

Academics weathering the storms: the changing climate of UK HE in the face of increased managerial power, marketization and consumerist regulation

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ABSTRACT This paper reflects on recent and current UK government policies on Higher Education (HE) from the viewpoint of how they are, or are likely to, impact on the work of the academic community. Information, perception and comment is presented from government papers and NGO publications as well as trade union, student union, institutional and national surveys of academic staff with a view to documenting views reflecting the changing academic profession in the UK. The author concludes that whilst this data is wide ranging and pertinent, there is a pressing need for some serious field based research into the lived experiences of academics in a range of disciplines and HE institutions as they face key challenges resulting from changes in government policies. Changes expressed in the recent Green Paper as: ‘initiatives, incentives, reforms, hypotheses, metrics, processes, introduction of new providers and higher education architecture’, are signalling turbulent times ahead as UK HEIs continue to evolve.

Keywords: Higher education institutions, academic community, National Student Survey, government policies

The academic profession in UK

The changing nature of the academic community in the UK is a somewhat under researched and under theorised area. The original now classic study of academic staff, known as the Carnegie study, was the 1992 survey completed under the auspices of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching in the United States (Altbach 1996). Crisis, change and morale were themes in many of the journal articles, book chapters and reports based on the Carnegie survey. Bentley (2012) observed that higher education (HE) was becoming increasingly measured according to economic benchmarks, “commodifying” activities that previously did not have an explicit market value. The international student ‘market’ had earlier been identified as ripe for commodification by Walker (1997). The Changing Academic Profession or CAP study, was a follow-up to the Carnegie. It began in 2006 and made its international database available to researchers in 2011. The CAP study was the largest of its kind, being part of an international comparative analysis that included some 20 countries; the UK element of which was produced by Locke and Bennion (2010).

Existing research on the circumstances of the academic profession clearly illustrates that challenges facing the academic profession are not confined to the UK. In a global report for the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education in 2009, Altbach et al (2009) found a discouraging environment for the academic profession

worldwide – albeit with different sets of difficulties facing developing and developed nations. Van der Walt, Wollhuter et al (2011) concentrate their investigations on the Third World. Teichler, Arimoto and Cummings (2013a) covered almost 20 countries in their study. They chose to emphasise the influence of recent changes on the working lives of academics citing the mechanism of regulations, incentives and sanctions. Teichler & Hohle's (2013b) study focussed their investigations on European HE noting expansion and increasing expectations of the universities contributions to the 'knowledge society across Europe. A number of studies focus on a specific country: Williams (2008), in South Africa, questions whether at this time, academia is actually a profession. Abramov (2012) discusses the rise of managerialism in Russian universities finding evidence of the diminishment of academic freedom and autonomy. A recent study from Arimoto et al (2015) took an in depth view of the academic profession in Japan also highlighting challenges from marketization and also internationalisation a long standing issue for Japan. Research findings from across the world including the wide scale work of Bentley et al (2013) suggests that teaching and researching in higher education institutions in the opening decades of the 21st century on the whole is considered a challenging and unsatisfactory occupation, though they cite Finland and Canada as having higher satisfaction rates than most.

So there are suggestions from across the globe that the UK is not alone in concluding that academic work is challenging for the majority of academic staff with changes imposed from outside the university posited as a causal factor. This factor was highlighted by Trow and Clark (1994) who demonstrated that over the past decade British higher education has undergone a more profound reorientation than any other system among industrial societies. Universities UK (UUK) offered an interim investigation of the UK element of the CAP study indicating that HE would become more international indeed would grow a trans-national business. The author also predicted the increasing stratification of the previously fairly unified UK HE sector (Locke 2007).

Newly appointed academics' perceptions of the language of teaching and learning was investigated by Green (2009) who identified a range of impediments preventing new staff accessing and benefitting from the scholarship of learning and teaching which, we can infer, was inhibiting them from developing professional practice to support the challenges faced in their work with students. Gale (2011) identified a range of anxieties experienced by early-career academics in a 'post-1992' teaching-oriented institutions in the UK about assuming an academic identity, related to students, the teaching arena, and organisational practice. Walker (2015) focusses on challenges to international academic staff (IAS) but concedes that the pressures described in respect of IAS are likely to be experienced by all academics in UK HE, especially newly appointed, to a greater or lesser extent.

Importance of higher education to the state

For decades preceding the CAP study, tertiary education across the globe was high on the agendas of governments not least because of unprecedented demand, but also because higher education was increasingly recognised as central to the fortunes of the nation state and key to its prospects. In most parts of the world massive changes were seen, not only in the direction and complexity of the underlying rationale of higher education, but in the sheer size of the enterprise in terms of students, staff, budgets and the social and economic purposes to which higher education goods and services contribute (Walker 2009).

The publication of the UK element of the CAP study stimulated further interest in the evolution of the university in the country, together with changes in higher education policy and the impact of these on the academic profession (Locke and Bennion 2010). As long ago as the turn of the last century, Burton Clark had commented that the universities of the world had entered a period of disquieting turmoil that seemed to have no end in sight. Diversity, widening participation, a growing array of academic subjects offered, and continuing programme renewal: all were becoming part of the landscape, all resulting in key challenges for the academic community. He warned, 'we all, to a greater or lesser extent inhabit knowledge based economies and societies. We are competing in an expanding and rapidly changing professional labour market for which Universities are expected to produce competent graduates. Governments expect HEIs to do more for society in solving economic and social problems yet at the same time they are becoming unreliable patrons. Most importantly university researchers are creating new knowledge but even the richest institutions cannot cover all the new fields' (Clark 1998: xii).

As demand for higher education continued to increase across the world, unhappily the unit of resource allocated by the UK government, declined. It is true to say, as Callan (2002:2) has observed, 'The politics of scarcity are very different from the politics of prosperity – and different in ways that are often inimical to financial support of higher education'. From the perspective of hindsight, we have come to appreciate that over the last decades higher education in the UK had inhabited a somewhat benign environment in financial terms. The sector was in possession of significant assets as institutions entered the new millennium (Callan 2002:3) and had relative advantages over other public services. Not only did universities possess financial assets, they were in a better position to raise revenue on their own behalf. One of many examples of revenue streams is the accommodation and hospitality function whereby students rent rooms and facilities from the University throughout the teaching year which can then be let during the vacations for conferences and similar events.

Whilst expansion of the sector was lauded, the problem of how to accommodate additional students without commensurate additional state support, was one of the principal (unanswered) questions for UK higher education since the days of the Robbins Report of 1963 a problem likely to have maximum impact on academic staff. Prime Minister Harold MacMillan had appointed a committee chaired by Lord Robbins, tasked with: '[reviewing] the pattern of full-time higher education in Great Britain and in the light of national needs and resources to advise Her Majesty's Government on what principles its long-term development should be based' (HMSO 1963).

The political left in the UK has traditionally held the view that UK higher education is a public good, and it can be argued that income from UK goods and services in one form or another returns to the public purse, as does taxation, both in Pay As You Earn directly from salaries and Value Added Tax from the sale of higher education goods and services. From their innovations in services to business, including commercialisation of new knowledge, delivery of professional training, and consultancy, universities in the UK contributed £3.4 billion to the economy in 2011-12, the latest year for which hard data is available, (UUK 2014). The academic work and management (AWAM) systems operated in Universities create space for entrepreneurial academics to respond to opportunities in the business world to work for their mutual benefit and that of the state. Moreover universities have demonstrated growing success at winning funding from the European Union with collaborative research grants and regeneration programmes. In terms of its wider economic impact, UK universities' contribution to the UK economy has increased substantially, new figures published in 2014 revealed.

The higher education sector generated over £73 billion in output (academic year 2011-12) – up (24%) from £59 billion when the last study was published in 2009, a sum greater than that of either the agriculture sector or the pharmaceutical industry (UUK 2014).

Notwithstanding, the Conservative led coalition government of 2010 had throughout its tenure, continued to reduce the unit of resource to higher education with a noticeable shift towards envisioning it as a private, individual good, thus justifying a greater cost sharing. Tuition fees were seen as an important tool in the repertoire of state and institutional response to the withdrawal of public support for higher education. The then Universities' minister had declared ... 'students will not be a burden on the taxpayer' (Telegraph, 2010) which summed up the prevailing approach. This fundamental transformation to the historical pattern of a state funded higher education system in England, which had provided as Robbins decreed, 'access to all those who could benefit from it', has marked a seismic shift in the way universities recruit and retain students and consequently, a significant bearing on the way the academic profession is viewed by students, managers, politicians and the British public. Furthermore, not only has the price of a higher education course passed to the individual consumer, expenditure on course provision is shared with a range of other providers including private, who are allowed – indeed encouraged – to operate on or off campus, within or outside the country, and on physical or virtual environments. In short, a picture of increasing complexity and variegation began to emerge which could not fail to impact on the academic community.

Impact of government policies on the higher education workforce and shifting culture of UK higher education

The General Election of May 2015 brought an end to the coalition government by returning a Conservative majority, albeit 'a razor-thin majority' of 12 as Dan Snow put it (Telegraph 2015). Undaunted, their higher education policies, expressed in a Green Paper (DBiS 2015) without a full debate in parliament and therefore without a parliamentary vote, has 'turned education into a commodity' according to Patrick McGhee (Guardian 2015).

In the UK, what has been regarded as the identity of the academic profession, and of the university itself, has endured for centuries, recognised and accepted by those who have had the privilege of being part of the university and those who haven't. The increase in managerial power, (quasi-) marketization and commodification, has resulted in a somewhat hybrid institution; part public body, part firm, where advertising, branding, mission statements, strategies, target setting, out-sourcing, mergers and price deals, are all part of a landscape characterised by an increasingly differentiated workforce shaped by the changes described here. As Clarke, Hyde & Drennan (2013) observe, "...changes in higher education have added a further complexity to identity formation within higher education. Professional identity is not a stable entity; it is complex, personal, and *shaped by contextual factors*" (author's emphasis)

The Green Paper's promise to 'drive up teaching quality' by introducing the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) will allegedly ensure prospective students are able to identify high quality providers by the TEF level awarded them. It is difficult to see these proposals as anything other than stimulating competition. League tables have become the obsession of Vice Chancellors who expect their staff to be consciously outward-facing, to ensure that the customer satisfaction and above all, to demonstrate value for money (VFM). Managers are driven by the shibboleth of 'the student experi-

ence' which trumps all other concerns, including the well-being of academic staff. That the two historically have been inextricably linked is rarely argued, yet there is ever increasing pressure on academics to 'keep students happy' at all costs. 'With more and more information available to prospective applicants, the growing importance of league tables, and competition between universities for a decreasing pool of applicants becoming ever more cut-throat, it seems like there is an ever increasing pressure on universities and their academics to keep students happy'. With the focus on students, commentators report, academics feel demoralised and disempowered. (Guardian Higher Education network 2013) yet 'Investing in staff pays dividends in satisfying students and engaging them in learning' the report argues. Notwithstanding, the student of the past has morphed through client to individual economic entity, or customer. And the customer is always right.

Responsible UK academics recognise that it is incumbent upon them to offer a quality educational experience. They interpret this as a relevant current curriculum offer embracing the employability agenda, delivered through appropriate pedagogies and responsive to student expectations. In many institutions academic staff are required to demonstrate that they have responded to student feedback and made changes accordingly and where appropriate. This approach has come to be a hallmark of learning and teaching in UK higher education. Typically academics welcome and are committed to the idea of student engagement but the spectre of 'student feedback', especially the National Student Survey (NSS) (HEFCE 2015a) and the re-imagining of the student as consumer, can be worrying. Some newly appointed academic staff, especially but not only from outside the UK, struggle with the issue of 'student centredness' let alone 'student satisfaction'. Some find the concept confusing and alarming and thus dread offending or upsetting students, as some have confirmed in their annual interviews with managers (commonly known as Staff Development Reviews). In the National Student Survey (NSS), students are invited to rate in detail their satisfaction with the quality of their course including their tutors—the quality of teaching, tutors' ability to explain the subject and make it interesting, their assessment and feedback on students' work, and even the extent to which they make themselves available to individual students. The element of competition has heightened as institutions vie for falling numbers of students and data from the NSS is included in the Key Information Sets (KIS), to which any potential student has access simply by typing into a search engine the name of the HEI they are interested in.

Further student satisfaction engines include Rateyourlecturer (RYL) the British version of the increasingly notorious Ratemyprofessor.com in the US which has received around six million postings on about 750,000 academics since 1999. The RYL has provoked angry responses from academics including Bill Cooke, head of the Department of Organisation, Work and Technology at Lancaster University Management School. His blog on the issue – declaring that lecturers are human beings, "not dancing bears" – has been accessed around 8,000 times as detailed in THE (2013) reporting 'RYL unapologetically asserts 'This is the only way to improve teaching in the UK whilst holding your lecturers to account' and claiming it is 'giving students the power'. (RYL 2016). Cooke claims the problem is stemming from '... anger and anxiety...about the debt people are incurring as students and what will happen to them afterwards... saying which lecturers are good or bad is an expression of that.'

As Deans and other managers issue instructions to their staff on the importance of good NSS ratings, academics report feeling micro-managed and under pressure to perform for the Survey. These reports can be corroborated in the occupational stress survey carried out by UCU (2014). Of the 6439 respondents from HE the proportion who

strongly agreed or agreed that they find their job stressful has increased from 72 in the 2012 survey to 79 in the 2014

The proportion who considered their level of stress to be very high has risen slightly from 16% in 2012 to 17% in 2014. However, there was a considerable increase in the proportion of members from HE that reported experiencing unacceptable levels of stress 'always' or 'often', that is 39% in 2012 and 48% in 2014 and moreover, experience considerably higher average levels of stress (relating to the demands made on them at work), than the British working population as a whole. Academics report that this can in part be explained by changes in the student cohort. In no small way as a result of the expansion of higher education many students, in the pressure to pay tuition fees, have to fit in paid work around their existing commitments which may include family life and childrearing, thus challenging the notion of a full time degree course. Many are the first generation in their families to become university students. Without any existing knowledge of university life they have unrealistic expectations of their tutors' support, time, and even contact hours. Student discontent can cause severe anxiety in academics and a loss of self-belief, worth and esteem. Students may not appreciate how stressful it is for their tutors to balance their efforts between externally imposed short term targets such as producing module reports, with long term targets such as bringing in research funding, and who as a result may not present as approachable knowledgeable mentors in whom students can place their trust, thus compounding the student/staff relationship dilemma.

Academic staff morale

The effects of the range of changes discussed above on the morale of academic staff, has yet to be fully understood. Whilst the academics' unions paint a bleak picture of the pessimism of the workforce (UCU 2015) some commentators, for instance Watson (2009) have accused frontline staff of harking back to an alleged golden age and needing to grow up. A balanced viewpoint may be achieved by consulting the bi-annual staff satisfaction survey which gives something of a panoramic view of the feelings of the workforce (BoS 2012). Academic staff across the country fill out questionnaires operated through the confidential Bristol on-line Surveys operation. Although designed by individual universities for their own workforce, academic and administrative, items used are broadly similar to those included by other types of institutions, thus Sector Benchmarks can be calculated from the responses.

Sector Benchmark users include Pre-1992 Universities, Post-1992 Universities, Russell Group and Specialist Colleges. The survey usually begins with two benchmark questions designed to gauge the overall disposition and motivation of staff. These are phrased as Q1) I would recommend my university as a good employer and Q2) I feel motivated to do my best in my current job.

In 2012 the sector benchmark for Q1 'I would recommend my university as a good employer' is 71% encompassing responses: One of the best, Above average, and Average. (Negative responses covered: Below average, One of the worst, and Don't know). In terms of Q2 on job satisfaction the sector benchmark was 75% responding to the phrase 'I feel motivated to do my best in my current job'.

These results may well compare favourably with employees in other public sector professional roles such as nursing or medicine particularly when judged against the background of a fundamental funding review of UK higher education as a result of which, many institutions are claiming they are compelled to reduce costs (Telegraph 2012) - despite the sector being as healthy financially as it has ever been according to

HEFCE's annual audit (see above) and, as has been noted also, a wide range of differences between HEIs. Since the highest element of any institution's budget is staffing, 'voluntary release schemes' have become commonplace and are resulting in a proportion of the workforce leaving not to be replaced, thereby shunting more responsibility onto those who remain. As noted above, there has been an exacerbation of differentiation across the sector over time despite the absence of a binary divide, resulting in some institutions' finances becoming much less robust whilst others thrive.

Other questions in the survey relate to:

Overall satisfaction with the job. Pay awards (rises) had averaged 3%, with a spike of 8% in 2008, but recently, pay awards of 0.5% per annum have been the reality, with a 2012/13 award of 1%. The UCU claims that there has been a real terms four year decline in academics' pay a fall of 13%. In addition there have been national pension 'reforms' meaning some individuals will have to work for longer before they can retire and draw down their pension. It is the case that the institutions' spend on staffing is growing though the majority of academic staff have not seen evidence of this in their salaries. The Vice Chancellors, as most heads of institutions are known, have been awarded an 8% rise (worth £22,000k to some) whilst the front line academics' pay at is currently being increased at less than the rate of inflation, i.e. a decrease in real terms. The Times Higher looked at the pay of 19 vice-chancellors in the 24-strong Russell Group of research-based universities, reporting that the polarity between the highest and lowest paid academics has never been greater with some VCs earning £400,000K whilst the longest serving senior lecturers were on £40,000K. Sally Hunt of UCU accused university managers of "startling hypocrisy". (BBC 2014).

Understanding of role and contribution. According to the survey, academics continue to have a clear understanding of their role and how their work contributes to the overall aims of the institution. 'I understand how my work fits into the overall aims of the University' (Always or Often) scored 67%. This is not to say that those individuals necessarily agree with 'the mission, objectives' and so forth which can be interpreted as 'spin'. 'I am clear what my job is' scored 82% across the sector but some individual institutions scored much lower, e.g. a worrying 56%. The low score may relate to the position of those academics who have been required to absorb the work of redundant or retired staff, whether or not the portfolio is commensurate with that person's qualifications and/or experience – a fairly typical scenario.

Staff communication and contribution within organisations. In line with the CAP survey, positive ratings have decreased since the 2009 survey it is reported, effective sharing of good practice depending on a positive and collegiate culture sowing the appropriate seeds which is not always present. 51% agreed that senior university management informed staff of reasons behind decisions, although 9.8% didn't know either way. 47% believed they could communicate their ideas to Deans and that their ideas could be heard (it was not specified whether or not their ideas were acted upon). Those staff who believed they could freely express their opinions were 64% although those who thought they could make a difference and influence planning was 47% – also in line with the CAP study; the feeling that good practice was shared across the department or institution was 51%.

Management of change. Only 27% of academics say they were consulted on changes, which seems surprisingly low given that intellectuals usually understand the need for change – although they do not necessarily embrace it (Watson 2009). British academics especially are thought to adopt a fairly traditional position on the university

environment. So it seems staff are being more unsettled by the pace of recent change than in previous surveys, generally regarded as not only rapid but fundamental. Only 27% thought change was well managed, 13.9 didn't know and 7% thought the University reflected on and learned from the change.

Working relationships and performance management. Across the sector 52% of staff believe that poor job performance is not tolerated, although one post '92 university reported only 29% believed that was so, implying, as expressed in narrative comments, that managers were unwilling to tackle poor performance. According to the comments, poor performance covers a lack of capability, mediocre contribution to a team, poor attendance or high levels of short-term sickness, and/or absence where no underlying medical condition exists. In general however, academic staff treat one another with courtesy and respect and reasonably good working relationships exist across teams, or, as Locke and Bennion put it, they hold 'understanding and expectations of academic freedoms and responsibilities embodied in time honoured customs and practices such as collegiality and peer review' (Locke and Bennion, 2010: 48).

Equality and diversity. The picture is not clear across the country. Equality of opportunity in terms of Race and ethnicity, especially in the capital, is probably higher than in the sector as a whole, although it is believed that commitment to support for disabled staff tends to be much lower. The Lesbian, gay bisexual and transvestite (LGBT) staff community feel they can be open and be themselves at work, 83%, across the sector, a high standard set by 39 HEIs who are 'Stonewall Champions'. 57% said that the University demonstrates that it values the diversity of its workforce, 75% said their own managers valued diversity. Sector wide, 83% said that University staff were treated equally regardless of disability.

Physical working environment. It is incontestable that a university environment is more likely to be a safe and healthy one than not, since the institution has a duty of care to students with whom their tutors co-exist, work and in some cases, live. Nevertheless, there is a great variation in terms of the condition of the physical plant in Universities across the country. The evolution of higher education in the UK is long and complex and university buildings range from the elegant colleges of some of the early mediaeval universities, through the great Victorian civics, so-called plate glass or green fields campuses, to the urban, erstwhile vocational and technical colleges. New ways of working and greater degrees of informality in universities, and not least financial imperatives, has have led to a differentiation of working practices including the gradual disappearance on the whole of academic staff 'common rooms' replaced by café areas where students and staff mingle. Individual staff offices are gradually being replaced by open plan office spaces. Notwithstanding these changes, the level of satisfaction with workplace conditions expressed as 'I have a safe working environment' was communicated by 84% of respondents.

Workloads and wellbeing. Again the picture is not consistent. According to comments volunteered, there is a degree of resentment amongst many staff in relation to the fair distribution of workloads and the number of students taught. This is not inevitable given the increased expectations in respect of improving staff performance; greater emphasis on improving institutional league table position; loss of staff through voluntary severance or early retirement; and varying perceptions around the fairness of academic staff work schemes. In some cases academics are urged to take responsibility for adopting smarter ways of working, including the use and mastery of new technology which is becoming ubiquitous. A further transformation is the phenomenon of 'presenteeism', i.e. struggling onto campus despite feeling unwell. A survey by risk insurance group Canada Life found that presenteeism was endemic in Britain as 93 per

cent of employees come into work despite being ill. Furthermore, the Office of National Statistics (ONS) in Britain confirmed that the average number of sick days fell from 5.6 days in 2007 to 4.1 in 2012, as staff worried about job security and redundancy (CIPD, 2013). Less than half the academics who took part in the survey (49%) answered positively to the question ‘I have a choice in what I do at work’, and even fewer (40%) said their workload didn’t allow time for a private life. About 35% didn’t take all their leave entitlement, currently 35 days per year excluding national holidays.

Learning and development. It was found that there are, however, opportunities to develop skills in British universities. Most universities have a Learning and Development Unit as part of the Human Resources function which runs Continuing Professional Development (CPD) courses. Some institutions create opportunities for their staff to work towards higher degrees, MBAs or PhDs for instance, and in some cases pay the course fees. ‘I am encouraged to develop new skills’ scored 51%. ‘I am satisfied with the career opportunities available for me at the University’ scored slightly lower, at 38%.

‘I feel that I am part of a team working towards the same common goal within my department’ scored 67%. 48% agreed that they had confidence in the way the University was run and 51% agreed there was good cooperation between departments they had contact with across the University. ‘I am encouraged to use my initiative at work’ scored 80%, and ‘I have the level of authority I need to be able to carry out my responsibilities’ was 72%.

Standards of Line Management. It seems that collegiality and affirmation, on the whole, characterise the working lives of academics in the UK with over 80% of respondents agreeing ‘My line manager values my contribution’ (81%). ‘I can talk to my line manager about something that has upset or annoyed me at work’ scored 74%. ‘I can rely on my manager to help me with a work problem (Always or Often)’ scored 60%. ‘My line manager provides a sense of direction for me’ 60%. ‘... gives me the support I need when I need it’ 72%. ‘... takes an interest in my long-term career development’ 53%. ‘I am given supportive feedback on the work I do’ 49%. ‘I am clear what my duties and responsibilities are’ 82%. ‘I feel able to voice opinions and influence changes in my area of work’ 64%.

Comments from individuals in the survey suggest the academic Staff Development and Review (SDR) process is not universally embraced, with many staff regarding it as a waste of time and yet more spin and PR on behalf of management to pretend they have staff wellbeing at heart. However, reviewing the past 12 months was considered very or quite useful by 82% of respondents across the sector and 68.9% were positive (very or quite useful) about the setting of clear objectives for the next review period. 68% found identifying training and development needs very or quite useful with 70% being equally positive about the opportunity to discuss one’s future development.

A survey in the THE (2014) described as ‘inaugural’ and termed ‘Best University Workplace’ attempts to offer an overview of how the academic workforce ‘feel about their jobs’. Their account is able to present a rather nuanced picture since they surveyed individuals 45% of whom described themselves as ‘academic’ and 55% ‘professional and support. According to the research, 85% of academics and 78% in professional and support roles derive satisfaction from their work. As so frequently however, the picture lacks homogeneity. Of those working in the creative arts, humanities and education only 43- 45% agreed that ‘my subject area is valued by my university’ and nearly a third overall said they were looking to leave their current employment. This is worryingly low since elsewhere in a City and Guild ‘happiness’ survey

(2012) even schoolteachers, thought to be demonised and undervalued currently, scored 59% in the happy stakes, though not as high as the 87% scored by florists!

Conclusion

In July 2015 the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (BiS) notified HEFCE of the need to make £150 million of savings from the teaching grant to universities in England (HEFCE 2015b) in 2014/15 and 2015/16 then in the Autumn statement the Chancellor revised that sum to £190m by 2019/20. The biggest single sources of savings will be from; money “previously set aside to support an expected increase in student numbers but now scrapped (£37m) the ending of the “transitional” funding for postgraduate and STEM subjects £52m and deduction from the all teaching grant for 2014-15 (£38 million). In the light of these cuts, the government’s Green paper’s stated intention to fulfil (ling) our potential for teaching excellence, social mobility and student choice rings hollow.

It is not unlikely that there will be an exacerbation of the tensions in a number of institutions relating to staff cutbacks, leading to pressure on remaining staff and low morale, to which can be added frequent staff absences and churn. As a consequence there is a risk that classes are not covered, or with inadequate replacements, with even greater student unrest and further pressure on resilient and enduring individuals. The business model approach by government which sanctions the non-payment of tax by Starbucks but not our favourite campus neighbourhood coffee shops, demonstrates the faux business approach that the strong will not be challenged, the weak will go to the wall. Furthermore, at an operational level institutions risk disruption from ever changing management teams keen to ‘make a difference’ yet hamstrung by the uncertainties posed by changes of governments with differing manifestos, then post-election, policy iterations including short termist approaches to budget setting which obliges institutions either to delay making policy decisions until they learn what the Treasury’s financial settlement has in store for them, or to press ahead with their own budget setting in ignorance of government’s plans.

The changes to the academic profession in UK currently have to be seen in the context of the transformation of the university together with the practices that historically have defined academic work. This can be seen partly in terms of the expanded functions of UK higher education. In Trow’s terms the seismic shift from elite higher education through massification to incipient universalization, together with the economic transformation of the last decades and the emergence of globalised knowledge based economies operating across borders (Trow 2000). Almost inconceivable in a sector traditionally publically funded, is the belief that some universities, as a result of the new financial arrangements with government, and increasing competition from the incipient private sector, could go bankrupt. It seems this ‘College for sale’ mentality is deeply troubling for academics since many owe their current positions to excellent higher education, free at the point of delivery. It is disquieting and threatening to the stable collegial relationships academics have traditionally enjoyed with their students, to view the present cohorts burdened by debt, distracted from their studies by the imperative for paid employment, and who make unreasonable demands on their tutors as a result of their insecurity and fear of failure. There are signs however that others are sanguine about what they see as the inevitability of mission stretch, commodification, virtualisation, heightened accountability. The Russel Group of universities have demanded to be exempt from (certain aspects of) FOI because they claim they are private institutions not public bodies, Laura Hopkins at the Telegraph reported. The Rus-

sel Group's written evidence to the Justice Committee Enquiry (Parliament UK 2012) states 'There are elements of university-held information which have clear commercial interest, and form part of their competitive nature. UK universities operate in a global marketplace and compete with leading global universities. Changes in the funding environment are increasing domestic competition, as is the growth of private sector higher education providers'.

It has been noted above that the picture across the sector is not homogeneous but increasingly stratified. An academic's life in a research led university is unlike that of a teaching focussed institution committed to widening participation. The inner city HEIs experience challenges that differ from those of the county campus (Walker 2009). Departmental differences also exist, the creative arts tutors may have a daily life far removed from colleagues in the hard sciences. The changes being proposed by government are manifold; in their words (Green Paper 2015) they express as 'initiatives, incentives, reforms, hypotheses, metrics, processes, introduction of new providers and higher education architecture'. Powerful signals of turbulent times ahead as UK HEIs continue to evolve.

Across the piste, academic life in the UK is morphing into an uncomfortable cultural melange in which academics are coerced into a business mode and businessmen aspire to be educators, the enterprise deeply affected by gender Race and class, particularly the latter. The time is right for some in-depth investigations probing the everyday lived experiences of academics in a range of institutions and disciplines, to come to an understanding of the pressures and problems, but also the variety and richness of our profession.

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