant knowledge and skills for bureaucrats is regularly contested—both by politicians and bureaucrats—and subject to change. How can we explain the processes of contestation and change in the expertise of policy bureaucracies? The article presents a theoretical framework for analyzing the politics of bureaucratic expertise. It proposes the concept of "expertise bargains" to capture the understanding between politicians and bureaucrats about the knowledge and skills of civil servants. Based on a transactional view of authority in bureaucratic politics, it argues that the terms of this expertise bargain are mutually defined by politicians and bureaucrats through a dynamic bargaining process."

Would the government really let a university go bust?

[David Kernohan thought perhaps not](#), in his *Wonkhe* piece on 5 March 2023.

DfE has returned almost a quarter of ringfenced apprenticeship funding to the Treasury

Many have tried, but none succeeded until Billy Camden of [FE News on 6 March 2023](#) got the Treasury and DfE to admit that since ringfenced apprenticeship funding began in 2017 almost £2billion, about 23% of total funds, has been returned unspent by the DfE.

Horizon talks can begin as soon as the 'Windsor Framework' on Northern Ireland is implemented

President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen has confirmed she is ready to begin talks immediately on United Kingdom participation in Horizon Europe, the European Union's flagship research programme. [Brendan O'Malley reported for University World News](#) on 28 February 2023 that at the press conference announcing the Framework she said "... although it is for now only an agreement in principle, "the moment it is implemented, I am happy to start immediately, right now, the work on an association agreement, which is the pre-condition to join Horizon Europe"."

How academics and policymakers get together

Taran Thune and colleagues from the University of Oslo wrote [in Studies in Higher Education](#) (online 15 March 2023): "Through two large Norwegian surveys of academics and policymakers, we look at the characteristics of the academics that are engaged in various forms of knowledge exchange with policymakers – and vice versa – as well as the channels and mechanisms of knowledge exchange seen from both sides. Through comparing the patterns that emerge in the two studies, we discuss how this exchange arena, which we conceptualise as a 'co-production space' involves a small number of individuals with similar experiences and practices that set them apart from their peers."

What do arts and humanities graduates contribute to society?

Roberta Comunian (King's College London), Sarah Jewell (Reading) and Tamsyn Dent (King's College London) had an [article in Arts and Humanities in Higher Education](#) (online 27 March 2023) reporting their research using the 2018 Eurograduate data set. "Our analysis enables an understanding of the utilisation of A&H graduates' knowledge and skills in the current employment market (job-qualification match) and more specifically, their contribution to legal, social and cultural occupations. ... we examine graduates' volunteering activity during and after their degree, alongside other forms of civic engagement, including political and social action."

Moving with the times: The growing need for better graduate mobility data *by Tej Nathwani*



As SRHE noted in their summary of the [theme of the 2022 conference](#), one of the current areas of discussion is the relationship between student mobility and outcomes. For example, the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) have used the Longitudinal Education Outcomes dataset to explore [trends in graduate mobility and earnings in England](#). While mobility is correlated with individual destinations, there are also wider macroeconomic consequences resulting from the extent to which graduates move around the country.

In a separate paper by the Resolution Foundation and the Centre for Economic Performance, researchers at the two organisations highlighted how one of the key factors that explains [variations in productivity across areas](#) are human capital levels – measured by the share of graduates in the locality. Hence, while providers can help with widening participation and upskilling the labour force in our most deprived regions, the full benefits of this for the vicinity may only be realised if those individuals who study in higher education choose not to move out of the area or region. ...

Read the full blog [here](#).

Tej Nathwani is a Principal Researcher (Economist) at HESA, which is now part of Jisc. Feedback on our mobility marker is most welcome. Please send these to pressoffice@hesa.ac.uk. To learn more about Graduate Outcomes, visit www.graduateoutcomes.ac.uk or [view the latest national level official statistics](#). To be kept updated on our publication plans and latest research releases, please join our [mailing list](#).

The Polytechnics legacy – continuing to break down the academic/vocational divide in the twenty-first century *by Kat Emms*



For two years [Edge Foundation](#) has been drawing together lessons from past education policies. Government is at risk of institutional amnesia for a variety of reasons, such as a high level of organisational churn ([Stark, 2018](#)) and at Edge we believe it is essential that decision-making about future policy builds on and adapts evidenced best practice from the past, in order to avoid repeatedly falling into the same traps. As part of Edge's [Learning from the Past series](#) one recent initiative was SRHE Fellow Professor [Gareth Parry's \(Sheffield\) paper on Polytechnics](#). ...

Read the full blog [here](#).

[Katherine Emms](#) is Senior Education and Policy Researcher at the Edge Foundation. Her main areas of research cover higher education, vocational education, skills shortages and employability skills.

What difference does national HE policy make to institutional practice?

Carvalho Carolina (Federal University of ABC, Brazil) and colleagues from Finland reported their research in [Evolving Pedagogy- Electronic Journal](#) on 24 February 2023: “educational practices related to digitalisation, working life orientation, the competence-based curriculum, improving the competences and methods of the teaching staff, learning environments and their quality, and student counselling and guidance are strongly emphasised in practice at the HEIs. Internationalisation, entrepreneurship and sustainable development were mentioned rarely. The different missions of universities and universities of applied sciences (UAS) are evidently clear, especially in their orientation towards working life. In the universities, the curricula draw strongly from the latest research while in the UASs the orientation was strongly practice-based.”

Office for Students

OfS v QAA

[David Kernohan mused for *Wonkhe*](#) on 26 January 2023 about why OfS seemed so keen to criticise QAA as its (former) Designated Quality Body. OfS published their [latest set of key performance measures](#) on 23 March 2023.

Regulation by the Office for (no) Students

That indefatigable observer of OfS registers, Mike Ratcliffe (Nottingham Trent), used his [Moremeansbetter blog](#) on 9 February 2023 to note no fewer than eight providers regulated by the OfS who had no students, exploring some of the possible consequences and regulatory loopholes which might arise.

OfS changes its approach to regulating sexual harassment

[OfS issued a consultation](#) on 23 February 2023 because its hopes for self-regulation by HE providers had not led overall to a satisfactory response. It was therefore proposing a new condition of registration on universities and colleges which “would achieve the consistent level of protection for all students that self-regulation has not delivered.” [Wonkhe’s Jim Dickinson welcomed](#) the new approach; [Wonkhe’s Sunday Blake said it didn’t go far enough](#).

OfS gives a £48million boost to performing arts

Problem 1: many smaller specialist institutions missed out on the ‘world class funding’ that used to provide some of their income, and are struggling

Problem 2: the new Minister, Robert Halfon, is a longstanding supporter of apprenticeships and will want to see this reflected in the way OfS does business

Solution: bung some funding to the ‘non-world class’ specialist providers but tie it to apprenticeships. Hence [OfS announces](#) £9.6million a year for five years to 15 small and specialist institutions. Of course, that’s £48million not available for other bits of HE, but it will still feel like win-win to the OfS.

Policy and funding in the USA

US government consults on how to identify low-financial-value postsecondary programs

The idea has been kicking around since the Obama administration, and on 11 January 2023 “The U.S. Department of Education (Department) is [requesting information](#) in the form of written comments that may include information, research, and suggestions regarding how best to identify low-value postsecondary programs. The Office of the Under Secretary solicits these comments to identify the best ways to calculate the metrics that may be used to identify low-financial-value programs and inform technical considerations.”

US government expands regulation to third party providers

[Taylor Swaak reported for *The Chronicle of Higher Education*](#) on 22 February 2023 that the US Department of Education had announced a “stunning expansion of its interpretation of federal regulations that appears to put a large swath of colleges’ ed-tech vendors on the hook for following more rules, and place the vendors under closer scrutiny.” The Department issued [updated guidance](#) on 15 February 2023 saying that with immediate effect, “the department considers entities that help colleges serve students in their Title IV-eligible programs by providing recruitment and retention services, certain software products, and “any percentage” of educational content and instruction to be “third-party servicers,” with some exceptions.” Colleges must report any such arrangements by 1 May 2023. The move, without prior consultation, attracted immediate criticism because its breadth and vagueness put many HEIs at risk of accidental non-compliance. The Department of Education

then [announced](#) on 15 February 2023 that its updated guidance would no longer be effective immediately; instead, it will go into effect on September 1 to give eligible institutions and third-party servicers “a reasonable amount of time to comply.” The deadline for institutions to report third-party servicers to the department was also pushed back, from 1 May to 1 September 2023.

DeSantis wants to make New College of Florida a ‘Hillsdale of the South’

[Josh Moody reported for insidehighered.com](#) on 11 January 2023 that: “In his first term as Florida’s governor, Ron DeSantis sought to reshape higher education at the state level, pushing changes to [accreditation requirements](#) and [tenure](#) while [requiring widely criticized intellectual diversity surveys](#) and limiting diversity, equity and inclusion instruction in public colleges. Freshly re-elected, he’s now shaking up higher ed at the campus level, aiming to transform the state’s public liberal arts college in the image of one of the country’s most visible private Christian colleges.” DeSantis has orchestrated a ‘takeover’ of New College of Florida, putting in place new trustees who demanded that their president Patricia Okker agree that her faculty were indoctrinating students. When she refused they fired her.

Meanwhile “Trustees of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC) voted to establish an entire new school (School of Civic Life and Leadership) with 20 faculty (to include a substantial number of Republicans) and its own dean without informing the faculty or administration. Before telling anyone on campus about the decision, the board chair bragged to conservative outlets that the school would be a “remedy” to academic indoctrination.” These developments led to a splendidly robust [Editor’s Blog by Holden H Thorp of Science](#) on 3 February 2023. Andrew Gothard (Florida Atlantic University) gave an impassioned account of DeSantis’s broader assault on Florida’s HE system [in insidehighered.com](#) on 7 February 2023, while Ryan Quinn reported the UNC developments [for insidehighered.com](#) on 8 February 2023. There was a long explainer by [Nathan M Greenfield in Universities World News](#) on 7 February 2023, and a call for academics to take back the initiative, by Marybeth Gasman (Rutgers), also [in Universities World News](#) on 11 February 2023.

[Josh Moody reported for insidehighered.com](#) on 30 March 2023 that DeSantis had approached a Republican state politician to become the president of Florida Atlantic University, following similar appointments at New College Florida and the University of Florida.

US Presidential hopefuls DeSantis, Abbott and Youngkin see attacks on HE as their way forward

[Josh Moody’s article for insidehighered.com](#) on 8 March 2023 reported three US state governors apparently seeing attacks on HE as a way to burnish their credentials with Republican party members with influence in selecting party candidates for President.

Higher education pays

But the return on investment (ROI) varies by type of institution, as research by Christopher G Reddick and Branco Ponomariov (both Texas at San Antonio) showed. [Their article](#) was in *Quality in Higher Education* (online 1 February 2023): “... highly selective universities have a greater ROI, public universities overall have a better ROI, Research 1 universities have the higher ROI and private Research 1 institutions have the highest ROI.”

Private and for-profit HE

[Oxford Business College](#)

The self-styled ‘fastest-growing private higher education college in the UK’ appears not yet to have opened its promised Coventry campus and turns out not to be an OfS registered provider, since its business degree courses are validated by the University of Buckingham and Ravensbourne University London. Buckingham has been suffering financial problems with late submission of accounts, and creative industries specialist provider Ravensbourne seems an unlikely validator of the Oxford BSc

Business Management. [Mike Ratcliffe \(Nottingham Trent\) turned over a few stones](#) in February 2023. Even the home page of the College's website is littered with grammatical errors, but "Accounts of the college show turnover jumped from just under £5 million to £18.2 million, with a £6.5 million pre-tax profit in 2020/21."

Is for-profit HE on its last legs?

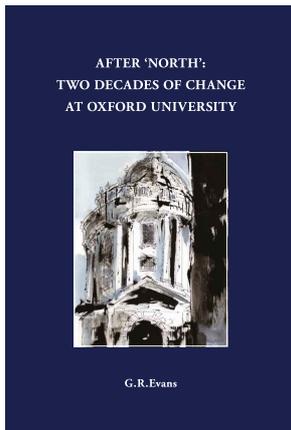
Doug Lederman got together [an expert panel to mull over the question for *insidehighered.com*](#) on 21 March 2023, prompted by news of the possible sale of the University of Phoenix to a public university (Arizona). [Phil Hill \(independent\) blogged](#) on 21 March 2023 about the 'sale' by Pearsons of its once market-leading online business: "this is somewhat of a distressed sale. *Get this mess off our hands, you make the big cuts to get it profitable, and we'll make money only if you can turn it around.*"

Strategy, Leadership, Governance and Management

New book from Shattock, Horvath and Enders

Surely the list of authors is all you need to hear before rushing to (get your library to) place your order (that's assuming your library still does things like that). "[The Governance of European Higher Education: Convergence or Divergence](#) analyses governance at state and institutional levels in five European higher education systems chosen as representative of European higher education as a whole."

New book on governance at Oxford



The new book by Gill Evans, *After 'North' Two Decades of Change at Oxford University*, was [reviewed by Mike Ratcliffe \(Nottingham Trent\) for HEPI](#) on 3 March 2023: "Oxford is, according to some league tables, the best university in the world. Professor GR Evans has written about the last 25 years with a focus on governance. By her account, it's not necessarily the case that it has the best governance of any university in the world and it may be that the previous Vice-Chancellor agreed with her. ... Evans provides a thorough account of many of the issues that attracted that attention. ... In her 2010 [history of the university](#), Evans looked forward to the 'chance to expand on the few pages on contemporary governance of the university that even a generous editor would allow in a general history of a 900 year old institution' (p76). Here Evans seizes her chance, using internal documents of the University. Key is the official record, the *Gazette*, in which accounts of the University's business appear. The other main source is the *Oxford Magazine* (OM), which is a forum circulated in the University, but not an official publication."

Conceptualising the socially responsible university

Ada Godonoga and Barbara Sporn (both Vienna University of Economics and Business) reported their systematic literature review [in *Studies in Higher Education*](#) (online 11 November 2022): "SR is an umbrella concept, which has evolved from being a moral duty to provide service to society, to engaging external stakeholders in universities' core functions, and more recently to showing evidence of social impact."

Coping with paradox through dialogue

How do you deal with paradoxically conflicting demands? Aurélien Ragaigne (Rennes) argued that the solution is to comply while maintaining your autonomy through dialogue, in [his article in *International Review of Administrative Sciences*](#) (online 28 February 2023).

University of Cape Town governance and leadership turmoil

The governance concerns that preoccupied UCT during most of 2022 continued, as news emerged of an offer by the Council to drop charges against VC Mamokgethi Phakeng if she promised to take early retirement – an offer she rejected. [Edwin Naidu reported for *University World News*](#) on 18 February 2023.

What is a university ‘surplus’?

Andrew Connolly (York) had [a myth-busting explainer on *Wonkhe*](#) on 9 February 2023.

East Anglia threatens compulsory redundancies, then VC steps down

The [BBC reported](#) on 18 January 2023 that UEA was experiencing financial pressures due to Covid, the fee freeze, “pressures on student numbers” and rising costs. A £13.9million loss in 2021-2022 meant that “... it is unlikely all savings can be made without compulsory redundancies.” The UEA deficit may be £23million in 2023-2024, possibly rising within three years to £37million, as [Tom Williams reported for *Times Higher Education*](#) on 18 January 2023. Problems include fewer students, more dropping out, and higher energy bills, but UCU branch chair Michael Kyriacou said there had been “systemic mismanagement” of the institution. [Tom Williams then reported for *Times Higher Education*](#) on 27 February 2023 that UEA VC David Richards had resigned following a no-confidence vote organised by UCU: “the university ... [announced](#) earlier this year that it had built up a deficit of £13.9 million, which was expected to treble in the coming years. Cuts to departments of between 10 per cent and 25 per cent were expected ... the institution ... has struggled because of declining student numbers and the [cost of maintaining its 60-year-old Brutalist campus.](#)”

Minnesota president resigns private sector board role after heavyweight challenge

[AP reported in *WIXM News Talk*](#) on 2 January 2023 that University of Minnesota Regent Darrin Rosh, Minnesota law professor Richard Painter and former state governor Arne Carlson had written to the US Securities and Exchange Commission and the state attorney general about University President Joan Gabel’s position on the board of Securian Financial. Securian holds \$1.3 billion in retirement plan assets for university employees, while its affiliate Minnesota Life Insurance Company has a life insurance contract with the University worth \$4.6 million a year. The letter alleged that her board position was a conflict of interest. After weeks of controversy, Gabel resigned her position on the board; [Scott Jaschik had the story for *insidehighered.com*](#) on 25 January 2023.

Temple University President resigns

Jason Wingard resigned as President of Temple University after a two-year tenure marked by disputes and controversy, as [Josh Moody and Susan H Greenberg reported for *insidehighered.com*](#) on 29 March 2023.

Athabasca University board fires president who fought Alberta government on staff relocations

Peter Scott was president of Athabasca University for over a year, during which time he defied the provincial government’s plans to move Athabasca to completely virtual operations. [Michelle Bellefontaine reported for *CBC News*](#) on 1 February 2023 that Scott had been fired – just three weeks after his wife died of cancer.

VC comings and goings

Wendy Larnar has been appointed [Cardiff University’s new President and Vice-Chancellor](#), commencing her role on 1 September 2023 following Colin Riordan’s retirement. Professor Larnar is currently Provost of Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. Before then she was Dean of Social Sciences and Law and Professor of Human Geography for ten years at the University of Bristol.

Following the retirement of Professor Rob Warner in December 2022 Professor Claire Taylor will join [Plymouth Marjon University as Vice-Chancellor](#) in May 2023, from her current position as Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Professor of Education at Wrexham Glyndwr University in North Wales. Professor Taylor studied Music and Education at the University of Cambridge and qualified as a teacher, working with learners of all ages for ten years before becoming a primary school headteacher. She then moved into higher education, studying for her PhD at the University of Nottingham. She held roles of Dean and Pro Vice-Chancellor at Bishop Grosseteste in Lincoln and St Mary's University, London.

Sheffield Hallam VC Chris Husbands announced his decision to step down, probably in Autumn 2023, in [his vice-chancellor's blog](#) on 11 January 2023.

Staff at **Wolverhampton** were told on 27 January 2023 that VC Ian Campbell would be leaving after less than a year in post. The [UCU branch said](#) "He'll be chiefly remembered at WLV for a spreadsheet cull of staff".

Jobs for the anti-diversity boys

The newly-installed Board of Trustees at New College of Florida appointed Richard Corcoran, the former Republican Speaker of the House in Florida's legislature, as its new president with a base salary of \$699,000 - \$400,000 more than his predecessor Patricia Okker, and that's before adding in Corcoran's \$84,000 annual housing stipend, a \$12,000 automobile allowance, the potential to earn a 15 percent goal-based salary bonus, and a pension adding \$104,850 in annual contract costs. The news that Corcoran would get the job broke before Okker was actually fired, but obviously that's just a procedural detail. As is the fact that "Matthew Spalding, a new trustee and dean at Hillsdale College in Michigan who initially approached Corcoran about the job, touted Corcoran's lengthy résumé and argued that his friendship with the interim president is not unethical." [Josh Moody reported for insidehighered.com](#) on 14 February 2023.

New Columbia President

The Board of Columbia University [announced](#) on 18 January 2023 that Nemat "Minouche" Shafik, an economist whose career has focused on public policy and academia, would become the 20th president of Columbia University on 1 July 2023, succeeding Lee C Bollinger. Shafik is currently President at LSE.

Systematic review of authentic leadership literature

Eman Ahmed (Menoufia University, Egypt) had a systematic review of literature covering 1997-2021 in [Educational Management and Leadership in Administration](#) (online 2 January 2023).

Conceptualising informal institutions

Jack Barbalet (Australian Catholic University, Melbourne) used the case of *guanxi* to extend ideas about informal institutions in [his article in the British Journal of Sociology](#) (online 7 November 2022): "Institutions regulate social life through formal rules and sanctions. These are distinguished from another source of social regulation, the informal incentives and constraints inherent in cultural currents and customary practices. Informal practices may be based not simply on cultural forces, though, but expectations regularised by informal rules and sanctions, which may operate as informal institutions. One approach holds that informal institutions arise out of formal institutional voids. Another holds that informal institutions operate in response to situations in which formal institutions frustrate the interests of individuals and groups who engage informal institutions to augment, compromise, or subvert formal institutions. After developing the concept of informal institution, the article goes on to indicate how an informal relationship pervasive in modern China, *guanxi*, may be understood as an informal institution."

Managerial learning

Russell Warhurst and Kate Black (both Northumbria) used running as a metaphor/illustration, arguing that managers need to learn how to fail well, [in *Management Learning*](#) (online 11 February 2023).

[Leading a business school](#), by Julie Davies, Howard Thomas, Eric Cornuel and Rolf D Cremer was reviewed by David Law (Keele) in [Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher Education](#) (online 22 February 2023).

The research reported by Ted A Paterson (Oregon State), Peter D Harms (Alabama) and Andrea Erin Bass (Omaha College of Business Administration) [in the *British Journal of Management*](#) (online 13 March 2023) found that “when managers rate research findings, there is a very strong negative relationship between relevance and surprise; however, when rated by academics attempting to predict managerial responses, the relationship is orthogonal.”

There’s more than one kind of consultant

Reut Marciano (Toronto) developed a conceptual framework to identify consultants’ “... four role categories: (1) experts and knowledge brokers, in which consultants provide policy advice and analysis; (2) seeing for the government, in which they construct a picture of the policy field; (3) legitimizers and validators, in which they provide symbolic capital to policy; and (4) channels for stakeholders’ policy preferences, in which they manage deliberation and synthesize actors’ policy preferences.” Her [article was in the *Policy Studies Journal*](#) (online 25 January 2023).

The all-digital library was probably a bad idea

The planned Vermont State University announced bold plans for an all-digital library after an online survey ... but then had to change its mind after a staff and student backlash, as [Susan D’Agostino reported for *insidehighered.com*](#) on 16 February 2023.

Staff

Joint management-union statement on USS dispute

UUK and UCU issued a [joint interim statement](#) on 17 February 2023: “The latest information provided by the USS Trustee suggests that the forthcoming 2023 valuation is likely to reveal a high probability of being able to improve benefits and reduce contributions. Should this be confirmed, this would allow for a return to a comparable level of future benefits as existed before the April 2022 changes, as well as achieve a reduction in costs for members and employers. We jointly agree to prioritise the improvement of benefits in this way, where this can be done in a demonstrably sustainable manner.” [Tom Williams reported for *Times Higher Education*](#) on 10 March 2023 on UCU’s aggressive rhetoric towards VCs and the mixed reactions it had prompted. Subsequently there has been much counterproductive infighting in UCU about what should happen next.

Public sector pay doesn’t drive inflation

That was the view of [Paul Whiteley \(Essex\) on the *LSE Impact Blog*](#) on 21 February 2023. Tom Calver of *The Sunday Times* tweeted on 21 January 2023 [a telling graph](#) showing how far the pay of teachers and lecturers has fallen since 2011, and David Kernohan explained how HE pay negotiations work in his [Wonkhe blog](#) on 30 January 2023

Survey of UK professors

The [National Conference of University Professors](#) commissioned a [survey of the UK professoriate](#) in 2022. NCUP chair [Roger Watson \(Hull\) blogged for HEPi](#) about the results on 14 February 2023: “While the routes to professorship are becoming more varied, the profile of the UK professoriate is much as could be expected: predominantly White British and male. The professoriate assumes a wide range of

roles, often without personal or financial support. Role distribution and mentorship are unevenly distributed based on ethnicity and gender, favouring White British male professors.”

Professional staff as policy actors

Françoise McKay and James Robson (both Oxford/Nottingham Trent) had an [article in the *Journal of Further and Higher Education*](#) (online 27 February 2023) reporting their single-institution case study research, presenting professional staff “acting as both operational and strategic drivers: experiencing the regulatory policy cycle as opportunities, subjugation and threat.”

Trust among staff in HE

Former SRHE Chair Jill Jameson and colleagues from Greenwich published a systematic scoping review on trust among staff in HE settings, [in *Studies in Higher Education*](#) (online 22 November 2022). They said there was surprisingly little research; more is needed(!).

Do we still need professional boundaries?

Heavy hitters Tomas Farchi (IAE Argentina), Sue Dopson (Oxford) and Ewan Ferlie (King’s College, London) [reported their health service research in *Organization Studies*](#) (online 11 January 2023): “Although a body of research suggests that interprofessional collaboration is hindered by the presence of professional boundaries, more recent work has demonstrated that removing these boundaries also has negative consequences for collaboration. ... Our ... analysis ... shows that professionals use boundaries and their manifestations – which become apparent through *materialization*, *articulation* and *embodiment* – to identify and retrieve professional categories. The conspicuous presence of boundaries allows professionals to anticipate other team members’ expertise and roles, as well as different aspects of team tasks. We theorize our findings by showing how professional boundaries can be positively interlaced with interprofessional collaboration by making visible and grounding naturalized systems of classification.”

Academic salaries in UK, Germany, France and Italy

The report by Alice Civera and colleagues, [The Attractiveness of European Higher Education Systems: A comparative analysis of faculty remuneration and career paths](#), was in the Research and Occasional Paper Series (ROPS) of the Center for Studies in Higher Education at Berkeley. The study, sponsored by the Conference of Italian University Rectors, shows that Italian academic salaries/careers are in several ways less attractive than in the other three European countries.

Mobilities and the ‘international academic’ in higher education by Vera Spangler, Lene Møller Madsen, and Hanne Kirstine Adriansen



December marks the month of the International SRHE Research Conference. It was an interesting week full of presentations and discussions around the theme of *Mobilities in Higher Education*. In the opening plenary talk, Emily Henderson invited us to reflect critically on the different ways in which mobilities of academics and

students in higher education are discursively constructed. She debated how discursive constructions of mobility may influence who can access academia/higher education, who can gain recognition, and who can establish a feeling of belonging. Emily’s presentation set an interesting and highly relevant ground for the week to come, opening space for critical thought about academic mobility and experiences of mobility, subjectivities, and power. Our presentation about who is considered ‘the

international academic' addressed similar ideas and observations, which we would like to share in this blog post in order to open the conversation with a larger audience. ...

Read the full blog [here](#).

Marketing and admissions

UCAS tweaks university admissions process

Kim Eccleston, Head of Strategy and Reform at UCAS, [blogged for HEPI](#) on 12 January 2023 about new [UCAS proposals](#) to change how the admissions process handles references, grades on entry, the personal statement, personalisation (which might lead to personal recommendations of courses for individual applicants), and widening access and participation. David Kernohan of *Wonkhe* crunched the numbers for UCAS end-of-cycle data to look at [offer rates for different groups](#), on 12 January 2023.

The acceptability of algorithms

Georg Wenzelburger and three other co-authors argued [in Public Administration](#) (online 14 November 2022) that: "... algorithms, as parts of socio-technical systems, are always embedded in a specific social context. ... citizens' acceptance of an algorithm is strongly shaped by how they evaluate aspects of this context, namely the personal importance of the specific problems an algorithm is supposed to help address and their trust in the organizations deploying the algorithm. The objective performance of presented algorithms affects acceptance much less in comparison." We fear that the [2020 A-levels algorithm](#) may be a counter-example ...

Equalities and Diversity

Education: the state of the discipline

This [important BERA project](#) had its [latest output](#), which "contributes to a more detailed understanding of issues of equality, inequality, diversity and discrimination for academic staff working in universities in the discipline of education." published in January 2023. The report was compiled by Dina Zoe Belluigi (Queen's University, Belfast), Jason Arday (Glasgow, but heading for Cambridge) and Joanne O'Keeffe (Queen's University, Belfast).

OfS relents on timetable for access and participation plans

The new(ish) OfS Director for Fair Access and Participation, John Blake, has agreed to relax the timetable for the submission of APPs. The original OfS plan had been for all providers to submit APPs in 2023, but now only 30-50 will be required to do so, as [Tom Williams reported for Times Higher Education](#) on 9 February 2023. The [OfS report](#) was issued on 9 February 2023.

On 31 March 2023 the OfS published an [Equality of Opportunity Risk Register](#) following a consultation exercise. It may be a little heavy-handed but seems a broadly sensible checklist which institutions should in any case be doing.

Social mobility through higher education?

Research by Harsh Kumar (Cardiff) and Robyn Wharton (independent), published [in Studies in Higher Education](#) (online 6 March 2023), looked at how ethnicity, gender and class intersect in admissions to professional undergraduate programmes (medicine, law, accounting, architecture, engineering and business management). "... higher class background is a key factor in admissions to elite professional programmes, especially evident in the exemplar traditional professions of medicine and law; presumed gender effects on entry into technical math-based professional programmes, such as engineering and accounting, are substantially moderated by class background; and ethno-racial

background may mitigate some of the class penalties for women, but leads to double penalty for black men.”

Merger in the credentials and transfer business

A [news release](#) on 21 March 2023 from [Parchment](#), “the industry leader in academic credentials management, announced the acquisition of [Quottly](#) the leading technology solution for course and program sharing, transfer articulation, and dual enrollment. This acquisition adds a new dimension to Parchment's mission to turn credentials into opportunities by helping higher education give students access to more academic options, up-to-date transfer information, and guided pathways to ensure they stay on track and graduate on time.”

Deprivation data: Introducing a new UK-wide area-based measure *by Tej Nathwani*



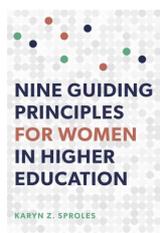
The 2020s will be a pivotal period in determining the UK’s economic future. That’s the primary message of a [recent report](#) published by the Resolution Foundation and Centre for Economic Performance at LSE. While major events such as the pandemic and Brexit have undoubtedly played a part in this, there are also longer-term factors that have contributed to the country reaching this position. Examples noted by the researchers include stagnant productivity levels, large disparities in economic performance between areas and inequalities in our education system.

Naturally, one of the questions being increasingly asked of the UK higher education sector is how it is helping to resolve some of the latter issues. Yet being able to tackle these matters successfully, as well as understand the outcomes from various interventions, requires the provision of suitable data. As the body responsible for the collection and dissemination of information about UK higher education, HESA has a role to play in supplying appropriate variables and statistics to our users that support them in their decision-making. Hence, the past few years have seen us develop new fields designed to be relevant and valuable in meeting the current needs of our customers. ... we begin with a focus on our work relating to socioeconomic disadvantage. ...

Read the full blog [here](#).

Tej Nathwani is a Principal Researcher (Economist) at HESA, which is now part of Jisc. Read more about our measure, its correlation with income and how it compares to the Indices of Deprivation <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/insight/08-11-2022/new-area-based-measure-deprivation-summary>. Feedback on our measure of deprivation is most welcome. Please send this to pressoffice@hesa.ac.uk. To be kept updated on our publication plans and latest research releases, please join our [mailing list](#).

Guiding principles for women in higher education



[Nine Guiding Principles for Women in Higher Education](#) is “a concise and accessible resource aimed at helping women faculty succeed in their academic careers. Karyn Z. Sproles offers guidance, humour, and courage to women in higher education, paying particular attention to those with children and women of colour.” Alternatively, you could just stay with SRHE Fellow Marcia Devlin’s [Beating the Odds](#): “This humorous book about a serious topic will help women learn to beat the current odds for their university career success and achieve their full potential. Marcia Devlin’s tough, funny and practical guide to kicking the system in the butt will give women who read it an unfair advantage and help them fight the odds and win.”



Working-Class and working in higher education: possibilities and pedagogies by Carli Rowell



This blog reports on presentations and discussion at [an SRHE event](#) on 1 February 2023.

Doctoral study, despite its expansion, continues to operate as a classed pathway, a problem exacerbated by the surplus of doctoral graduates and an increasingly congested precarious global academic labour market. Although a prerequisite for academic careers, the doctorate no longer operates as a passport into the ivory tower. It is now accepted that the ‘leaky pipeline’ of academia, whereby ‘non-traditional’ (e.g. working-class, BAME) participants remain absent from professorial and higher managerial positions within UKHE is adversely affecting the diversity of scholarship and leadership.

SRHE brought together those who identify as coming from a working-class background and who are currently working in higher-education or aspiring to do so, as well as those with an interest in supporting working-class persons through the pipeline to and through academia. The event served as supportive space where delegates discussed the lived experience of being a working-class academic (aspiring to otherwise), the implications of a working-class background on pedagogy alongside contemporary barriers to transitions to and through academia and so called ‘strategies for successes’.

...

Read the full blog [here](#).

SRHE member Carli Rowell is a Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Sussex. She is currently an executive member of Gender and Education Association and convenes the British Sociological Associations Social Class Study Group. Email c.r.rowell@sussex.ac.uk or Twitter [@Carli Rowell](#).

Teaching, Learning and Assessment

TEF 2023

89% (204/229) of institutions made student submissions to TEF 2023, described as a ‘golden turnout’ by Ranjeet Dhinsa (OfS TEF manager) and Jade Underwood (Portsmouth/TEF student panel member) in [their 22 March blog for OfS](#).

The curriculum in HE research: a review of the research literature

Malcolm Tight (Lancaster) was doing his usual encyclopaedic but inconclusive thing with his [article in *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*](#) (online 10 January 2023): “This article synthesises the results of a review of the published research literature on the curriculum in higher education, outlining an agenda for future research.”

Searching the literature on SoTL

Two of the foremost protagonists of SoTL, Mick Healey (Gloucestershire) and Ruth L Healey (Chester) have written a two-part account on using an academic literacies perspective to search the SoTL literature [in *Teaching and Learning Inquiry*](#).

How academic developers become critical-constructive and strategic

The [article by Ester Fremstad \(Oslo\) and Kristin Ewins \(University of Örebro, Sweden\) in *Studies in Higher Education*](#) (online 2 March 2023) was a case study of how an academic development unit at Örebro moved from the margins to become “a centre holding an integrated and strategic position with a critical-constructive focus on the educational and societal mission of the university in 2021”.

One crucial change was the decision to appoint five new full-time staff to the unit, along with another 15-20 faculty-based staff with part-time roles. ADUs elsewhere can dream ... but it did seem to work.

Pedagogic frailty

Just-retired SRHE member Ian Kinchin (Surrey) and many of his colleagues had an [article in *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*](#) (online 16 January 2023) about using poetry to illuminate pedagogic frailty, to support their contention “that collective arts-based and biographical approaches can provide alternative ways for ourselves and teachers to examine their own pedagogic frailty.”

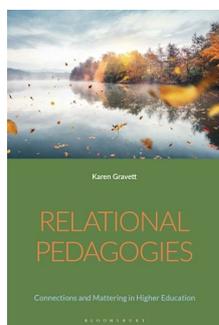
School-university partnerships that improve teaching and learning practices

Edna Milena Sarmiento-Márquez (Tallinn) and colleagues published their systematic review focusing on evaluation of school-university partnerships [in *ScienceDirect*](#) (online 28 January 2023).

Middle leaders and teaching and learning

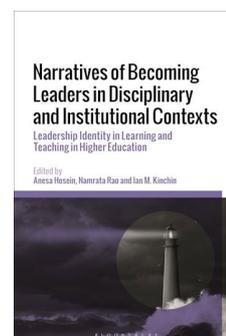
The [systematic review by Louise Claire Maddock](#) (Griffith, Queensland, Australia) was in the *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management* (online 30 January 2023).

New books from the Surrey powerhouse



Bloomsbury has not one but two new books with a strong Surrey flavour. SRHE Trustee/Governing Council member Karen Gravett’s new book (published 12 January 2023) is [Relational Pedagogies](#): “What do meaningful connections in learning and teaching look like, and how might we foster these? How might the concept of mattering be helpful for our understanding of higher education? In this book, Karen Gravett examines the role of relationships, and in particular of relational pedagogies, where meaningful relationships are positioned as fundamental to effective learning. She explores concepts of authenticity, vulnerability, and trust within learning and teaching, as well as the potential of working with students in partnership.”

The new offering edited by SRHE R&D Committee members Anesa Hosein (Surrey) and Namrata Rao (Liverpool Hope) plus Ian Kinchin (Surrey) [Narratives of Becoming Leaders in Disciplinary and Institutional Contexts: Leadership Identity in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education](#) provides “theoretically informed personal narratives of nine emerging and established leaders in learning and teaching in Australia, Brazil, Canada, Trinidad and Tobago, the UK and the USA. The academics' narratives consider how individuals navigate the disciplinary and institutional context as emergent and established leaders in learning and teaching.”



Will universities fail the Turing Test? by Phil Pilkington



The recent anxiety over the development of AI programmes to generate unique text suggests that some disciplines face a crisis of passing the Turing Test. That is, that you cannot distinguish between the unique AI generated text and that produced by a human agent. Will this be the next stage in the battle of cheating by students? Will it lead to an arms race of countering the AI programmes to foil the students cheating? Perhaps it may force some to redesign the curriculum, the learning and the assessment processes. ...

Read the full blog [here](#).

Phil Pilkington’s former roles include Chair of Middlesex University Students’ Union Board of Trustees, and CEO of Coventry University Students’ Union. He is an Honorary Teaching Fellow of Coventry

University and a contributor to *WonkHE*. He chaired the SRHE Student Experience Network for several years and helped to organise events including the hugely successful 1995 SRHE annual conference on *The Student Experience*; its associated book of 'Precedings' was edited by Suzanne Hazelgrove for SRHE/Open University Press.

ChatGPT

Todd A Carpenter, Executive Director of the US National Information Standards Organization (NISO), [blogged for *The Scholarly Kitchen*](#) on 11 January 2023 with ChatGPT's responses to a series of questions. For the casual, or even not so casual, observer, we may already be past the Turing Test.

QAA has taken on the role of sorting out the deluge of commentaries on GPT with a [regularly updated webpage](#) which "... contains advice, guidance and resources for higher education professionals to adapt their teaching in light of artificial intelligence. It will be updated weekly with new information." The deluge included:

- A [special report](#) from *University World News*
- An [article by Debby Cotton \(MarJon\) and co-authors](#), some of which (spoiler alert) is written by ChatGPT.
- *The Scholarly Kitchen* blog offered [some expert views](#) on the issues posed by AI
- Torrey Trust (Amherst) produced this [helpful briefing](#) on what ChatGPT can and can't do.
- Kevin Jacob Kelley's (Red Rocks Community College) [ten strategies](#) to prevent students' use of AI
- Phil Davis (independent) on [whether ChatGPT tells lies](#), and David Smerdon (Queensland) on [why and how ChatGPT makes up fake academic papers](#)
- Clare Williams (Kent) on [whether teachers need to worry](#)
- [Nature's ground rules](#) for ChatGPT
- [Using artificial intelligence in your studies - Help - University of Kent](#)
- Turnitin have launched their [AI detection module](#)
- Note the EU AI Act as wider context <https://artificialintelligenceact.eu/>

And if you thought Chat-GPT was a problem, you ain't seen nothing yet, as [Mark Leach wrote for *Wonkhe*](#) on 20 March 2023 as GPT4 and its rivals hit the streets.

[Poppy Wood reported for i](#) on 28 February 2023 that eight members of the Russell Group, including Manchester, Bristol, Edinburgh, Oxford and Cambridge, had decided to deem the use of ChatGPT by students as academic misconduct.

Does using existing publications for 'training' AI infringe copyright?

[Roy Kaufman \(Copyright Clearing Center\) blogged for *The Scholarly Kitchen*](#) on 7 March 2023 about current legal cases in the US (and one in the UK) that might clarify some issues, including: using code without appropriate licensing permission; 'fair use' of material; using images without permission to create works 'in the style of' established artists and illustrators; the alleged surreptitious copying of an entire database (after having been denied a licence) in order to create an allegedly competing product; and, unauthorised copying of images for which copyright is owned by others. "These cases are not against AI. Rather, they will determine whether those who create works have a voice in the use of those works by commercial entities, some of whom compete with the original creators. As such, innovation through AI is not at risk, but these cases may have a long-term impact upon the rules governing reuse of copyrighted, valuable and reliable inputs and the incentives of ongoing creation."

Fostering a sense of safety in higher education by Lauren McAllister, Luke Ward, and Lauren Young



As three lecturers who have taught on a postgraduate course for several years that covers topics around race, gender, identities, parenting, development, disabilities, mental health, wellbeing, and the associated experiences of managing these oppressive and regulatory discourses - we began to question how we can keep ourselves, and our students 'safe'. We had reflected that we were not talking about a *physical* sense of safety here, but rather a felt sense of feeling understood, or perhaps even contained.

...

From left to right: Lauren Young, Lauren McAllister, and Luke Ward

Read the full blog [here](#).

Students

Student numbers

Wonkhe's David Kernohan was as usual blissfully happy to see [the latest HESA data for 2021-2022](#), on 1 February 2023. On 8 February 2023 [OfS released data](#) on the number of full-time equivalent higher education students at providers registered with the OfS for the academic year 2021-22.

OfS issued [early statistics on student numbers for 2022-2023](#) on 22 March 2023, "compiled on 16 March 2023 using HESES22 data. A provider's data is included in the figures if they are registered with the Office for Students in the Approved (fee cap) category and they signed off their HESES22 data by 1 February 2023. The data does not provide a complete picture of higher education provision in England. Only providers who are registered with the Office for Students in the Approved (fee cap) category are required to return HESES22."

Estimate of total years countable in the 2022-23 academic year	2,456,835
Estimate of years completed in the 2022-23 academic year	2,136,042
Estimated FTE of years completed in the 2022-23 academic year	1,873,199
Estimate of total new entrants in the 2022-23 academic year	1,094,667

Cut in student maintenance loans represented as a 'boost'

[Wonkhe's Jim Dickinson was rightly outraged](#) on 11 January 2023 by a [DfE press release](#) on 11 January 2023 which hailed a 'Cost of living boost for students', whereas "this year, the poorest students are [£1,500 worse](#) off than they should be in real terms – with almost no other help coming their way from the other cost of living schemes". Dickinson's words were [brought to Parliament by shadow HE minister Matt Western](#) on 16 January 2023.

[Richard Adams reported for The Guardian](#) on 3 February 2023 that: "In an equality analysis of the government's decision to raise maintenance loans by just 2.8% from autumn, the DfE said student support would have needed to go up by nearly 14% to keep up with the recent rises in the cost of living." He quoted Tim Bradshaw, head of the Russell Group: "... the department responsible and [the Office for Students], which is supposed to be on the side of students, just seem to be shrugging their shoulders ... The government ... is actively choosing to ignore its own analysis – as well as our analysis and that of the IFS – and this choice will leave students out of pocket by over £1,500."

The latest developments in student accommodation

Martin Blakey, chief executive of Unipol, wrote a superb update with a series of sensible recommendations for universities, in [his HEPI blog](#) on 28 March 2023.

Students: are they coming or going?

New Zealand is appealing for more students to attend lectures in person, as [John Gerritsen reported for RNZ](#) on 28 February 2023, whereas students at Tehran University rallied in protest at on-line only provision, as [Iran International reported](#) on 3 March 2023.

Students' sense of belonging

The [article by Gulsah Dost and Laura Mazzoli Smith](#) (both Durham) in the *Journal of Further and Higher Education* (online 23 March 2023) explored "higher education students' sense of belonging, a concept that has not been adequately conceptualised, from their perspectives. ... Interpretive qualitative synthesis resulted in one higher-order concept, four main concepts, and nineteen sub-concepts that conceptualise higher education students' understanding of sense of belonging to their universities." "The four main concepts constituted the four pillars of the higher concept of sense of belonging to higher education. These are social capital, ethnic groups fit and cohesion, social exclusion and on/off faculty/campus connections."

What do students think about value for money? *by Kristina Gruzdeva*



In 2022, the cost of living crisis meant communities across the UK had to adjust their behaviours and their spending. Many needed to learn to navigate within a complex energy market. Prospective university students were in a similar position, being expected to make a cost-conscious decision about their degree education with limited understanding of their options. In research conducted for my PhD, I invited first-year students to participate in focus groups to explore their orientations to their degree. ... I developed a typology to show how students perceive their degree, their beliefs about the financial implications of going to university and how they define value for money. ... My findings suggest that even now, five years after the Higher Education and Research Act legislated for an HE market, it is problematic to rely on informed student choice as a basis for the market's operation. ... Read the full blog [here](#).

Kristina Gruzdeva is a Research Facilitator at the University of Birmingham. Kristina's research interests are in higher education policy, mainly in relation to student finance, student choices, and marketisation. This blog is based on a chapter from her recently completed PhD. Email: k.gruzdeva@bham.ac.uk

Quality, Standards, Performance, Evaluation

Quality and standards

OfS applauds decline in proportion of first class degrees

HESA published [statistics for 2021-2022](#) on 19 January 2023 and [OfS were quick to respond](#), with chief executive Susan Lapworth saying “Today’s figures show a welcome decrease back towards pre-pandemic levels in the proportion of first class degrees awarded to students graduating in the 2021-22 academic year.”

What happens when QAA is no longer the DQB?

David Kernohan had his [suspicions about OfS’s motives](#) in doing QAA down, on 21 January 2023. Elizabeth Halford, former Head of Research and Intelligence at QAA, [blogged for HEPI](#) on 14 February 2023 about the possible consequences of the changes made by OfS which led QAA to step down from its role as the statutory Designated Quality Body. She drew on Australian experience with TEQSA to hypothesise about possible consequences.

Rob Stroud, Director of Quality Assessment at QAA, [blogged for HEPI](#) on 11 January 2023, arguing that QAA had not been allowed to support independent new providers as it might wish because of the constraints that came with being OfS’s Designated Quality Body. “When our service as DQB ends, we will ... be able to better support providers with existing resources for enhancement and engage with them utilising our significant pool of subject experts. This will give providers the feedback for quality enhancement ... This is simply not a feature of the current review processes, as it is not a feature of the criteria that the regulatory regime considers at the baseline.”

When QAA moved to a subscription model and lost its HEFCE funding it also lost more than half its staff, with full-time equivalent staff numbers falling from 192 in 2016 to 85 in September 2022, as [Fiona McIntyre reported for Researchprofessionalnews.com](#) on 11 January 2023.

Andrew Boggs (Oxford/Kingston) wrote [HEPI Policy Note 44](#) in February 2023, spelling out the several ways in which the OfS had fallen short, first of respecting the role of QAA as the Designated Quality Body under the Higher Education and Research Act, and then considering the consequences of QAA’s demitting from its DQB responsibilities because of OfS intervention: “The principle of protecting regulation of quality and standards from political interference articulated by HERA cannot, therefore, be assured.”

QAA and Ofqual sign Memorandum of Understanding

QAA and Ofqual announced on 20 February 2023 that they had signed a [Memorandum of Understanding](#) which “outlines areas of common interest between the parties and details how they will liaise so that they can fulfil their respective responsibilities effectively and efficiently.” It seems a little odd that they felt it was necessary. QAA also published [its 2023-2027 strategy](#) on 5 April 2023.

Performance and evaluation

Performance government and management in HE

When Jeroen Huisman (Ghent) and Bjørn Stensaker (Oslo) get together it’s going to be worth listening. Their 2022 article in *Quality in Higher Education* (online 17 February 2022, also [on academia.edu](#)) reviewed international developments and argued that: “performance governance is changing with respect to the way performances are documented, measured and disseminated. ... meaning creation

and the relationship between institutional achievements and their significance for current societal challenges are becoming more focal.”

The critics of rankings ensure their resilience

Julian Hamann (Humboldt) and Leopold Ringel (Bielefeld) argued [in Higher Education](#) (online 12 January 2023) that “While the way rankers respond to criticism generally explains how rankings continue to flourish, it is precisely the ongoing conversation with critics that facilitates what we coin the discursive resilience of university rankings. The prevalence of university rankings is, in other words, a product of the mutual discursive work of their proponents and opponents.”

Harvard Medical School will no longer participate in US News rankings

The Dean of Harvard Medical School [announced](#) on 17 January 2023 that the School would no longer contribute data to or support *US News* in compiling its rankings because: “...rankings cannot meaningfully reflect the high aspirations for educational excellence, graduate preparedness, and compassionate and equitable patient care that we strive to foster in our medical education programs.” [Scott Jaschik had the story](#) for *insidehighered.com* on 18 January 2023.

Harvard and Yale law schools organised a conference in Cambridge, Massachusetts, to discuss student needs for information about law schools, after both had withdrawn from the *US News* rankings. The conference was opened by US Education Secretary Miguel Cardona, who said “Harvard and Yale Law could have wiped your hands clean of the ranking and called it a day. Instead, and really importantly, you’re here bringing leaders together to talk about what comes next. It’s not enough to abandon a broken system,” Cardona said. “The real work is building a better one for everyone. And you’re taking the lead on that.” [Scott Jaschik reported for insidehighered.com](#) on 2 March 2023.

Power and agency within the evaluative state

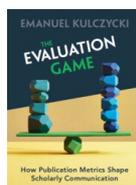
Jakub Krzeski (Nicholas Copernicus University, Torun, Poland) aimed to change how we think about quantification of HE by arguing for a relational approach to understanding how HE comes to be evaluated: “This article addresses the problem of the quantification of higher education by introducing a theoretical framework for power relations and agency within this process. Instead of treating evaluation regimes as external and imposed on the sector, it argues for a relational approach to the problem of exercising power over the higher education sector through means of evaluation. ... the article draws on ... Guy Neave’s account of the evaluative state and Bob Jessop’s strategic–relational approach (SRA) to the state. By using the latter to further develop our understanding of the logic under which the evaluative state operates, the article offers a general framework for inquiring about the conditions that shape power relations and impact the degree of agency at the disposal of the actors involved in the evaluative state. For this purpose, the article operationalises the six general dimensions of the state developed on the grounds of the SRA in the context of the evaluative state.” His article was [in Educational Philosophy and Theory](#) (online 9 January 2023).

Using systems theory to classify research performance parameters

Has anyone researching HE in the developed world in the last 30 years thought of using systems theory to interpret organisational performance? Perhaps not, which is why [this article in the Journal of Science and Technology Policy Management](#) (online 7 March 2023) was authored by Adhi Hindra Hermanu (Padjadjaran University, Bandung, Indonesia and Gunadarma University, Depok, Indonesia) and three colleagues from those two institutions. Their paper aimed “to identify and classify the parameters that construct the input, processes, output, productivity and outcome variables that affect performance. These parameters are used in the evaluation model to measure research performance in universities ... the input variables consisted of 10 parameters; the process variables consisted of 22 parameters; the output variable parameters consisted of 8 parameters; the productivity variables consisted of 4 parameters; and the outcome variable parameters consisted of 10 parameters. The

performance parameter was determined by competitive ranking, good reputation, government trust and public trust.” At an early stage they discarded ‘student involvement’ as a relevant parameter.

The Evaluation Game



Emanuel Kulczycki (Adam Mickiewicz University, Poland) has [a book out in April 2023](#) which “provides a detailed introduction to the origin and development of the scholarly metrics used to measure academic productivity, and the effect they have upon the quality and diversity of scientific research ... [and] guides the way to a more grounded understanding of metrics, and the diverse academic cultures they give rise to.”

Research

The international research landscape

The Association of Commonwealth Universities on 14 February 2023 [published the results](#) of its inaugural [ACU Measures](#) Supporting Research Survey, revealing significant disparities in access to funding, research support systems and gender equity in university research ecosystems across the Commonwealth.

Cross-cultural differences in PhDs by publication

Brian Paltridge and Sue Starfield (both Sydney) reported their research [in the Journal of Further and Higher Education](#) (online 23 March 2023): “there seems to be a preference for different types of PhD by publication in each of the countries. In the US they were all prospective PhDs with the work being especially written for the thesis. In the UK, by contrast, retrospective PhDs, the PhD by published work, largely dominate. Canada was similar to the US, at least in the area of study where the data were collected for the paper, Education. In Australia, both prospective and retrospective PhDs were found, although it was the former, the prospective PhD, which dominated.”

Reimagining the research process

[In Organization Studies](#) (online 9 January 2023) Lena J Jaspersen (Leeds) reviewed the 2022 book by Mats Alvesson (Lund) and Jörgen Sandberg (Queensland), [Reimagining the research process](#). The authors “identify common metaphors that govern contemporary research and writing, such as *research design*, *gap-spotting*, and *theory-building*. They argue that by treating these metaphors as unequivocal representations of specific research activities, we freeze our understanding of what research entails. As a result, ‘rigour is confused with conservatism and conventionalism’ (p. 35). This can lead to ‘a form of functional stupidity’ (p. 8) where researchers no longer question the conventions and templates they rely on.”

Researcher collaboration

The [Higher Education Quarterly article](#) (online 22 March 2023) by Kelefa Mwantimwa and Mohamed Kassim (both Dar es Salaam) “ascertained patterns of collaboration, exposed moderating factors of collaboration and established the perceived importance of collaboration in research activities.”

Qualitative sociology as theory and method

[In International Sociology](#) (online 29 December 2022) Claudio Benzecry (Northwestern) “discusses: (a) how different qualitative sociology is from other approaches; (b) the role of ‘casing’ in generating both units of analysis and settings; (c) the theoretical and empirical work of adjudicating what some emergent phenomena is a case of; (d) the ‘modelization’ through writing of our case as a research object; (e) the rhetorical construction of causality and the central role of ‘puzzles’ on it; (f) the reflexive epistemological vigilance about the role of the participant observer in producing the knowledge they

generate; and (g) the reconceptualization of qualitative sociology as a type of epistemological package, and of theorization, in consequence, as a kind of practical activity.”

Source criticism for organisational scholars

In [his article in *Organization Studies*](#) (online 1 February 2023) Michael Heller (Brunel) drew on historians’ methodology to argue for an extension to methods for organisational scholars. He set out an “Organizational Source Criticism Matrix which categorises organizational archival sources into four types based on their category and modality. Category differentiates between narrative and documentary sources, and modality distinguishes narrative from performative sources. The Matrix proposes four distinct forms of source criticism for each type of organizational source”.

Business and Management in the 2021 REF

Robert Blackburn (Liverpool), Sally Dibb (Coventry) and Ian Tonks (Bristol) analysed the 2021 REF outcomes for Business and Management [for the *British Journal of Management*](#) (online 22 March 2023). “The paper concludes with support for peer review and expresses caution against the automation of research quality assessment.”

The higher degree by research student experience in Australia

Charlotte Brownlow and colleagues from the University of Southern Queensland reported the results of their systematic literature review [in *Higher Education Research and Development*](#) (online 15 March 2023): “7 themes were identified across the 68 papers included in the review. Themes reflected supervisory relationships, challenges for international students, engagement with research communities, balancing life contexts, administrative challenges, thesis by publication, and industry-based research. The overall findings suggest a need for universities to be more proactive in supporting the unique needs of HDR students in a changing educational context.”

Research into higher education

Is there a gap in the literature justifying your article?

[In the *European Journal of Higher Education*](#) (online 16 March 2023) Navé Wald, Tony Harland and Chandima Daskon (all Otago) looked at “how higher education researchers approach writing the rationale and justification for their work published in journal articles. ... the majority of articles do have a gap statement, but these are mostly implicit rather than explicit, and located somewhere in the introductory text. ... Based on the data and drawing on theory, we present a tool to assist with writing gap statements and comment on current practice in relation to knowledge contribution.” Was this a gap in the literature?

Disciplines are not silos

Mathieu Albert (Toronto), Pia Vuolanto (Tampere) and Suzanne Laberge (Montréal) wrote [in *Studies in Higher Education*](#) (online 29 October 2022): “We use citation practices to demonstrate that cross disciplinary communication occurs despite claims otherwise. Considering the overwhelming amount of data generated by bibliometric studies, we argue that knowledge exchange across disciplines is too large to be ignored and that the silo thesis should be re-examined.”

Identifying patterns in the development of research into HE

Yusuf Ikbal Oldac and Francisco Olivos (both Lingnan) “mapped the development of the higher education field in the last two decades using novel natural language processing techniques. Their study, [‘Exploring the development of higher education research topics in the last two decades: Seven patterns’](#) (online as a preprint), covered the abstracts of all articles published between 2000 and 2021 in the six core journals of higher education research. The findings highlight 15 emergent research

topics, some of which are new additions that have not been highlighted before. ... the study argues for seven major patterns in the development of higher education research in the last two decades.”

The seven patterns were:

1. Higher education research is diversifying
2. Policy and teaching/learning are still top, but higher education research has other rising topics: identity politics and discrimination, access, and employability
3. Research funding existence is influential in shaping the research agenda of certain topics in the higher education field, but not all
4. Some higher education topics are more prevalent when studied in collaboration
5. Top-six or generic higher education journals have differing publication preferences
6. Topic focus changes based on the location of the first author
7. Asia-based authors are now on a par with Western Europe- and North America-based authors in terms of specialisation level in higher education research, but Asia-based authors are less represented

Assessing the contributions of higher education: knowledge for a disordered world

The new book from CGHE is free to download [here](#). It asks: “What is ‘higher education’ and what does it do for persons, organisations, communities, cities, nations and the world? What difference does it make? How do we know?” It offers the stellar cast which we have come to expect from CGHE, with the unmistakable imprint of CGHE Director Simon Marginson (Oxford) in many places.

Reflecting on a second virtual conference...and looking ahead *by Camille Kandiko Howson*



I had the honour of being asked to give some closing remarks at the Society for Research into Higher Education’s [Annual Conference](#) this year, alongside Prof Chris Millward and the SRHE team. ‘Mobilities in Higher Education’ was the theme of the Society’s second virtual conference. First some reflections.

Mobilities in higher education refer to the movement of students, faculty, and staff within and across national borders for the purpose of pursuing education and research opportunities. This phenomenon has increased significantly in recent years, driven by factors such as globalization, advances in technology, and the growing demand for a highly skilled workforce.

In conclusion, mobilities in higher education are a crucial aspect of the contemporary global education landscape. HEIs need to carefully consider the opportunities and challenges posed by mobilities and develop strategies to support and enhance this phenomenon.

I’ll pause here, because I did not write the previous four paragraphs. I put the title into the ChatGPT open AI chatbot and it spit out the abstract above instantly. This tool launched during the conference week, exciting many delegates and kicking off worries about the future of assessment and feedback in higher education. The possibilities also reminded me why we like to meet up as a community - virtually and physically - to share what is happening and how we can actively shape the future. The conference theme was widely adopted across presentations, showing our desire to come together to learn, teach and research higher education. Now on to my (human) thoughts. ...

Read the full blog [here](#).

SRHE member Dr Camille Kandiko Howson is Associate Professor of Education in the Centre for Higher Education Research and Scholarship at Imperial College London. Follow Camille on Twitter @cbkandiko

Academic drift may not be about prestige

Amal Kumar (Harvard) about California State University explored “the origins and evolution of academic drift at the California State University (CSU) system between 1960 and 2005, finding that its name change from college to university and pursuit of doctoral-level education had endogenous origins grounded not in status competition but rather in a desire to repair an organizational identity breach with field stakeholders. This case suggests that organizational activities that look like they are in the pursuit of prestige may not in fact be grounded in prestige dynamics and that academic drift may be less inevitable and hegemonic than currently portrayed in the literature.” His [article in Higher Education](#) was online in January 2023 before it appeared as part of Vol 85 in March 2023.

75 years of HEQ

Christine Teelken (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam) reflected on 75 years of *Higher Education Quarterly*, which started life as *Universities Quarterly*, in [her editorial](#) (online 19 January 2023).

Dates for HE researchers in 2023

ECHER published [a helpful list](#) in December 2022.

Landscapes of Learning for Unknown Futures: Prospects for Space in Higher Education by Sam Elkington and Jill Dickinson



Across the higher education (HE) sector, factors including increasing student numbers, growing diversification, concerns about students’ mental health and wellbeing, and marketisation, have been compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis. Their culmination has pushed the changing needs of learning spaces to the top of the agenda. Against this backdrop, our [Symposia Series](#) aims to provoke critical debate around the possibilities for new configurations of learning spaces to support decision-making,

policy and practice in developing future landscapes of learning within HE. ...

Read the full blog [here](#).

Publishing

Open access

[John Sherer \(North Carolina\)](#) blogged for *The Scholarly Kitchen* on 23 March 2023 about a recent initiative to publish open access monographs in history, reporting technical problems, author resistance but also much greater take up/use, with about three times as many reported individual engagements as even a successful paywalled monograph.

An [article](#) on 6 March 2023 by Alexander B Belles and colleagues from Penn State in the *Journal of Science Policy and Governance* made recommendations about how to handle the US Office of Science and Technology Policy requiring that all federally funded scholarly research be accessible to the public immediately upon publication. The article said: “While this open access policy will ultimately benefit society by increasing the availability of data and research outputs, it could place a heavy burden on researchers due to the relatively high cost of open access alongside an academic culture that tends to favor publishing in high impact subscription journals. We ... offer recommendations for agencies, universities, and publishers to mitigate the impacts on researchers.” One recommendation was to consider cancelling publisher subscriptions and divert funds to author processing charges.

[Jack Grove reported for Times Higher Education/insidehighered.com](#) on 16 March 2023 on the suspiciously remarkable expansion of Swiss open-access publisher MDPI, which published no fewer than 240,500 articles in 2021, “just slightly fewer than Springer Nature and Elsevier’s combined open-access total that year, levying an average article processing charge of 1,258 Swiss francs (\$1,364) per paper.” [Jack Grove had reported for Times Higher Education](#) on 15 March 2023 that analysis by economist Paolo Crosetto (National Research Institute for Agriculture, Food and Environment, France) showed “the number of MDPI’s special issues continued to rise sharply in 2022. Focusing on 98 MDPI journals with an impact factor, there were 55,985 special issues with a closing date in 2023, as of 23 February, Dr Crosetto told *Times Higher Education*. That compares with 39,587 open special issues [identified at the end of March 2021](#), although only 10,504 of these eventually published anything. In 2022, 17,777 special issues published content.” [Mark Hanson \(Exeter\) blogged](#) about the predatoriness of MDPI on 25 March 2023.

[Web of Science reported on 20 March 2023](#) that it had this year already disqualified some 50 journals, including an MDPI flagship journal, from having an impact factor in future. Christos Petrou of Scholarly Intelligence [blogged for The Scholarly Kitchen](#) on 30 March 2023 about the recent delisting of 50 journals, its implications for publishers, including MDPI, Hindawi and Wiley (which recently acquired Hindawi), and the consequences of the ‘guest editor’ model which underpins the recent growth of MDPI and other journals.

Shaping the field of lifelong education

The editors of the [International Journal of Lifelong Education](#) looked back on 40 years of the journal to develop themes which had shaped the field. They chose “citizenship and its learning; learning in, through and for work; and widening participation and higher education”. The [article](#) by John Holford (Nottingham) and his co-editors was part of the journal’s retrospective issue 41(6) (2 November 2022).

Books with DOIs are more discoverable on Google Scholar

Lettie Y Conrad (independent) and Michelle Urberg of EBSCO [blogged for The Scholarly Kitchen](#) about their funded study to find how metadata contributes to the successful discovery of academic and research literature via the mainstream web. “Initial results indicated that **DOIs have an indirect influence on the discoverability of scholarly books in Google Scholar** — however, we found no direct linkage between book DOIs and the quality of Google Scholar indexing or users’ ability to access the full text via search-result links. Although Google Scholar claims to not use DOI metadata in its search index, the results of our mixed-methods study of 100+ books (from 20 publishers) demonstrate that books with DOIs are generally more discoverable than those without DOIs.

Why journal submissions get rejected

Alex Edmans (London Business School) reflected on his experience as editor of the *Review of Finance* and analysed his reasons for rejecting nearly 1000 submissions, [for SSRN](#) on 9 February 2023.

The ethics of peer review

The endless lament of journal editors about finding reviewers continued, as Dirk Lindebaum (Grenoble Ecole de Management) and Peter J Jordan (Griffith) [mused in Organization](#) (30(2) 396-406) on reviewer disengagement: “... an audit culture in academia and individual incentives (like reduced teaching loads or publication bonuses) have eroded the willingness of individuals to engage in the collective enterprise of peer-reviewing each others’ work on a *quid pro quo* basis. ... it is unethical for potential reviewers to disengage from the review process ... we aim to ‘politicise’ the review process and its consequences for the sustainability of the scholarly community. We propose three pathways towards greater reviewer engagement: (i) senior scholars setting the right kind of ‘reviewer’ example; (ii) journals introducing recognition awards to foster a healthy reviewer progression path and (iii)

universities and accreditation bodies moving to explicitly recognise reviewing in workload models and evaluations. ... the latter point ... aligns individual and institutional goals in ‘measurable’ ways. In this way, ironically, the audit culture can be subverted to address the imbalance between individual and collective goals.”

Identity theft prompts scientists worldwide to contemplate legal action

[Jack Grove reported for Times Higher Education/insidehighered.com](#) on 10 February 2023 that many leading scientists had been wrongly named as authors or editors on AI-generated papers and predatory journals. Some were considering legal action, which might be supported by UKRIO.

The gaming of citation and authorship

Stuart Macdonald (Leicester) wrote a truly terrifying analysis of the extent of misrepresentation in academic publishing, [in *Social Science Information*](#) (online 7 February 2023): “Many authors in medicine have made no meaningful contribution to the article that bears their names, and those who have contributed most are often not named as authors. Author slots are openly bought and sold. The problem is magnified by the academic publishing industry and by academic institutions, pleased to pretend that peer review is safeguarding scholarship. In complete contrast, the editors of medicine’s leading journals are scathing about just how ineffectual is peer review in medicine. Other disciplines should take note lest they fall into the mire in which medicine is sinking.”

APCs are a heavy burden for middle-income countries

Alicia J Kowaltowski (São Paulo) and colleagues from Brazil [blogged for *The Scholarly Kitchen*](#) on 9 March 2023 about the way author processing charges can be a major problem for middle-income countries like Argentina, Brazil, India, Mexico, and South Africa.

Predatory journals and the mislocated centres of scholarly communication

Franciszek Krawczyk and Emanuel Kulczycki (both Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland) argued in [their article in *Tapuya: Latin American Science, Technology and Society*](#) (2021, 4(1)) that so-called predatory journals may have a significant role in enabling otherwise marginalised scholars to maintain their academic careers despite a location on the periphery of mainstream academic debate. “Knowledge production is an important factor in establishing the geopolitical position of countries ... we introduce the term “mislocated centres of scholarly communication” to help better understand the emergence of predatory journals, and journals that bear similarities to them, in geopolitical peripheries. Mislocated centers of scholarly communication are perceived in the peripheries as legitimized by the center but are in fact invisible or illegitimate in the center. Thus, we argue the importance of viewing these mislocated centers as the result of unequal power relations in academia. ... predatory journals are a geopolitical problem because the geopolitical peripheries of science are much more often harmed by them than the center. Unlike predatory journals, mislocated centers of scholarly communication are not necessarily fraudulent but rather they are geopolitical roles imposed on some journals by a dynamic between center and peripheries.”

Routledge/Taylor & Francis acquire US publisher Stylus

The founder of [Stylus Publishing](#) announced in an email to authors on 2 March 2023 that the publisher will be sold to Taylor & Francis and operate as part of its Routledge division, as [Doug Lederman reported for insidehighered.com](#) on 3 March 2023. “Founded in 1996, Stylus’ publishing focuses on higher education, covering such areas as teaching and learning, student affairs, professional development, service learning and community engagement, study abroad, assessment, online learning, racial diversity on campus, women’s issues, doctoral education, adult education, and leadership and administration.” The publisher seems mainly to produce practical guides for US HE, with no obvious impact more widely.

Ethics and Academic Freedom

Academic Freedom

Hamline academic freedom controversy rumbles on

Hamline University, a small but long-established university in Minneapolis-St Paul, did not renew an art history teacher's contract after she showed an image of the prophet Muhammad during a class. She had forewarned students but one Muslim student complained afterwards and the University at first apologised and declared the action 'Islamophobic'. Later, amid some positive and much negative comment, it issued apparently contradictory statements from its board and the president, as [Scott Jaschik reported for *insidehighered.com*](#) on 17 January 2023. Then the adjunct, Erika López Prater, [sued the university](#) for religious discrimination and defamation, as the university president admitted it had been 'flawed' to use the term 'Islamophobic'.

'Wokery'

Think tank *Civitas* aimed to outdo *Policy Exchange* as it produced [its own dodgy survey](#) of 'radical progressivism' in universities leading, of course, to a league table with Oxbridge at the top, gleefully reported by [Connor Stringer in the *MailOnline*](#) on 15 January 2023 (other right wing media are available). The article led with unnamed critics saying leading institutions were "poisoning the minds of generations to come". Near the bottom of the piece: "A Russell Group spokesperson said: 'Our universities are places where free speech and the expression of all ideas and viewpoints is encouraged and protected. There is nothing in this report, which is based on flawed assumptions, to suggest that this is not the case.'"

Global decline in academic freedom

[Nathan M Greenfield reported for *University World News*](#) on 16 March 2023: "Over the past decade, academic freedom has declined in more than 22 countries representing more than half of the world's population, four billion people, says the [Academic Freedom Index: Update 2023 \(AFI\)](#), a new study, produced by researchers at the Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Institute of Political Science (FAUIPS, Erlangen-Nuremberg), Germany, and the V-Dem Institute in Gothenburg, Sweden. Among these countries are India, China, Mexico, Britain and the United States."

Boo boo Ron Ron

[Ethan W Ris \(Nevada at Reno\) wrote in *insidehighered.com*](#) on 27 February 2023 about the parallels between Ronald Reagan and Ron DeSantis, both using a culture war focused on HE as a vehicle for advancing their presidential ambitions. The [DeSantis bill](#) was presented to the Florida legislature in February 2023: [Jeremy Young, a campaigner for freedom of expression, said](#) it "would end academic freedom, shared governance, and university independence in FL public higher education in favor of one man's authoritarian control of public university decisions. It would be the end of FL higher ed as a space of open inquiry and free expression." Danielle Groton, Allan E Barsky (both Florida Atlantic University) and Christine Spadola (Texas at Arlington) surveyed 187 Florida academics at four state universities and concluded that: "Florida House Bill 233 ... purports to support intellectual freedom and viewpoint diversity through four components: prohibiting shielding of students, staff, and academics from certain speech; requiring an annual assessment on intellectual freedom and viewpoint diversity; creating a cause of action for certain video- or audio-recordings; and revising provisions related to protected expressive activity, university student governments, and codes of conduct. ... while academics support intellectual freedom and viewpoint diversity conceptually, most academics suggested the bill has negative impacts on intellectual freedom and viewpoint diversity and faculty morale." Their article was [in *Higher Education Policy and Management*](#) (online 15 March 2023).

Integrity

The ethics of organisational ethics

[Carl Rhodes \(University of Technology, Sydney\)](#) wrote in *Organization Studies* 44(3) about research in organisational ethics: “The tension between authoritative and interpersonal forms of ethics in organizations is not a problem for ethics, but rather a condition of the possibility of organizational ethics itself.”

High quality ‘supreme audit institutions’ help to minimise corruption

Eriole Zita Nonki Tadida (Laval University, Quebec) used regression on 2019 budget data from 117 countries to develop her argument that “the quality of the institutional anti-corruption system centered on the SAI is associated with a low level of perceived corruption. However, other elements must be implemented to create an anti-corruption environment, such as citizens’ involvement as controlling actors.” Her [article was in *International Review of Administrative Sciences*](#) (online 27 February 2023).

Brighton embezzler convicted after 30 years

[Tom Williams reported for *Times Higher Education*](#) on 24 February 2024 that David Hall, the University of Brighton’s former head of income and payments, had been convicted of fraud after embezzling £2.4 million from the institution over 30 years, discovered by the university only in November 2021.

The president owns the course-sharing platform the college uses. Is it a conflict of interest?

Yes, obviously. But Adrian College president Jeff Docking doesn’t think so, as [Josh Moody reported for *insidehighered.com*](#) on 18 January 2023. Adrian College is a small college (1900 students) near Detroit; it works with Rize Education – which also employs Docking’s son Jacob, as [David Jesse reported for *the Detroit Free Press*](#) on 17 November 2023.

Global Perspectives

The state of higher education worldwide

Andreas Schleicher, Director of the OECD, gave the [HEPI Annual Lecture](#) on 7 March 2023, chaired by late substitute Mary Curnock Cook, who tweeted [this thread of highlights](#).

Elite private universities

[Philip Altbach \(Boston College\)](#) wrote in *University World News* on 25 March 2023 about “a small but remarkable development of high quality non-profit private universities, especially in the Global South.”

Australia

School-university partnerships in Australia

A literature review by Stacey E Jones (Charles Sturt) and Corinne A Green (Wollongong) identified “five key themes: partnership structure; partnership activities; partnership aims; respect and reciprocity within the partnership; and sustainability of the partnership.” It was a book chapter in [Work-Integrated Learning Case Studies in Teacher Education](#) (online 2 January 2023).

Policy changes made Australian HE less efficient and less competitive

Stephen Ingram (La Trobe) analysed Australia’s HE policy changes 1988-2019 [in *Higher Education*](#) (online 6 January 2023) and concluded that “... policy changes have reduced efficiency and competitiveness, and weakened the financial position of a number of universities. ... [My analysis]

provides empirical support for previous research highlighting the significant structural and regulatory constraints on the creation of a competitive market in higher education. Furthermore, it demonstrates that 35 years of policy change have merely reinforced pre-existing market positions ...”

Caucasus

Georgia (and Azerbaijan) on my mind

Quality in Higher Education had a [special issue](#) (online 30 January 2023) on ‘Aspects of Higher Education Quality in the South Caucasus’, edited by Paul Gibbs (East European University, Tblisi), Irma Grdzeldze (Tbilisi State University) and Giorgi Tavadze (East European University, Tblisi).

China

Engaging with China from inside and out

SRHE member and [network convener](#) Miguel Lim (Manchester) was one of the editors of a [special collection](#) of articles for the *International Journal of Chinese Education* (online 23 December 2022), drawing on themes discussed at the annual China and Higher Education conference series at the University of Manchester.

Record numbers of students and staff leaving Hong Kong HE

[Yojana Sharma reported for University World News](#) on 24 January 2023 that 2,302 undergraduates at Hong Kong’s eight public universities left their courses before completing them in the 2021-22 academic year, about 2.7% of the 86000 undergraduate population. 362 staff left, a 30% increase over the previous year.

New Zealand

Classes washed out in Auckland

Floods in Auckland in January 2023 forced an eight-day closure of two universities and a range of other HE providers in Auckland, as [John Ross reported for Times Higher Education](#) on 31 January 2023.

Norway

Norway HE struggling with new fees policy

The Norwegian government introduced a new fees policy, requiring universities to charge tuition fees for non-European students from 2023 -2024 onwards, but the policy has been widely criticised as ill-founded and lacking clear guidance, as [Jan Petter Myklebust reported for University World News](#) on 21 March 2023.

Russia

Regional accessibility of HE in Russia

Ilya Prakhov and Polina Bugakova (both HSE University, Moscow) wrote [in the British Journal of Sociology of Education](#) (online 25 January 2023) about barriers to access to HE. Residents of small towns or villages face the highest barriers and gender inequality.

Society News

2023 SRHE International Research Conference (4-8 December)

We are excited to share that the 2023 SRHE Conference in December will provide the opportunity for delegates to participate in person for the first time since 2019. In addition, we will also be offering an online element to build on the success of the SRHE online conferences held in 2021 and 2022.

Below are the initial details:

- **Monday 4th December 2023:** online conference
- **Wednesday 6th December to Friday 8th December 2023:** in-person conference at Conference Aston, Birmingham, UK.

After a fully remote conference day on 4th December, 5th December will be a day of rest, travel, and preparation. The in-person conference will then run from 6th – 8th December. Full details (including a call for papers) will follow very shortly but for now, please save these dates and join us in early December.

Forthcoming SRHE Network Events

Do visit our home page at www.srhe.ac.uk for further details and to book onto our forthcoming events.

SRHE Digital University: what's on in 2023 by Janja Komljenovic, Katy Jordan, and Jeremy Knox (SRHE DU Network Co-Convenors)

From 2023, the Digital University (DU) network is launching a new strategy to connect its members, collaborators, and friends. We hope this new way of working will motivate and stimulate debates around everything digital in higher education.

We will organise the network's work and events along three themes each year, chosen to reflect key issues in research and teaching currently. Each will last about four months, but sometimes activities arising from the different themes will overlap. DU convenors will organise a launching event for each theme. We invite our members, friends, and anyone interested to propose sessions, seminars, webinars, workshops, etc., for any of the three themes. We will try to organise these events in the timeframe of the particular theme. The DU network will, therefore, act as a platform for anyone to contribute to discussions about digital higher education. ... Read the full blog [here](#).

SRHE Annual Report 2022

To find out more about the Society, including updates from the Chair, new CEO, and Treasurer, plus an overview of the membership, publications, awards and events of the past year, do visit <https://srhe.ac.uk/about-srhe> to view this recently published report.

SRHE Executive Team

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Small ads

External examiners, referees, reviewers wanted?

SRHE News is happy to publish calls for papers, advertisements for external examiners in the broad field of research into higher education, for publishers' referees, for book reviewers, and so on.

And finally

Academy of Social Sciences

Congratulations to not just one but two [new Fellows of the Academy of Social Sciences](#), elected in 2023: Helen Higson (Aston), until recently SRHE's Vice-Chair of Governing Council, and Anna Mountford-Zimdars (Exeter), current SRHE Governing Council member.

Sir William Taylor

Bill Taylor, who died in January 2023, was for many years one of the leading figures in education as an educationist, academic, institutional leader and contributor to educational policymaking. He was Director of the Institute of Education in Bristol before moving to London to [lead the Institute of Education](#) for ten years. He was then Principal of the University of London before becoming VC at Hull, retiring but returning to serve as interim VC first at Huddersfield and then Thames Valley, and interim Head of the Winchester School of Art. He chaired many national and international organisations, including NFER, ACFHE and EAIR. His best-known publications included *The Secondary Modern School* (1963) for many years the key work on the topic, and his influential collaborations included *Educational Administration and the Social Sciences* (1969), jointly edited with George Baron of the London IoE – the first professor of educational administration in the UK.

There IS a cultural hierarchy

Survey data in Denmark analysed by Mads Meier Jaeger, Rikke Haudrum Rasmussen (both Copenhagen) and Anders Holm (Western University, London, Ontario, Canada) concluded that "These results are consistent with the idea that a cultural hierarchy exists that sustains SEP [socioeconomic position] gradients in cultural tastes and participation." Their [article was in the British Journal of Sociology](#) (online 12 March 2023).

Mind your language

Berkeley might be cancelled

Trinity College Dublin is debating whether to rename its Berkeley Library, as [John Walshe reported for University World News](#) on 21 March 2023. Irish philosopher Bishop George Berkeley (1685-1753) was a slave owner in the United States; his name lives on not only at UC Berkeley but also a college at Yale.

Stanford cancels its website attempt at removing harmful language

Stanford's Elimination of Harmful Language Initiative, aimed at challenging words like 'American', 'immigrant' and 'grandfather', unsurprisingly failed to engage its intended audience, and the website in question was first hidden and then taken down, as [Susan D'Agostino reported for insidehighered.com](#) on 11 January 2023.

Changing of the seasons at LSE

After consultation the School Management Committee at [LSE has decided to change the names](#) of terms: Michaelmas becomes Autumn, Lent becomes Winter, and Summer becomes Spring.

The Temple Column

We are delighted to announce that our new regular columnist, already a frequent contributor to SRHE News and Blog, is Paul Temple.



A movie about the life and work of J Robert Oppenheimer, called simply *Oppenheimer*, with Cillian Murphy in the title role, is due to be released in the UK this summer. It looks as if the movie will deal mainly with the three years of Oppenheimer's life when he led the Manhattan Project's scientific team which produced the first atomic bomb in 1945, but his life story holds many other points of interest for those of us studying higher education. Oppenheimer was primarily a university teacher, researcher, and administrator, before the war mostly at Berkeley and after the war as the Director of Princeton's Institute for Advanced Study, where his staff included Einstein, Bohr and Dirac.

A particular point of historical interest is that Oppenheimer's academic career spanned the period during which Europe, as a result of self-inflicted wounds, ceded world scientific leadership to the United States. When Oppenheimer graduated from Harvard in 1925, young American scientists wanting to work with the world's best researchers crossed the Atlantic as a matter of course. As a theoretical physicist, Oppenheimer's choice was between Germany, particularly Göttingen and Leipzig, and England, particularly Cambridge. Cambridge didn't work out well, so in 1926 he went to work with Max Born, one of the leading figures in quantum mechanics, at Göttingen, receiving his doctorate there just a year later. There were presumably no wasted words in his 25-page thesis.

Several factors came together to allow America to build an atomic bomb in a stunningly short period. The crucial phase of the Manhattan Project, from when the first scientists arrived at the newly-created Los Alamos laboratory (a collection of army huts) to the "Trinity" test in the New Mexico desert on 16 July 1945, lasted a mere 28 months. But the Manhattan Project built on the best available physics and engineering research, created in American universities in the 1930s – Berkeley and Chicago in particular – largely with public funding for the purest of research. Through the 1930s, for example, Berkeley seemed to have no particular difficulty in obtaining funding to build ever more powerful cyclotrons (the first particle accelerators, allowing the production of radioactive isotopes), but with no practical aim in view: nobody seems to have asked them for an impact statement.

America also took full advantage of talent sucked in from Europe, particularly Jewish refugees from Germany, Hungary and Italy. Britain also took in foreigners: Rudolf Peierls and Otto Frisch, both German-Jewish refugees, worked at Birmingham University in the 1940s and made a vital contribution to building the bomb by showing that the amount of uranium-235 needed to sustain a chain reaction was a matter of kilograms, not tons as had been thought – thus making the bomb a practical proposition.

A lot of things supported the Manhattan Project's success, but large-scale, long-term funding for blue-skies research, together with a policy of grabbing talent from wherever it could be found, and a sophisticated manufacturing economy, were all crucial. Hard to decide which of these factors is the least likely to apply in Britain today.

Oppenheimer's loss of his security clearance in 1954 was devastating for a man with a strong sense of national duty. There are several ironies here. One is that, while Oppenheimer's politics were certainly left-wing, he was notably clear-eyed about the Soviet Union, concluding as early as 1947 that negotiations with Stalin over the control of nuclear weapons would be a waste of time. And, just as past service to the Soviet state was no guarantee of one's future safety, so the fact that Oppenheimer had given America the bomb ("What more do you want, mermaids?", a friend asked at his Security Board hearing) did not protect him from the FBI's unshakeable obsession about his political

unreliability (of course, they missed the actual Soviet spies). There is a depressing contrast between this cold war paranoia and the open, international culture which Oppenheimer had known before the war. Princeton's refusal to bow to pressure from Washington to sack him must have been a consolation of sorts.

There was a reflective silence in the control bunker immediately following the "Trinity" explosion. Oppenheimer later said that he thought of the line from Hindu scripture (he read Sanskrit), "Now I am become death, the destroyer of worlds". It seems not to be entirely clear whether he actually uttered the words; someone present recalls him saying, "Well, I guess it worked". Let's see how the movie handles this era-defining moment.

Dr Paul Temple is Honorary Associate Professor in the Centre for Higher Education Studies, UCL Institute of Education.