

THE HIGHER EDUCATION MANAGER'S HANDBOOK

Effective Leadership and Management
in Universities and Colleges

THIRD EDITION



Peter McCaffery



The Higher Education Manager's Handbook

Drawing on professional experience from university innovators and a wealth of international case studies, *The Higher Education Manager's Handbook* offers practical advice and guidance on all aspects of university management. An engaging, comprehensive and highly accessible practitioner's guide, the book tackles all the key areas central to the job of managing in higher education, from understanding the culture of your university and the role it plays, to providing effective leadership and managing change. Now in a thoroughly updated third edition, the book is written from the unique perspective of the higher education manager, offering advice that can be implemented immediately by leaders at all levels.

The book is organised into four prerequisites that any prospective higher education manager must master if they are to be an effective university leader:

- Knowing your environment
- Knowing your university
- Knowing your department
- Knowing yourself

Each of the chapters within these sections provides commentary and analysis of the particular role aspect under review, and offers advice and guidance on good practice, including case study examples and self-assessment tools. New topics include:

- The new higher education landscape
- The first 100 days
- Avoiding cognitive bias and developing a flexible mindset
- Strategic planning and Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF)
- Reviewing course portfolios and subject areas
- Improving student outcomes and staff experience
- Assessing and mitigating risk
- Project management and managing up
- Widening participation and social mobility

Vice chancellors, university presidents, provosts and deans, heads of academic departments and university services, subject leaders, course directors and others in management positions within the field of higher education will find this book to be an irreplaceable resource that they will use time and time again.

Professor Peter McCaffery is a former university vice chancellor and a Winston Churchill Fellow. He has over 35 years of teaching, research and management experience and has worked in a range of institutions from further education colleges to an Ivy League University.



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The Higher Education Manager's Handbook

Effective Leadership and Management in
Universities and Colleges

Third edition

Peter McCaffery

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To Sean and Kyle, so they now know what I do.



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Preface

The demands made upon higher education managers are greater today than they have ever been. Effectiveness as a university leader requires managers to master four essential prerequisites. They must know their environment, know their university, know their department and know themselves as individuals.

The *Higher Education Manager's Handbook* aims to help university leaders to do just that. This new third edition has been fully updated to take account of the important changes that have occurred since the second edition was published in 2010.

It includes entirely new sections to help leaders and managers:

To prepare for – or review – their role: your first hundred days; avoiding cognitive bias; developing a flexible mindset; mapping your university culture;

To make a difference in their role – strategic planning; reviewing your course portfolio and subject area; improving student outcomes and your TEF assessment; enhancing your staff experience; managing projects;

To navigate their role – assessing and mitigating risk; managing up; the psychological contract; handling complaints; handling an employment tribunal;

To understand how environmental changes affect their role: the new HE landscape; globalisation and populism; widening participation and social mobility; the university of 2035?

Like previous editions this new one draws on a wealth of US and UK case study examples of university innovators and offers self-assessment tools in all these areas.

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Abbreviations

AAUP	American Association of University Professors
ACAS	Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service
ACCA	Association of Chartered Certified Accountants
ACE	American Council on Education
AGB	Association of Governing Boards
AOB	any other business
APM	Association for Project Management
ARA	academic-related administration
ARWU	Academic Ranking of World Universities
AUA	Association of University Administrators
AUT	Association of University Teachers (now UCU)
BPS	British Psychological Society
BME	black and minority ethnic
C&IT	communications and information technology
CBI	Confederation of British Industry
CEQ	Course Evaluation Questionnaire
CIPD	Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
CMA	Competition and Markets Authority
CMI	Chartered Management Institute
CPD	continuous professional development
CRE	Commission for Racial Equality
CUA	Conference of University Administrators – now AUA
CUC	Committee of University Chairs
CUPP	Community–University Partnership Programme
CVCP	Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals – now UUK
DCFS	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DGB	degree-granting body
DLHE	Destination of Leavers from Higher Education survey (now Graduate Outcomes survey)
DRA	default retirement age (65 years)
DRC	Disability Rights Commission

DTI/OST	Department of Trade and Industry / Office of Science and Technology
DUMB	defective, unrealistic, misdirected and bureaucratic
ECU	Equality Challenge Unit (now Advance HE)
EFQM	European Foundation for Quality Management – business excellence model
ELQ	equivalent or lower qualification
EPI	Education Policy Institute
EQ	emotional quotient
ESFA	Education and Skills Funding Agency
EU	European Union
FE	further education
FTE	full-time equivalent
GMU	George Mason University
GROW	goals, reality, options and will (coaching model)
HE	higher education
HEA	Higher Education Academy (now Advance HE)
HEC	Higher Education Corporation
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England (replaced by OfS)
HEI	higher education institution
HEPI	Higher Education Policy Institute
HERA	higher education role analysis (job evaluation)
HERDSA	Higher Education Research and Development Society for Australasia
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
HMT	Her Majesty's Treasury
HR	human resources
ICT	information and communication technology
IFS	Institute for Fiscal Studies
IiP	Investors in People
IQ	intelligence quotient
IT	information technology
JCPSPG	Joint Costing and Pricing Steering Group
KEF	Knowledge Excellence Framework
KPI	key performance indicator
LEA	local education authority
LEO	longitudinal education outcomes
LFHE	The Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (now Advance HE)
LGBT	lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender
MBO	management by objectives
MBO	master of the bleedin' obvious
MBWA	management by walking about
MLE	managed learning environment
MoD	Ministry of Defence
NAB	National Advisory Board (no longer current)

NAO	National Audit Office
NATFHE	National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (now UCU)
NEF	New Economics Foundation
NHS	National Health Service
NICE	needs, interests, concerns, expectations (media communication plan)
NLE	New Learning Environment – at TVU
NSS	National Student Survey
NTFS	National Teaching Fellowship Scheme
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OFFA	Office for Fair Access (replaced by OfS)
OfS	Office for Students
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education
OIA	Office of the Independent Adjudicator
ONS	Office for National Statistics
OPM	Office for Public Management
OU	Open University
OUP	Open University Press
P4P	Partnerships for Progression
PAC	Public Accounts Committee
PQA	post-qualifications admissions system
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
QUT	Queensland University of Technology
RAE	research assessment exercise (replaced by REF)
RBL	resource-based learning
RDA	Regional Development Agency
REF	research excellence framework
SME	small and medium-sized enterprise
SMT	senior management team
SMART	specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-related
SNC	student number control
SRHE	Society for Research into Higher Education
SSC	Sector Skills Council
STEM	science, technology, engineering and mathematics
STEP	social, technological, economic and political
SWOT	strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats
TA	Teaching Assistant
TDA	Training and Development Agency for Schools
TEF	Teaching Excellence Framework
<i>THE</i>	<i>Times Higher Education</i> (formerly <i>THES – Supplement</i>)
TQA	Teaching Quality Assessment (replaced by TEF)
TRAC	transparent approach to costing
TVU	Thames Valley University
UCAS	University and Colleges Admissions Service

UCEA	University and Colleges Employers' Association
UCU	University and College Union
UGC	University Grants Committee (no longer current)
UKCISA	UK Council for International Student Affairs
UKES	UK Engagement Survey
UKeU	UK e-University
UKPSF	UK Professional Standards Framework
UKRI	UK Research and Innovation
USP	unique selling point
UUK	Universities UK
VLE	virtual learning environment
UWS	university-wide services
WOW	World of Work



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Introduction

The challenge for HE managers

I left the Presidency just as I had entered it – fired with enthusiasm!

Clark Kerr, President, University of California on being
dismissed following Ronald Reagan's election
as Governor in 1967

'Management is a punishment from God!' Pilloried in the media for incompetence, badgered by the incessant demands of government bodies and often vilified within their own academic communities, there can be few managers in higher education who cannot have identified with this popular epithet at some stage in their career. And yet, ironically, this sentiment is strikingly at odds with the vitality of the very institutions which this group purports to manage. For while universities have, like other public sector institutions, experienced unprecedented change over the last quarter century, they have been equally successful in facing up to the unprecedented demands that successive governments have placed upon them.

In essence, HEIs have, on the one hand, had to become more accountable for the way they manage their affairs while, on the other, been obliged to cater to the needs of a mass student clientele, rather than those of a privileged few. While this transition in role and function has been neither smooth nor uncontested, HEIs have, by and large, successfully managed to do 'more' (that is, teach more students) with 'less' (fewer resources) while simultaneously maintaining 'quality'. In the UK for example, HEIs have accommodated a tripling of student numbers over the past twenty-five years while assimilating a 50 per cent reduction in the unit of public funding per student. More than that, HEIs have maintained their international standing in research while continuing to produce first degree graduates quickly, and with low drop-out rates, compared to other countries. Further still, between 2005 and 2011 HEIs reported £1.38 billion of efficiencies against a cumulative target of £1.23 billion along with a further £1 billion in cost savings between 2012 and 2015 and in the process created 117 jobs in the wider economy for every 100 people employed in universities (700,000). Universities, in sum, contribute at least £73 billion a year to the national economy and generate more GDP (gross domestic product) per unit of resource than health, public administration and construction (UUK, 2017; 2015; NAO, 2007; Eastwood, 2008). Universities, then, can quite rightly be proud of their collective achievement. Once perceived as a drain on the public purse, they are increasingly recognised as key contributors to wealth creation and economic well-being.

2 Introduction

Where universities have been much less successful, however, is in managing the internal ramifications of these externally imposed changes. Indeed, alienation, cynicism and demoralisation are, and have been, rife within academic communities throughout this period. (Weale, 2017; Back, 2016; Finkelstein and Altbach, 2016; Coaldrake and Stedman, 2013; McNay and Bone, 2006; Watson and Amoah, 2007). Witness one Oxford University Professor of English in 2000, for example, who, in response to his own question: ‘What does the institution of higher education care about?’ railed,

Bleakly observed, the local institution seems to have thrown in the towel. Degree-factory rhetoric is all we hear. New-style university managements are, actually, counter-productive. If you piss off your teachers and researchers you are eating the seed-corn, selling the family silver, sapping the life-blood. You would think our institutions were suicidal, the way they treat us – with the bad pay they colude in, the abolition of tenure they have agreed to, the rash economisings by engineering early retirements of good people, with the weekly questionnaires and the constant abuse of our time and energy and their acceptance of piss-poor TQA-inspired formalisms and abomination of abominations, their utter short-termism (their kow-towing to the silly time-scales of the RAE bods, their iniquitous short-term contracts – you can have your job back at the end of the long vacation if you ask nicely). Managerial cynicism is rampant in higher education as never before. They (THEY) don’t care about the poor bloody infantry. . . . People are fed up, they are glad to give up and retire; they are going into internal exile, clock-watching, minimalising their effort. The government-inspired way, the neo-managerial way, is a mess none of us can survive on.

(Cunningham, 2000)

It is not a surprise then, if no less cause for concern, that a UCU-sponsored (University and College Union) inquiry into university staff well-being in summer 2013 still found that ‘levels of psychological distress among academics’ exceeded ‘those of the average British worker, even those in high-stress occupations such as accident and emergency doctors and nurses’ (Kinman and Wray, 2013; McCall, 2006) and an independent qualitative study in 2016 warned that ‘unremitting work’ means more academics ‘will be off long-term, with stress-related conditions’ (Elmes, 2016). Likewise a comparative survey on the ‘professional well-being’ of the 140 or so officially recognised occupations (commissioned by the Economic and Social Research Council’s ‘Future of Work’ program) actually placed university teaching professionals at number one in their ‘Job Misery Index’. Nor is this grim picture peculiar to the UK. Researchers at Melbourne Business School, for instance, have charted how stress levels in Australian universities have risen dramatically over the past decade, generating an epidemic of work-related illnesses across the country’s campuses; an outcome which they attribute to, among other things, the role played by university managers. (Grove, 2017; Reisz, 2017; Cunningham, 2014; *Times Higher Education Supplement (THES)*, 2000, 2003) It is also the case that the pressure on universities worldwide to embrace yet still further change is – and is likely to remain for the foreseeable future – unrelenting. Globalisation, information technology, the ‘Knowledge Society’, marketisation, social media, economic nationalism and the UK withdrawal from the European Union (or Brexit) all presage a new environment to which universities will have to adapt (Royal Society, 2017; Quinn et al., 2015; PA Consulting, 2014; HEPI, 2009; Spellings, 2006). And all at a time when only one in three higher

education students consider their course offers value for money and a new regulatory body – the Office for Students (OfS) – has been established (January, 2018) to develop a new regulatory framework for the HE sector (NAO, 2017).

The challenge facing universities then, and in particular individual managers, is a formidable one. Nor can they prepare for it with a *tabula rasa*. On the contrary, as we've seen above, 'management' in universities, unlike in other organisations, has long had its legitimacy questioned. Often depicted by academics ('the managed') as an irrelevant business practice which has no place in the (essentially) collegiate environment of the academic world; this view was, until recently, upheld for the most part by those who occupied such 'management' positions in HEIs. On the other hand, there have been well-publicised instances when 'new managerialism' has allegedly run rampant in its quest to bring the techniques, values and practices of the commercial sector to the university world. Thus, where once universities may have been led and managed in an amateurish, complacent or uninformed way in the past, they are now widely perceived as in the grip of an aggressive managerial cadre determined to run HE as a business.

Common to both scenarios is the low status and low esteem which is accorded university management not only within HE but beyond it as well. 'Bogus professionalism' is the pejorative comment most commonly used by Whitehall departments – in private if not in public – to describe the way in which universities are led and managed. For the intellectual, 'there is no scientific basis to management therefore it does not deserve to be taken seriously'. A view which is too often compounded in university settings by the disregard that some managers themselves have for their positions when it comes to their own training and development – the notion somehow that 'training is for the second eleven' (Bryman, 2007; Bolman and Gallos, 2011); a disposition that the Leadership Foundation for HE (2004–2018) has sought to counter by successfully 'establishing an emergent community of practice among professional university leaders' (Gentle, 2014). Instances of mismanagement and incompetence in universities, however, have continued to exhibit an upward trend. How then – given the prospective changes in the environment, the degree of internal malaise within institutions, and the 'crisis in management' – can university managers hope to manage effectively in such a setting? Indeed, how can and should university managers prepare to meet this challenge?

The purpose of this study is to help university leaders and managers – both academic and professional heads alike – to do just that. Taking my cue from my academic research as a historian – one who regards history as 'doing moral philosophy and public advocacy' (i.e. 'to understand the past as a means of changing the present'); a legacy of my Idlewild Fellowship with Lee Benson at the University of Pennsylvania and at the London School of Economics – this study argues that we ought to be as professional in our leadership and management as we are in our teaching, research and administration. It draws on a variety of sources including the continuing research on university innovators overseas, which I undertook for the Travelling Fellowship I was awarded by the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust. As a Dean of Faculty, Deputy Vice Chancellor – and latterly, a head of institution – I, like many others in the HE sector, have both a professional and a practical interest in how our institutional counterparts in other countries are responding to the common dilemma which, as I indicated above, we all face no matter our domicile; namely, how to do 'more' with 'less' while still maintaining 'quality' in an ever-increasing competitive environment. This study, based on a selected number of universities in

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the USA and Australia, not only reports the findings of this inquiry, but also seeks to identify the lessons we can learn from these university innovators and in particular those which we can all apply in practice.

It also draws on my own personal and professional experience – as a teacher, researcher, leader and manager in a variety of institutions from further education college to USA Ivy League university – and especially of crisis management in three different universities: Thames Valley University (TVU: now, the University of West London), the University of Cumbria and London Metropolitan University. Indeed my initial research followed on from Tony Blair and David Blunkett's visit to TVU in September, 1996 when – in the week after the former had declared at the annual TUC Conference that his three key priorities in government if his party were elected to office would be 'education, education and education' – the then Leader of HM Opposition, formally opened the new state-of-the-art Paul Hamlyn Learning Resource Centre on the Slough campus with the rejoinder: 'Why, I wonder, can't every university be like TVU?' At that time, TVU was attempting to establish a self-styled 'New Learning Environment'; a bold innovation that was to founder, not because the aspiration behind it – to create an education setting which was more learner-centred than teacher-centred – was unsound, but because, as the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) subsequently pointed out, the scale and speed with which attendant change processes had been introduced (notably, the centralisation of academic-related administration and the establishment of an internal market) had undermined the university's infrastructure, thereby placing academic standards at risk.

The whole of this process – the conception, and subsequent unravelling of, the NLE; the QAA's investigation into allegations of 'dumbing-down'; the naming and shaming of TVU as Britain's 'first failing university' and the development of the HEFCE recovery plan under the stewardship of Sir William Taylor – conducted, as it was, under intense public scrutiny and in circumstances unprecedented in higher education in the UK, yielded penetrating insights into management practices and processes; both their deficiency and also their efficacy. Not only that, but when contrasted with the examples set by university innovators overseas, it rendered transparent those prerequisites which are essential to effective management and leadership in HE. It is these characteristics which this study seeks to identify. In doing so it also offers guidance, where appropriate, on tried and tested methods derived from the training programmes and the professional development schemes provided by, among others, the Cabinet Office, Institute of Directors, Work Foundation (the former Industrial Society), Chartered Management Institute and the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. It is informed too by the feedback from the leadership and management development consultancy I have undertaken with a variety of sector bodies including the Leadership Foundation for HE; the HE Academy; British Council; Epigeum (Oxford University Press); the former American Association of HE; the Higher Education Research and Development Society, Australasia; the Centre for HE, Germany; the Botswana Tertiary Education Council; and the University of Jamaica project. Taken together, this study aims to provide university leaders with a 'good practice' guide to effective management.

Its focus furthermore – unlike the bulk of the literature on university management to date – is on the HE manager per se. That is to say, it is written quite deliberately from the manager's perspective. Much of the research in this area in

the past – whether conducted by HE researchers, staff developers or management practitioners themselves – has invariably focused on a particular issue or theme in question (e.g. curriculum, personnel management, staff development, globalisation and so on): an approach which while quite legitimate given the conception of the subject matter, and which has very often yielded critical insights into the subject, is also one which has not always rendered them transparent or explicit from the (subjective) perspective of the reader. Put another way, the received wisdom to date offers HE professionals cogent analysis and advice on *what* one could – or should – do in academic environments, but it is implicit, and not explicit, on *how* one should go about doing it.

Ironically, this same trait is also characteristic of the literature which has been designed by management developers and deliberately targeted at the middle management HE audience. It is almost as if the same affliction which has affected management development in HE in the past – the (false) assumption that any intelligent, educated individual can manage, and there is therefore no need for training – has also influenced many of those who write about HE for a HE audience, viz. they appear to argue that ‘since any intelligent and educated individual *can understand* what we say then *ipso facto* they will *automatically* be able to manage it’. Their conception of management within HEIs is also equally if not more damagingly restrictive, in that they invariably exhibit a consensual acceptance of the status quo in universities and a disposition to regard academic staff as an undifferentiated mass, as well as a tendency to view the role of HE managers as confined solely to responding to the needs of the managed.

In this book I have attempted to overcome the deficiencies of the received wisdom by, on the one hand, conceiving of the academic environment from the holistic perspective of the university manager, rather than in terms of a particular theme or issue (i.e. by making the manager the independent variable of the study rather than the dependent variable as has conventionally been the case) and, on the other, by maintaining an open mind about how such environments could or should be organised and managed, viz. by recognising that universities do indeed have distinguishing features – the autonomy of the individual scholar; the precedence of subject over institutional loyalty; the strength of tradition and the cult of ‘the expert’ – but that these characteristics are not so peculiar in themselves that HEIs *have* to be managed in a particular way. And it is for this reason that I have not drawn any particular distinction between so-called academic managers such as Heads of Subject Departments and general (‘support’) managers such as ‘administrators’ of central services; that, and the fact that such distinctions – as the success of new alternative providers demonstrate – have more to do with the endemic elitist ethos that prevails within many institutions, than they do with the reality of how HEIs operate in the twenty-first century.

This book then seeks to address the needs of all those who manage in HEIs – with a particular emphasis on those who occupy head of department roles – and to make explicit, rather than implicit, the competencies and skills required to be an effective manager. It does not assume that any educated and intelligent individual can be an effective manager *without training*. Nor that universities are unique environments that can only be managed in a special way. And it has been structured and organised accordingly with the manager’s ‘world view’ in mind – the need to master the ‘four knows’:

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- Knowing your environment;
- Knowing your university;
- Knowing your department and;
- Knowing yourself.

From the examination of HE in the broader context in Chapter 1 and analysis of HEIs as organisations in Chapter 2, through to the expectations of the role (leading your department; leading by example) and the demands of the role (managing for high performance, developing staff, celebrating diversity, enhancing the student experience, managing change) and finally onto accomplishing mastery of the role: managing up; managing the 'downside'; managing oneself. Each of the chapters provides a commentary and analysis of the particular role aspect under review, and offers advice and guidance on good practice, including case study examples and self-assessment tools.

Taken together, these chapters argue the case for a professional (or 'managerial') approach to people management in HEIs, and the case against amateurist, elitist and reactionary perspectives on university management – that we ought to have the same professionalism in the way we lead and manage people as we do towards our research and teaching. They further seek to demonstrate that 'managerialism' is not necessarily incompatible with collegiality, and to show how 'institutions of learning' can indeed become more like 'learning organisations'. More than that, they aspire to inspire. For history teaches us, as George Bernard Shaw implies, that 'nothing has to be as it is' – maybe that even leadership and management can be a blessing, as much as a punishment, from God!

1 Knowing your environment

Of all mere human institutions there is none so important and mighty in their influence as universities.

Henry P. Tappon, first President, University of Michigan, 1858

The university is dead; long live the university.

Times Higher Education Supplement, 11 February, 2000

If higher education was a regulated market we would be raising the question of mis-selling.

Head of the UK National Audit Office (NAO), 8 December, 2017

The new higher education landscape

‘What are the world’s five largest business corporations in terms of market value?’ Headed by Apple, of course, with a market value in excess of \$900 billion, the others do not include, as management guru Peter Senge has suggested, the ones you might readily suppose. Not Exxon Mobil, or Coca Cola, or IBM, or General Motors. Indeed all of the top five are, for the very first time, derivative of new technology; the tech-giants that are Alphabet (Google), Microsoft, Amazon and Facebook. Such is the growth indeed of the so-called FANG – Facebook, Amazon, Netflix and Google – they are now collectively valued at \$1.5 trillion, about the same as the Russian economy (Hern and Fletcher, 2017). Along with technology there has also been innovation in the way that some businesses are organised. For example: in financial services, that of Visa International. As Senge explains, Visa International is a member-owned, non-stock corporation incorporated in the State of Delaware. Governed by the principle of subsidiarity, it has only 3,000 employees – approximately the same number as that of Selfridge’s department store in London’s Oxford Street. Yet it has a stock-market value in excess of \$500 billion. In other words, Visa International ‘is a business but unlike Microsoft which has an Industrial Age model of organisation it doesn’t feel like or look like a conventional business’ (Owen, 2008; Hock, 2005; Senge, 1998). And while Bill Gates has fallen victim to the same (Sherman) anti-trust legislation which thwarted John D. Rockefeller’s Standard Oil monopoly, Visa International is a conspicuous exception. It is indeed a novel phenomenon.

Senge’s purpose in posing this simple question was threefold: to draw our attention to the significant changes taking place in the nature and organisation of business

corporations; to remind us that the present may not be an accurate guide to the future; and, equally fundamental, to illustrate that the first prerequisite of effective management is an awareness of one's external environment.

His vignette also highlights the difference in perception between the business world and the academic world. In higher education the prevailing consensus is that we do not really face the same changes as those which confront business. After all, the conventional wisdom maintains universities have a history stretching back centuries, and they have proved themselves to be extremely durable institutions, capable of adjusting to different circumstances while still upholding their traditional ideals. They have, moreover, shown that they can accommodate themselves to the new realities of more recent times – principally, the (negative) governmental economic imperative to do 'more' (teach more students) with 'less' (resources) while still maintaining 'quality' and the (positive) pedagogical imperative to cater to employers expectations of graduate competence, and students desire for flexible provision. There is then no compelling reason, the argument runs, why universities cannot continue in the same vein in the future.

The problem with this argument, however, is that it ignores both the historical and the contemporary reality of the circumstances facing universities. In the case of the latter, for example, it overlooks the fact that the university is no longer the only type of institution capable of fulfilling the role that it has played in the past – namely that of providing access to knowledge, creating knowledge, and fostering learning in students to enable them to use knowledge. And in the case of the former, it overstates the ancient pedigree of universities, for in truth very few of them are old. In Europe, their ancient heartland, four out of five only came into being in the last century and in the UK fully three-quarters have been established in the course of the past four decades; and thirty of them (the former polytechnics) in a single stroke as recently as 1992. In essence, the bulk of universities are very modern institutions and those that can trace an ancient lineage have survived only because they have changed so much. To such an extent, indeed, that today, universities seek to present themselves as useful to all comers, from international students to local enterprise partnerships. Embracing 'mission stretch' they have acquired 'multiple callings': to broaden student access, enhance student employability, promote lifelong learning, meet quality benchmarks, diversify income streams, improve research rankings and so on. In consequence they have become so diverse, so fractured and differentiated that it seems they are no longer bound by any overarching principles or unitary idea. So much so, as some have argued, that the university as a concept or 'Idea' has in fact been rendered meaningless (Barnett 2015, 2000; HEPI, 2009; Scott, 2008). All at a time when universities stand accused of 'not really pulling their weight' and of being complacent about the quality of their teaching, the value of their degrees and the experience they offer students (Seldon, 2016; Wolf, 2016; Johnson, 2015; Rich, 2015; Edge Foundation, 2017; NAO, 2017).

It is perhaps not surprising then that many staff in HE have become alienated, and that the prevailing mentality within the sector is survivalist – one of endurance rather than enjoyment; a frustration over a perceived lack of resources, excessive accountability and the erosion of traditional university values (Finkelstein and Altbach, 2016; Moran, 2010; Watson and Amoah, 2007). Some even go further and have suggested that too many universities are imbued with a 'welfarist' mentality; an outlook of 'whingeing and whining' and ultimately one of dependence upon – and equally, subservience to – the public purse (Bell, 2017; Lucas, 2017;

Table 1.1 Traditional higher education and the new HE

<i>Traditional HE</i>	<i>New HE</i>
1 Changes in the marketplace	
Competition: other universities	Competition: everywhere
Technology as an expense	Technology as market differentiation
Institutional-centric	Market-centric
18–25-year-old audience	Lifetime learner
Terminal degree	Lifelong learner
Public subsidy	Portfolio management
Grant-making state (HEFCE)	Regulatory state (OfS)
2 Changes in role	
Student as apprentice scholar	Learner as consumer (and producer)
Producer of knowledge	Agent of learning
Organised by subjects	Organised for solutions
Linear production of knowledge	Non-linear production of knowledge
Teacher as director of learning	Teacher as facilitator of learning
Academic as ‘jack of all trades’	Academic as specialist
Independent supplier	Shared services
3 Changes in practice	
Quality input	Quality outputs
Peer review	External assessment
Delivery in the classroom	Delivery everywhere
Take what is offered	Courses on demand
Academic calendar	Year-round campus
Courses as 3–4 years revenue	Courses as business plan
Multicultural	Global
Diversity as problem	Diversity as strength
Process compliant	Outcomes driven

Million+, 2015; Forsyth, 2014). Either way, the most common reaction within the sector has not been to address the broader issue concerning the *raison d’être* of HE other than to constantly reiterate the narrowly instrumental defence line stressing the usefulness of universities to government and industry. Rather it has often been to engage in mutual recrimination and penny-pinching within institutions on the one hand, and a common railing against government and the wider community for failing to appreciate the self-evident value of universities on the other.

The difficulty with this approach, however, is that this outpouring is often matched by a deafening silence outside the sector. Lacking in self-confidence, reluctant to articulate an overriding motivating purpose, and contending in a world where hardly anyone is listening, universities, it would seem to appear, are enfeebled institutions facing an uncertain future. Yet, the prospect is not nearly so bleak. Viewed from a long-term, rather than short-term, perspective it is apparent that HE is in transition: that the traditional university model that emerged in the late nineteenth century and dominated throughout the twentieth century is – as a

consequence of the unprecedented changes outlined above – having to adapt to a fundamentally new environment characterised by significant changes in the role and practice of HE as well as in the marketplace (see Table 1.1). Higher Education is also a growth industry – the student population at UK HEIs, for example, grew from fewer than 1.5 million to 2.3 million between 1998–99 and 2015–16 with a further 700,000 students studying offshore – and the education-driven economy of the so-called ‘Knowledge Society’ is likely to keep it this way in the foreseeable future, Brexit notwithstanding. Between 2015 and 2022, for example, UUK estimate that there will be two million additional jobs in occupations requiring higher level skills, with total employment share set to increase from 42 per cent to 46 per cent of all those in employment. (Hillman, 2017; UUK 2015; HEFCE, 2009). We also arguably need an ‘Idea’ of the university more than ever, to, as Barnett (2015) puts it, make sense of ‘the craziness of the world of supercomplexity’ in which we now live. The tripling of the fee cap from £3,000 to £9,000 in 2012–13 and the relaxation and then the removal of the student number control (SNC) in 2015–16, along with the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 too – for all the controversy over the linking of tuition fees to the quality of teaching as assessed through the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF); the creation of a new regulatory body (the Office for Students: OfS) and easier market entry for new providers – all presage a setting in which universities are encouraged to play to their strengths.

Box 1.1 UK higher education (EU) resources at risk through Brexit

EU research funding – c.£730M or 16% of total UK university research income

Freedom of movement of staff – 31,635 EU nationals or 16% of university academic staff*

Recruitment of EU students – c.127,440 or 6% of the UK university student population

Facility to exchange students – c.15,000 UK students per year through the Erasmus programme.

And their *disproportionate* impact on:

Subjects:

- 13 of the 15 disciplines most dependent on funding from the EU are in the arts, humanities and social sciences with Archaeology (38%), Classics (33%) and IT (30%) the most vulnerable.
- Clinical medicine is potentially the single biggest loser in absolute terms: c.£120M a year.

Institutions

- The biggest recipients like Oxford and Cambridge are dependent on EU funding for c.18 per cent of their annual research income or c. £60M each per year.

*Should be protected under the terms of ‘the divorce bill’ agreed between the UK and the EU on 8 December, 2017 subject to the final agreement on Brexit.

Source: Royal Society, 2017; UKCISA, 2017.

There are of course threats, not least the implications of Brexit for the future security of EU research funding and collaboration – principally the ‘Framework’ and Horizon 2020 programmes to which the UK has been the second-largest EU net contributor – the tenure of EU nationals working in UK universities, the recruitment of EU students and the exchange of students through the Erasmus programme (see Box 1.1). The politicisation of (non-EU) international student numbers, and whether or not they are included in the government’s net migration target (even though they contribute a net benefit of £20.3 billion a year to the British economy) has also led to a levelling-off in (non-EU) international student recruitment at 310,775 or 14% of the UK university student population in 2015–16 (UKCISA, 2017; London Economics, 2018). Even so, the alignment of universities with business, innovation and skills in successive government departments over the last decade, does suggest that universities have indeed moved from the periphery to the centre of the government’s drive to meet the social and economic challenges of the twenty-first century. Overdue recognition, in fact, of the role UK universities play as anchor institutions in their region and as one of the nation’s biggest earners of foreign currency, bringing in more than £10.7 billion a year in tuition fees, transnational enterprises and other activities (UUK, 2017; 2015). As such, universities have a tremendous opportunity to reassert their importance in the life of the country. Whether or not it is fully taken or spurned will, of course, be dependent on their willingness to practice flexibility on the one hand, while simultaneously maintaining their fundamental values on the other.

This first chapter, then, examines the broader context or nature of the external environment in which HEIs, and individual managers alike, have to operate. It explains, as a means of understanding the pressures on modern universities and the reasons why they respond the way they do, how universities have come to be where they are today, and includes an analysis of the role of HE and of the key influences or change drivers – globalisation, IT, the ‘Knowledge Society’, the contractual State, the postmodern challenge – currently affecting HEIs. It also examines the nature of the university identity crisis; the university as an idea; the case for universities and finally the key strategic challenges facing universities.

The role of universities

Universities are both ancient and modern institutions. Ancient in the sense that today’s universities can trace their first beginnings to those universities – Bologna, Paris and Oxford – founded in the late Middle Ages, and are the heirs to this

medieval heritage, and the traditions and values that goes with it. Modern in the sense that it was only in relatively recent times – in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century – that universities developed into the form recognisable today, and it was not until a generation or so ago that the bulk of Britain's universities were established. Their evolution, moreover, bears witness to a remarkable series of changes in the role that universities have played: one which is reflective of a close association with (and not, as is often held to be the case, separation or aloofness from) wider developments in society. The ancient institutions of Oxford and Cambridge for instance – the only established universities in England 200 years ago – were founded as Church universities, whose main concern was the training of clergymen and teachers and with it the sustenance of the established Anglican Church. They did not originally seek to encourage progressive science or provide a liberal education – nor research either for that matter. The former role was undertaken by the Dissenting Academies such as the 'godless' University College of London, which was established in 1826 and provided a practical education with an emphasis on science, medicine and engineering (Watson et al., 2011; Bolton and Lucas, 2008; Coaldrake and Stedman, 1998).

It was the Industrial Revolution, and with it the progressive extension of the franchise, and the rise of professional society, which were to be the three key factors in creating the demand for, as well as shaping the development of, a more elaborate university system in nineteenth-century Britain. And it was the civic universities – Manchester, Leeds, Liverpool, Sheffield, Bristol and so on (akin to the Land Grant universities in the USA such as Michigan State, Penn State and Texas A&M universities who played a similar role) – along with the technical colleges and the mechanics' institutes (that were later to develop into the technological universities and the former polytechnics) which were established to meet it. These three forces, albeit radically extended – to embrace the ever-increasing specialisation of labour, the universal access to mass entitlement, and the ceaseless march of professional 'credentialism' – have continued to mould and shape higher education down to the present day. So much so that the modern university has come to undertake four conventional roles, those of:

- finishing school; the last stage of general education;
- professional school; the training of elite workers;
- knowledge factory; the production of science, technology and ideology;
- cultural institution; the expression of our individual and collective sense of being.

It was the State, though, which was the critical driver in bringing together the different institutions – church, voluntary and public sector – into a coherent higher education system. This development drew on two interrelated processes: the subordination of the autonomous universities on the one hand, and the takeover by the state (or nationalisation, if you will) of responsibility for other advanced institutions, on the other. The subsequent abolition of the binary divide between universities and former polytechnics in 1992, along with the tripling of student numbers in the last 25 years, set in motion a social and political revolution in British higher education; one which has left the system with

far more in common with its counterparts in Europe and North America than it had a generation ago.

This transition from an elite to a mass system – or loss of British exceptionalism depending on your perspective – has been neither smooth nor uncontested and is still also curiously incomplete. For example, in terms of size, there is little doubt that if we apply Martin Trow's (1973) classic linear model – which defines elite systems as those which enrol up to 15 per cent of the age group, mass systems as those enrolling between 15 and 40 per cent, and universal systems as those which enrol more than 40 per cent – then the UK has acquired the attributes of a universal system. The current age participation index in British higher education, for instance, is just shy of one-half (49 per cent) (if we include the UK equivalent of the US Community College student population, viz. the post-18 HE provision in further education colleges) and bears testament to successive governments' target to widen participation among under 30-year-olds (Scott et al., 2016; Scott, 1995).

Much of this growth developed unevenly, initially, through the 'new' universities (the former polytechnics) for the most part and, latterly, through (many, if not all) Russell Group universities as a consequence of the 'suck-up' effect following the relaxation and removal of the SNC in 2015–16. And, moreover, it has been based on exploiting existing student constituencies more fully as it has on reaching out to new student populations. Even so, fears that growth would not be sustained because of student aversion to debt, following the tripling of the fee cap from £3,000 to £9,000 in 2012–13, proved unfounded. In 2014 young people from disadvantaged backgrounds (or households with an annual income less than £21,000) in England were 60 per cent more likely to enter higher education than they were in 2006: 31,750 compared to 22,500. That is, double the rate of the rest of the UK where devolved governments held the fee cap down (UUK, 2015). Again, the proportion of young people from the lowest participation areas in England increased from 21 per cent to 26 per cent between 2011 and 2016. Even so, the proportion of 16–64-year-olds in England educated to degree level is still just over one-third (34%), in Wales 26%, and Scotland 39% (NAO, 2017).

Additionally, this growth has still not yet produced the culture change normally associated with the shift to a mass system. The enduring emphasis on the privileged character of student-teacher exchanges; the fervent belief in pastoral intimacy – and fear concerning its loss (a peculiarly British phenomenon); and the passionate commitment to a research culture (even though as a university activity it is a relatively recent one) all suggest that – in its 'private life' if not its 'public' one – British higher education remains firmly wedded to elite values and practices no matter if it has become a mass system (Blackman, 2017; Watson et al., 2011; McNay, 2006; Scott, 1995).

Nonetheless, this expansion – and the universities' and colleges' achievement in accommodating it – has been a remarkable one, particularly since Britain was relatively late in making the shift from elite to mass higher education (the USA and much of western Europe made the transition a generation earlier) and given that it was accompanied by, as we noted earlier, a squeezing of resources; notably a halving in the unit of public funding per student. In the process, the core mission of higher education has been transformed. HEIs have had to redefine their notion of conventional roles such as 'teaching' (where the need to accommodate a

more diverse student population has coincided with the emergence of new learning technologies) as well as undertake additional new roles, most notably in the areas of lifelong learning and technology transfer. This transformation, like other developments in the universities' long history, did not emerge in isolation but rather is intimately linked to broader societal and economic trends. Drivers, that is, which are affecting higher-education systems in all developed countries – the UK, Europe, Australia and US alike – in similar ways. It is these critical influences in the external environment which are analysed next.

The change drivers

Globalisation and populism

Globalisation is a relatively recent phenomenon. The legacy – from 2008 on – of the world's worst financial crisis since the 1930s, however, has ensured that those who may have been unfamiliar with it have been left in no doubt as to its consequences. With British banks registering the biggest annual losses ever recorded in UK corporate history and UK public debt 'hitting Armageddon levels', there followed a credit crunch, a housing price slump, bank and business failures, and a jump in unemployment (Bundred, 2009). The recovery has been painstaking, characterised by strong employment growth (if bedevilled by low productivity), stagnant incomes, rising house prices and a mountainous debt legacy for future generations equivalent to 82 per cent of gross domestic product (or £1.8 trillion) in 2017. When compounded by concerns over the integrity of UK national sovereignty and unprecedented immigration from the EU and beyond, it is not surprising that there was a backlash – and spectacularly so (Murray, 2017; Krastev, 2017).

In the national referendum on June 23, 2016, the overall majority in the UK – if not in London, Scotland or Northern Ireland – voted to leave the EU by a margin of 1.27 million votes (17.41M:16.14M or 51.9%:48.1%); in sharp contrast to over two-thirds of the electorate's representatives (their parliamentary MPs) who wished to remain. Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty 2009 was subsequently triggered by the British government on 29 March, 2017, thereby initiating a two-year timeline in which to complete the negotiations of the country's withdrawal from the EU. A stunning reversal of the trend, since the end of World War II in 1945, towards ever greater European integration and one which has left the UK more divided than ever before by age, region, class and education (Collins, 2016).

Donald J. Trump's election as President of the United States in November, 2016 was equally remarkable. A political novice and anti-establishment outsider who capitalised on voters' fears over uncontrolled immigration; the loss of jobs and stagnant household incomes; a deep mistrust of the federal government and a perceived loss of respect for America's place in the world, his victory sealed the most astonishing political ascent in American history. Emmanuel Macron too was also another political novice who created his own political movement *En Marche* ('On the Move') outside the two main established parties and secured victory in the French Presidential election in May 2017, though in this instance as a proponent, rather than an opponent, of globalisation (Goodhart, 2017).

With Macron, as with Brexit and Trump, the alignment of supporters and opponents was similar: the younger, well-educated, affluent, cosmopolitan elites (those content to settle ‘anywhere’) against the older, less well-educated, rural and poor (those rooted in their community ‘somewhere’). A fault line symptomatic of ‘the greatest division of our times, not between left and right, but the nation and the world’ (Schofield, 2017; Blair Institute, 2017). What though are the implications of globalisation and this populist backlash for universities?

First, we should be clear about what is globalisation – and what does it mean? Globalisation, as Bill Clinton eloquently put it in his last speech as US President on British soil is ‘the intensifying process of economic integration and political interdependence’. ‘In a single hour today’, the President informed his audience, ‘more people and goods move from continent to continent than moved in the entire nineteenth century’. While his assertion may have been ahistorical – in that it understates the contribution of inventions such as the electric telegraph, the telephone and the railway; overlooks the fact that the world economy was more integrated in the nineteenth century than it is today, and that same century witnessed the greatest period of voluntary mass migration ever known – his motives were entirely laudable as well as remarkably prescient. Namely, to draw our attention to the radical impact this extraordinary process would have on the established institutions and ideas of the modern world – the Market, the State and the Individual – and the opportunity, as well as threat, it poses to the current social, economic and political order (Baldwin, 2016; Urry, 1999).

Confusion over its meaning has arisen in part because the term refers both to global processes (from the verb, to globalise) and to certain global outcomes (from the noun, the globe) and in part because it remains a contested concept, viz. some commentators view it primarily as an economic and political phenomenon, while others place more emphasis on its cultural and environmental dimensions. Thus the term has been used in a variety of ways to refer to (among others):

- the kinds of *strategies* employed by self-serving transnational corporations;
- an *ideology* promoted by capitalist interests seeking a global marketplace unfettered by (national) government regulation;
- an *image* used in the advertising of products (such as airlines for example) or in recruitment drives for environmental protest groups (as in the ‘fragile earth’);
- the *basis for political mobilisation* on a particular issue: famine relief in Ethiopia; the campaign to save the Amazonian rainforest, etc.;
- the ‘*scapes*’ and ‘*flows*’, or the means (the fibre-optic cable, the microwave channel, the space satellite) and objects (people, information, ideas, messages and images) which now characterise the interconnectedness of the new global environment.

Globalisation, then, is not simply an advanced form of internationalisation writ large. Unlike the latter, globalisation is at best agnostic about, and at worst positively hostile to, nation states; it celebrates the ‘low’ worlds (or *coca-colonisation* and *McDonaldisation*) of mass consumerism, not the ‘high’ worlds of diplomacy and culture and, as it is not tied to the past, is subversive of – and not supportive of – the established world order.

And that includes universities who have lost out in a number of ways:

- As an institution that is a creature of the nation state – one that has been reliant on it for the bulk of its revenue and closely identified with the promulgation of national culture, and whose core business, that of teaching, has been standardised through the impact of communication and information technology – it follows that globalisation presents possibly the most fundamental challenge that the university has ever had to face in its long history (King, 2017; HEPI, 2009; Scott ed., 1998; Urry, 1998).
- The great majority of university staff, students and alumni backed the losing side in the Brexit and Trump elections when populist nationalism sentiment – that is, ‘a politics’ as Ivan Krastev (2017) puts it ‘where citizens are consumers above all else and view their leaders as waiters who are expected to move quickly in fulfilling their wishes’ – overcame liberal internationalism. In the case of the UK, 90 per cent of university staff, 68 per cent of graduates and 87 per cent of current students all voted ‘to Remain’ (Bennett, 2017a).
- The consequences of Brexit threaten universities, as we noted in Box 1.1, with the loss of EU student recruitment income, EU research funding, freedom of movement of staff and the facility to exchange students. While the full impact is as yet unknown – one Vice Chancellor suggested it ‘would probably be the biggest disaster for the university sector in many years’, while a more considered analysis based on econometric modelling has projected ‘a loss of just 0.1% of the total income of publicly funded HEIs across the UK’ and a potential increase of 20,000 international (non-EU) students (or c.£227M) in the first year after Brexit alone that ‘would more than offset the financial loss from welcoming fewer EU students’, either way – the brunt of it will be disproportionate across the sector (Pells, 2017; Hillmann, 2017; HEPI 2017).
- The attempt by the Hungarian government to undermine the (US-funded) Central European University in Budapest through legislation – requiring foreign universities to have a campus both in Hungary and in their home country, as well as banning universities outside the EU from awarding Hungarian diplomas without an agreement between the respective national governments – is not only the first time that an EU member has threatened academic freedom, but has left us in no doubt that universities are perceived in the same pejorative way as other global political and financial elites (Coughlan, 2017).
- The cult of expertise has been diminished (in a ‘post-truth’ world where emotion trumps reason and logic) and with it one of the key strengths of universities as major contributors of evidence-based research (Krastev, 2017).

Collectively then, universities face an uphill struggle if they are to turn this situation around. They need to renew their sense of purpose, reconnect with their local communities and constituencies and reassert their values and beliefs. Put another way, universities need to be loud and proud – if we are to help ensure that we are to be perceived as Global Britain rather than Little England.

The knowledge society

Intimately related to globalisation is the growing recognition that national economic success can no longer be guaranteed solely by the mass production

of consumer goods, or the physical exploitation of natural assets. Rather it is becoming increasingly dependent on our ability to create and use new ideas and knowledge. Or as the Spellings Commission on *Charting the Future of US Higher Education* (2006) put it, 'in tomorrow's world a nation's wealth will derive from its capacity to educate, attract, and retain citizens who are able to work smarter and learn faster – making educational achievement ever-more important both for individuals and for society writ large'. New technologies have simultaneously transformed our capacity to store and transmit information. We can now access a far greater range, diversity and quantity of it with greater speed, and at our own convenience, than ever before. Knowledge though – and this is often misunderstood – is more than simply information, or access to it. It is about how and why we access it, how we make sense of it and how we engage critically with it. In essence, knowledge is about understanding. It is about 'information put to work. . . . it is what enables people to make judgments, create new products,

Box 1.2 New-wave competitors in higher education

Mega-universities

UK Open University
Academic University Turkey
University of South Africa
Indira Gandhi National Open University, India

For-profit universities

BPP, University of Law, Phoenix, De Vry, Strayer, Kaplan (now Purdue)

Corporate universities

BAE, Disney, Ford, Microsoft, Motorola, Unipart

Private HE training organisations

Apollo, DeVry, Education Management, Laureate Education, Strayer

Waking giants

IBM, News International, Pearson Education

Interested parties

Montague Private Equity, Sovereign Capital

solve problems and interpret events'. And, of course, it has also been the prime *raison d'être* of the modern university. Indeed, in the past century the university – as a producer of knowledge ('research') and as a developer of knowledgeability ('teaching') – has been a, if not *the*, key knowledge institution in northern and western Europe and North America.

This pre-eminence, however, can no longer be taken for granted. There are now, for instance, alternative sources of authority over knowledge readily accessible through the Internet and television. And while it is the case that high-level training and research has always taken place outside the university and public research system in think tanks, corporate research and development divisions and so on (indeed half of all spending on HE comes from the private sector), the new 'Knowledge Society' has spawned a proliferation of novel forms of knowledge organisation including the 'for-profit university', the 'mega-university' and especially the 'corporate university' (and perhaps yet the 'global university'?). Their use of the brand name 'university' may be a compliment but it is also a distinct threat, for these 'new-wave' institutions are earnest competitors for the university's established role. IBM, for instance, spends over one billion dollars per year on research and boasts eight of its own campuses in which it offers its own university-level education. For-profit universities in the USA may have struggled because of new regulatory pressures – as a consequence of concerns over student non-completion, the levels of student indebtedness, the use of public student support aid and well-publicised lawsuits alleging students were misled by some for-profit companies – even so, the number of their enrolments was just short of 3 million in 2014–15 (2,880,970) (Lederman, 2016).

In the UK there are four private, non-state funded universities; two are charities (University of Buckingham; Regent's University, London) and two, for-profit (BPP University of Professional Studies and the University of Law). The New College of the Humanities is a for-profit institution, while the London Institute of Banking and Finance, Pearson College and Ashridge Executive Education (part of Hult international business school) are all not-for-profit organisations. One innovator that has sought to turn the threat into an opportunity is Purdue University, Indiana who in April, 2017 became the first publicly funded university to purchase a for-profit institution – that of Kaplan University and its 32,000 online students – 'in a real cross-roads moment for higher education; an unprecedented move that will reverberate far beyond Indiana' (Fain, 2017). There is, though, also the threat that other kinds of knowledge organisations may yet emerge: institutions that are organised not so much on the university model but on that, say, of management consultancies, market research companies or media organisations. Either way, these alternative providers constitute a formidable challenge – as is deliberately intended by the Higher Education and Research Act, 2017 – which HE will have to rise to meet if it is to maintain its established role (see Box 1.2) (Fielden and Middlehurst, 2017; Coaldrake and Stedman, 2013; PA Consulting, 2008).

Social change

Globalisation and the Knowledge Society have also generated far-reaching implications for higher education through the way in which they have transformed the

nature of both our working lives and our daily lives. In today's education-driven economy the message is a loud and clear one: 'if you don't learn, you won't earn'. And if you want to prosper, then – given that there are no more 'jobs for life' – you will have to commit yourself to 'lifelong learning' in order to maintain 'lifetime earning'. Thus higher education has become, whether one likes it or not – and is almost certain to remain – a growth industry. In 2014 there were 2.3 million students in Britain, or more than triple that of 1990. And the participation of young people has increased from less than one in ten to more than one in three in a generation.

More than that, as the participation has risen the 'employment power' of a university degree has (quite naturally) declined, and this outcome has, in turn, generated a burgeoning demand (as in the 'MBA syndrome') for still more specialist and stronger academic credentials. Hence the surge in growth of ever-more post-graduate awards and professional qualifications. Further, the coincidence of this ratcheting (or 'credentialism') with the broadening of professional status, has also placed universities in a strong position to cater to the needs of these new professionals in 'enterprise' (entrepreneurs), 'technology' (web designers, software developers; business analysts et al.) and 'welfare' (nurses, social workers et al.), in the same way they accommodated those of the 'industrial' (engineering) and 'pre-industrial' professions (lawyers, doctors and clergy) (Caplan, 2018; UUK, 2015; Bargh et al., 2000).

Whether or not they will be able to take full advantage of this situation, however – or indeed maintain their existing market share, given the threat posed by the 'new-wave' competition outlined above – will be contingent on the extent to which they are willing to respond to public expectations of choice, service and quality. Today's discriminating consumer wants, and indeed increasingly demands and gets, personalised service. And there is little reason to suppose that students are any different. Indeed, as they are more financially pressed than ever, they are likely to be even more intolerant of standardised ('one size fits all') approaches to services and products, such as the expectations that they should: conform to the rhythms of a narrow conventional learning environment; attend classes at a set time and place, complete assessments that are often 'bolt-on' to courses as an after-thought, and generally learn passively under the overall control of the ('gate-keeper') tutor: in short, an approach which is organised to meet the convenience of the institution and its staff rather than that of the students.

If universities are to meet this challenge, then, as a significant minority have attempted, they will have to fundamentally change the way they currently organise teaching activity. In essence, they will have to turn this existing arrangement on its head. To not only put the student at the centre of the learning process, but also ensure that provision is tailored to their individual needs. In other words, they will need to establish a learning environment which is much broader and more holistic in scope. One in which students are able to tap a wide range of learning resources (their student peers, library, computing and media facilities) free of the constraints of time and space, organise their learning around assessments which are central to their courses, and above all are active participants under the guardianship of the ('facilitator') tutor.

The implications – and also rewards – for universities in taking this initiative are both significant and far-reaching. On the one hand they would have to convince tutors that the transformation in their role – from the traditional one of 'director of learning' (or information deliverer) to that of 'facilitator of learning' (or curriculum

designer) – was not merely desirable but essential for success. And on the other they would need to maximise the potential benefits offered by new learning technologies. That is to say, wary of the pitfalls that befell early e-banking and e-tailing and indeed the short-lived UK e-university in seeking a ‘technological solution’ to service excellence, universities would also need to ensure that they embrace a ‘conversational’ (i.e. ‘people-to-people’) model rather than a ‘transmission’ (‘machine-to-people’) model of electronic learning. If successful, then they should flourish in today’s service-oriented ‘new economy’.

‘Contractual’ government

A further driver – the one which has had the most profound impact to date – is something that universities have had to contend with since their inception, namely, the nature of their relationship to wider society. Up until the second half of the twentieth century, the form and practice of HE was largely a matter of the internal or ‘private interests’ of the academic community. Since then the State – in the name of the ‘public interest’ – has taken an increasingly active role in HE, initially to guide, then to steer and direct, and latterly to orchestrate ‘the market’ in which HEIs operate. A shifting pattern of behaviour, that is, which reflects the change in the way many governments now relate to their citizens: that is, in a contractual manner, as much as the traditional legal and political way.

This ‘contractual’ view of government in which the state now ‘purchases’ services on behalf of its ‘clients’ as opposed to ‘providing’ them itself (as it had previously done in the case of publicly owned ‘nationalised’ industries, for example) has been in the ascendancy since the 1980s. It is most typically associated with the privatisation initiatives of the Thatcher government of that period, and the public sector reforms of similar ilk introduced contemporaneously in Australia and New Zealand. This ‘purchaser-provider’ separation in the management of public services has also of course had a number of far-reaching implications for – and expectations of – the way in which HEIs are organised, governed and managed (PA Consulting, 2013; Coaldrake and Stedman, 2013, 1998).

‘Efficiency gains’

First, and most obviously, as we have seen, has been the financial imperative placed on institutions to do more with fewer resources. To generate, that is, in policy-speak ‘efficiency gains’. And they have in this regard been very successful, and consistently so, over the last thirty years. For example, they managed to accommodate a tripling of student numbers while assimilating, as the Taylor Report (2001) repeatedly pointed out, ‘a 38 per cent reduction in real terms since 1989 following a decrease of 20 per cent between 1976 and 1989’. Or, put another way, they achieved an efficiency gain of more than 30 per cent in the 1990s alone, measured in terms of expenditure per student. Not only that, they also managed to sustain – in spite of the unprecedented introduction of means-tested tuition fees and the abolition of student maintenance grants in 1998 – a higher student completion (or lower drop-out) rate than anywhere else (with the single exception of Japan) in the world (Taylor Report, 2001; Eastwood, 2008).

By the start of the millennium, however, the consensus within the sector was that this momentum was no longer sustainable; not, that is, without damaging ‘the continued reputation for quality of our higher education system’ (Eastwood, 2008). And particularly since half of Britain’s universities were collectively in debt to the tune of £200 million, and staff: student ratios had deteriorated from an average of 9 to 1 in 1980 to 17 to 1 in 1998 (or 23 to 1 if funding for research, which is included in the average unit of funding, is excluded). This view finally prevailed when the government – recognising the need to ‘reverse years of under-investment’ – committed itself in January 2003 to increasing public spending on HE by 6 per cent a year in real terms, from £7.6 billion in 2003–4 to £9.9 billion in 2005–6. A cash injection that was buttressed by a further £1.5 billion a year from 2006 when – in another volte-face on student finance – up-front tuition fees were replaced by a top-up fee of (up to) £3,000 a year, and maintenance grants restored for students from low-income families: namely the government finally introduced in 2006 the measures which the Dearing Inquiry had originally recommended back in 1997. Universities, however, still exceeded their efficiency targets set by government, reporting £1.38 billion of efficiencies against a cumulative target of £1.23 billion between 2005 and 2011 (UUK, 2015).

Year-on-year increases in funding came to an abrupt halt when – in the wake of the global financial crisis – the coalition government slashed the teaching grant delivered by HEFCE from nearly £4.5 billion in 2010–11 to less than £1.5 billion in 2013–14, and froze the council’s research grant of £1.5 billion in cash terms. To plug the funding gap, the fee cap was tripled from £3,000 to £9,000 in 2012 with students permitted to fund their studies through government-funded loans (repayable by graduates once they were earning more than £21,000 a year) rather than through the payment of fees up-front. This new arrangement with UG fee income from home and EU students of around £8,250 per head per year generated (except for the most expensive lab-based courses) a healthy premium for universities compared to the grant-plus-fee levels enjoyed prior to 2012, particularly when set alongside the relaxation and removal of the SNC in 2015–16. So much so, that English universities experienced their best-ever financial results, recording average surpluses of nearly 4.5 per cent and banking almost £8 billion of cash reserves; collateral that has been used to secure £3 billion in loans to fund an unprecedented building expansion and upgrade of many universities’ estate (Hurst, 2016; PA Consulting, 2014).

The Treasury’s new conviction that universities were now ‘awash with cash’ ensured the £9,000 fee cap was not lifted for five years – even to offset inflation – until 2017–18 (£9,250). Thereafter it was intended that increases in tuition fees would be linked to the quality of teaching (assessed through the Teaching Excellence Framework as set out in the 2016 White Paper) with only those universities of the ‘highest quality’ (Gold) or ‘exceeding quality requirements’ (Silver) as opposed to merely ‘meeting quality requirements’ (Bronze) being permitted to increase their fees in line with inflation. In yet another volte-face, however, the Prime Minister announced a ‘fee cap freeze’ (at £9,250) in June, 2017 and scrapped a further £250 increase planned for 2018–19 (the first time that an announced fee has been ditched) pending a parliamentary review of student finance. Recognising that the abolition of student maintenance grants in 2015 and their replacement by student loans had also squeezed students yet further – graduates from the poorest 40 per cent of families

Table 1.2 Funding options for higher education

Option	Strength	Weakness
Increased public funding – proposed by Labour Party, 2017; Liberal Democrats, 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Readily identifiable • Government commitment to acknowledged priority 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No guarantee of government commitment • Electorally unpalatable (allegedly) • Scrapping tuition fees would likely necessitate the restoration of the student number control (SNC) and could reduce quality • Lowering tuition fees or reducing the £9,250 tuition fee cap may threaten the sustainability of some universities
Lift the £9,250 tuition fee cap for ‘top universities’ to let them charge market rate (c.£15,000) – advocated by Conservative policy board, 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows financial and political support for elite universities aspiring to be ‘world class’ • Provision of bursaries to students from poor families a strict condition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determining a ‘top university’ is as much a value-laden judgement as an objective one • May not be as inclusive as it implies • Would place other universities at a material disadvantage
Market fees – introduced 2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Variable fees within £6,000–£9,000 range would generate greater competition and increase average university funding by 25 per cent • Up-front payment abolished in favour of government-funded loans repayable by graduates once they are earning £21,000 a year • A payroll deduction that functions as a progressive graduate tax in all but name 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would increase graduate indebtedness and threaten student participation – full-time; part-time; mature • Potentially damaging to access-oriented HEIs • The absence of political consensus
Market fees – introduced 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differential (‘top-up’) fees (£1,000 – £3,000) would accurately reflect the costs of providing teaching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same weaknesses as immediately above • Contingent on scale and scope of deregulation permitted by government
Institutional endowments (or ‘perpetual loans’) – proposed by Conservative Party, 2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would encourage diversity among HEIs and offer greater choice • £1.6 billion scheme which offers HEIs increased autonomy and independence of action • Could facilitate further development of world-class universities and niche institutions and also the culture of ‘giving’ (as in the USA) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May have negative impact on widening participation • Could not be applied universally in the short term • Would create new binary division

Income-contingent graduate contributions (or 'graduate tax') – similar to Cubie below and Australian system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abolishes up-front (fee) contributions in favour of fixed repayments shortly after graduation • (unlike Cubie) endowment fund would meet shortfalls in learning and teaching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would increase dependency on public funds and reduce equity in the short term • May still deter prospective students without incentivising those who do enrol to pressurise HEIs to provide improved 'value for money'
The Cubie – Scottish Parliament scheme (same as one immediately above except...)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Endowment fund provides additional support for students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raises no extra money for HEIs
Full-cost fees and scholarships administered by independent trust – advocated by Social Market Foundation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would increase institutional autonomy and give students greater influence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The burden of funding for students would likely remain unchanged
Individual learning accounts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would provide greater transparency for individuals and give real meaning to lifelong learning • More a method of building up and distributing many different types of funding to and from individuals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No ready means of controlling the demand in advance without complex rationing systems • Not a true funding option

Source: adapted from IFS, 2017a; Browne Review, 2010; Taylor Report, 2001.

in 2017 were now incurring average debts of £57,000, compared to £43,000 for those from the richest 30 per cent, with the overall average debt being double the amount students would have faced under the pre-2012 system (IFS, 2017a) – the government also raised the fee repayment threshold for graduates (frozen at £21,000 since 2012 in spite of the promise it would increase in line with average earnings) to £25,000 granting them a saving of c.£360 a year and a charge to the taxpayer of £2.3 billion a year (IFS, 2017b).

With 83 per cent of graduates forecast as unlikely to pay off what they borrow and a projected total student loan debt (since 1998) of £160 billion by 2023, many now accept that the current funding system is unsustainable; that we have, in fact, an unexploded ‘funding time-bomb’ (GKP, 2015); ‘a tipping-point that has been crossed’ for ‘the system is more expensive to the taxpayer now than it would have been if the pre-2012 scheme was still in place’ (Hellen and Griffiths, 2017; IFS 2017b). Indeed, the Department of Education’s up-front public funding for HE students in England is now over £9 billion a year, up from £6 billion in 2007–08 (NAO, 2017).

As there is no political consensus, however, and UK investment in research and development as a (1.8%) proportion of gross domestic product (GDP) lags behind that of EU (2.1%) and OECD (2.4%) competitors, the debate on the cost, purpose and funding of higher education continues to be a contentious one. In revisiting it, the parliamentary review will be guided by the various potential funding options that were identified and outlined previously in the Browne Review (2010) and its predecessor the Taylor Report (2001) (see Table 1.2) (IFSa, 2017; UUK, 2015).

‘Initiativitis’

The second implication of the contractual view of government has been the apparent retreat from central planning, or more accurately a shift in emphasis from overt to covert planning. The higher-education funding councils for the home nations (e.g. HEFCE, 1992–2018) were – unlike their ancestor the University Grants Committee (1918–1989), which acted as a buffer body between universities and Whitehall, and which generated a strategic overview for the sector consistent with universities’ core values – nothing other than agents of government. Their role – and there is confusion about this in the sector – was not to lobby or act as a mediator, but rather to implement the government’s predetermined objectives through second-order policies. As their name implied, they were not intended to be planning bodies. Since strategic development is the responsibility of individual HEIs, they confined themselves (supposedly) to funding institutions against their own strategic plans rather than seeking to impose any particular system-wide pattern of development (Scott et al., 2016; Scott, 1995). Well, that was the case in theory, at least.

Such was the spate of special initiatives, however, emanating from the funding councils over the years – on access and widening participation; institutional collaboration and restructuring; the development of learning and teaching strategies; the improvement of poor estates; the facilitation of links with business and the community and so on: projects, that is, amounting to £1,470 million, or 18.4 per cent of the total funding for HE in England in 2009–10, and £620 million, or 17.5% in 2017–18 – that one could be forgiven for thinking that HEFCE was indeed HEPCE! The biggest and most controversial of the funding councils’ initiatives – accounting for a further £1,595 million, or 45 per cent of the total funding in England in 2017–18 – is,

of course, the Research Excellence Framework (formerly the Research Assessment Exercise); the four or five yearly peer review (or exercise in ‘informed prejudice’ by ‘elitist amateurs’ as its detractors put it) of university research output (HEFCE, 2017, 2008a; Cohen, 2000). Each of these initiatives is accompanied by the usual bureaucratic paraphernalia and form-filling – the information circular, the consultation document, the invitation to tender et al. – so much so that for many in the thick of it, it feels like an endless treadmill of bidding rounds and game-playing, amid a snow-blizzard of information.

The government’s initial efforts to establish ‘a market’ in HE had much the same outcome. The introduction of top-up fees of (up to) £3,000 a year in 2006 very quickly turned out to be a revised flat-rate fee in practice. Likewise, when the fee cap was tripled from £3,000 to £9,000 and variable fees (from £6,000 to £9,000) were introduced in 2012–13, few institutions charged less than the maximum and £9,000 soon emerged as a sector norm. Competition did emerge between HEIs, but not the one the government or HEFCE had planned or intended; that is, over the provision of student bursaries and other support incentives, rather than the fee (price) levy. A more authentic market evolved once the SNC was relaxed and removed in 2015–16. Common to all these instances we have had the same attendant bureaucracy – the reviews of transaction costs and of regulation; notably the formal Access Agreement between each individual HEI and the specially constituted Office for Fair Access (OFFA).

The replacement of both HEFCE and OFFA by the new regulatory body – the Office for Students in April, 2018 – consolidates a shift from the ‘grant-making state’ to the ‘regulatory state’ in relation to HE teaching and is likely to intensify, rather than diminish, planning interventions, particularly as it has been given (as implied in its very name) an explicit statutory duty to promote the student interest.

Niche institutions

Even more painful is the realisation that these initiatives are likely to be unrelenting. For despite the rhetoric of free enterprise they are, in essence, national planning interventions thinly disguised as quasi-market competition. The chief purpose of which is to establish a more differentiated HE system. This *modus operandi* was reflected in the funding councils’ separation of funding for teaching and research [and again now between the OfS (teaching) and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) (White Paper, 2016)] and – which, if logically extended, would produce a ‘super-league’ of (elite) research universities co-existing alongside of, but largely segregated from – the bulk of HEIs, whose role would be confined primarily to a social one – that of providing (mass) teaching (Brown and Carasso, 2013; HEFCE, 2003).

The rationale behind this drive for greater institutional segregation has been the desire to protect elite research universities from the pressures of massification, on the one hand, and access-oriented HEIs from the temptations of (so-called) ‘academic drift’, on the other. Or put another way, to preserve and enhance ‘excellence’ in HE while simultaneously satisfying political and public pressures for mass participation. This aspiration has been articulated in successive White Papers (2003, 2011, 2016) and the HE and Research Act, 2017. Even so this drive has, to date, not been as successful in practice as national policy makers would have wished.

On the contrary, it could be argued that – formally at least – the HE system has become less stratified, not more. The elite universities, for example, have shown

a marked reluctance to forgo their broader social responsibilities, an inclination borne out – and ever since – in the celebrated case of Laura Spence, the Tyneside state-school applicant, whose rejection by Oxford, and subsequent acceptance at Harvard, was deemed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer to be an ‘absolute scandal’. Irrespective of whether or not this individual student should have been turned down, the furore it generated – ‘I have never seen Oxford in such a lather of indignation’ as one don put it – showed that although the university may be acutely sensitive to allegations of elitist bias, it has also had a long-standing appreciation of the need for broader student access (Richardson, 2017; Goddard and Tysome, 2000). Likewise the former polytechnics have shown a similar reluctance to forsake research in favour of an existence based solely around teaching. Indeed they have, by and large, sought to expand their research base, in the belief (if not one shared by the authors of the White Papers) that without such activity they would not be taken seriously as ‘a university’. An aspiration reflected in their universal participation in the RAE 2008 and REF 2014, even if almost three-quarters of current research funding were awarded to just twenty institutions (PA Consulting, 2014).

The government has been more successful, however, in its expectation of universities to take on brand new roles; in reaching out to new student constituencies and to the business community in particular. The establishment of science parks as incubators for private enterprise; the commercialisation of intellectual property; the provision of consultancy (both to generate income and to assist global economic competitiveness) the development of electronic and distance learning; the extension of continuous professional development provision; the accommodation of lifelong learning and of work-based learning, for example, are all radically new activities which go well beyond the traditional notions of ‘research’ and ‘teaching’. A myriad of callings have, in fact, opened up for universities providing opportunities which institutions have exploited to a greater or lesser extent. Thus differentiation is emerging not so much at the system level – where fuzziness, which was the norm even before the binary division between universities and polytechnics was abolished in 1992, has increased still further – as at the institutional level. Put another way, it would appear that we have all become niche institutions or, at least, expected to be one; that ‘instead of trying to do everything’ we should, as HEFCE advises, ‘focus on what we do best’. Even though, ironically, the Knowledge Society is evolving in the exact opposite direction to an environment in which easy categorisation, and ready-made demarcation, are conspicuous by their absence (PA Consulting, 2013; Scott, 2008; Bargh et al., 2000).

Accountability

‘Paper, paper, everywhere’; ‘Trial by paper’ and ‘Academics swamped by bureaucracy’ are familiar press headlines which bear testament to a further – and also bitterly contested – implication of government’s contractual relationship with HE. Namely, the former’s insistence that the latter should adhere to new forms of accountability. This expectation derivative of the expansion of provision in HE has a number of drivers. One is the financial imperative that – given HEIs receive over £39 billion of public money a year (2016–17) they should do their utmost to deliver ‘value for money’; a performance indicator which is monitored by the national funding

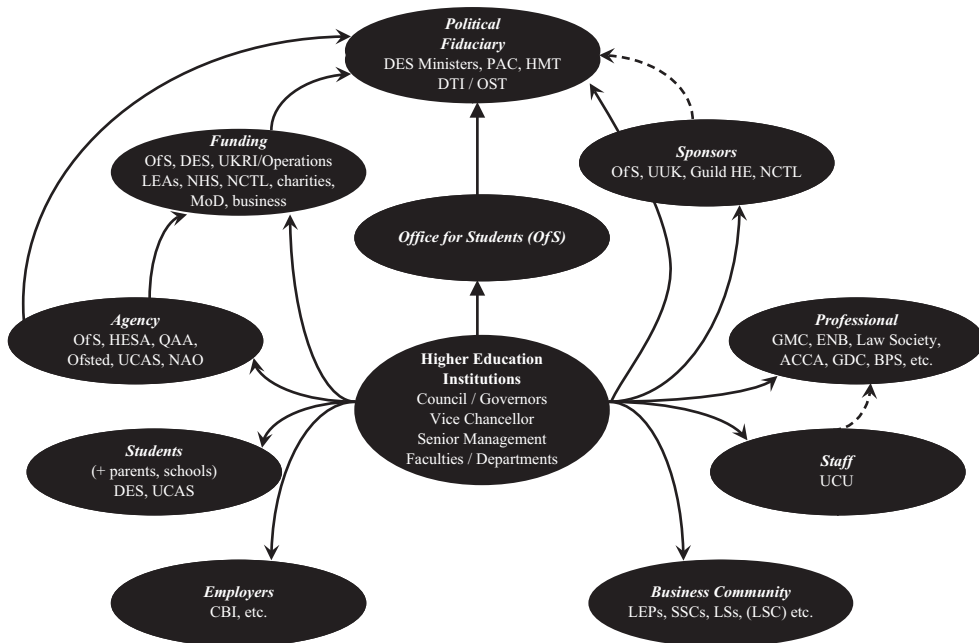


Figure 1.1 Stakeholders in the English higher education sector

Source: adapted from White Paper, 2016.

councils and by OfS from 2018. Another is quality assurance – the view that academic quality cannot be guaranteed if it is exclusively reliant on academic self-regulation; that quality ought to be managed, rather than assumed, in order to demonstrate that provision is ‘fit for purpose’; the monitoring of which is undertaken by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) (UUK, 2016).

Still another is the desire for greater transparency – that stakeholders have a ‘right to know’ and should therefore have access to accurate, consistent and comprehensive information on HEIs, enabling them to make informed choices; a process which is invariably aided and abetted by the publication of university league tables in the national media. In consequence, HEIs have found themselves required to respond to external requests for information, inspections, audits, submissions and bids for funding from an increasing variety of stakeholders: the QAA, HEFCE, the Higher Education Statistics Agency, the National College of Teaching and Leadership, the National Health Service, European Commission, Research Councils and so on. A key driver, indeed, behind the HE and Research Act, 2017 is to address the lack of information available to university applicants (see Figure 1.1). Though these requirements are no different to that expected of other public sector institutions – and are in fact symptomatic of the emerging audit society which has developed as a corollary of the nascent Knowledge Society – they have had a more profound impact on HEIs for a number of reasons.

First, universities, and in particular the traditional ones, have had a longer and deeper attachment to institutional autonomy and professional collegiality than

other comparable public sector organisations; an ethos reinforced in the past by the emphasis placed on planning resource (inputs) but undermined now by the current vogue for auditing policy (outcomes). Second, the strength of this tradition has meant that these new requirements have (rightly or wrongly) been widely perceived as having replaced a self-governing system, based on trust among competent professionals, with one based on a presumption of mistrust and incompetence. A perception, which accurate or otherwise, has, not surprisingly, had a predictable depressing effect on morale within universities. Third, the other reservations prevalent within universities concerning audit – that the processes are overly bureaucratic, time-consuming, expensive and needlessly stressful – were apparently borne out in the funding council's own review. Their initial review inquiry found that the cost of accountability was approximately £250 million – or 4% of the £6 billion of public funds which HEIs received in 2000 – but since 'the overall regime [was] a patchwork of legacy requirements from different stakeholders, responding to different concerns, at different times, with little overarching design, coordination or rationale' they concluded this investment 'represents poor value for money both for stakeholders and for institutions'. Further, the review team found that – among other things – the regime encouraged 'inappropriate behaviour' (such as game-playing, positional planning and short-term opportunism); contributed to 'planning blight' (by exacerbating uncertainty); placed academics' professional reputations (and even their careers) at risk; and fostered a 'something for something' culture which incurred costs in administering extra funding which were, ironically, often disproportionate to the extra money awarded (HEFCE, 2000b; Smith and Webster eds., 1997).

The reviewers recommended, therefore, that a new paradigm be established – viz. an investor/partner model – for the relationship between HE funding agencies and institutions. One which was less burdensome and less interventionist and which, in channelling demands on HEIs through a single body (the funding council) would eliminate 'the duplication, confusion and conflicting demands of overlapping systems' symptomatic of the current accountability regime. The implementation of this recommendation through the work of the Higher Education Regulation Review Group (the so-called 'single conversation') was – along with the QAA's much trumpeted 'lighter touch' for institutional and subject review – broadly welcomed. Indeed, these measures led to a further 20 per cent reduction (on top of the 25 per cent one between 2000–2004) in the cost of accountability between 2004 and 2008 to £190 million – or 2.4 per cent of the c.£8 billion HEIs received in 2008 – even while still accommodating additional requirements (for example, from the Office for Fair Access); though this figure does not include the costs of complying with more general public regulations such as health and safety laws and the Freedom of Information Act (PA Consulting, 2009). Subsequent independent reviews have also identified rising costs. KPMG, for example, found that England's 130 HEIs spend about £1 billion a year, or almost 8 per cent of their teaching budgets, on quality assurance and quality assessment processes (KPMG, 2015). The cost of the REF 2014 at c.£250 million (or 2.4% of the funding body's expected spend over the next six years) was four times that of the 2008 RAE (Else, 2015). And there are concerns that the introduction of the TEF will be yet another significant regulatory burden that will have a similar outcome, despite assurances to the contrary (Greatrix, 2016). Not surprisingly, a significant number in HE still believe these reforms do not go far

enough. On the contrary, they argue that given the propensity of bureaucratisation to stifle rather than enhance creativity and innovation – and the fact that half of all academics spend more than 15 per cent of their time on administration – the external government assessment process should be eliminated altogether, in favour of an unregulated market system in which freedom, competition, and choice flourish.

Much the same concerns have shaped the debate in the USA. Indeed, accountability, for example, caused more controversy than any other issue among members of the Spellings Commission, with the President of the American Council on Education refusing to sign the final report rather than endorse the Commission's recommendation of establishing uniform measures of accountability with student performance data that would be centrally collated and controlled. The best means of ensuring effective accountability thus remains a contentious one. But either way, the goal remains constant: how do we achieve the optimal balance between the needs of public assurance (that funds are spent properly and to good effect) and those of private governance (of the health and interest of institutions)? (White Paper, 2016; Williams, 2007; Spellings 2006; Jobbins, 2006)

Active management

A final implication – and one which has been equally divisive in consequence – has been that universities have been compelled to be far more proactive in the way they manage their affairs. Two generations ago, universities were self-governing collegial communities of scholars presided over by vice chancellors, whose *raison d'être* was essentially that of ceremonial figurehead. Their autonomy went unchallenged and their affairs were 'administered' by a bursar and a registrar whose combined complement of staff rarely exceeded 10 per cent of the total payroll of the typical 1950s 'redbrick' university. Today, universities operate as professional bureaucracies with vice chancellors whose authority rests more on managerial competence than it does on collegial charisma, and who wield power akin to their role – and to their counterparts in the private sector – as the institution's chief executive officer. External intrusion has become a daily fact of life, university departments have become 'basic units' and 'cost centres', and 'central services' administration now consumes well over one-third of the average university budget. More than that, universities have acquired the typical organisational panoply – the mission statement, the guiding principles and strategic plan, the corporate brand et al. – characteristically associated with that of contemporary private sector enterprise. And, in many instances, have sought to apply techniques, values and practices derived from the commercial sector. Simply stated, the 'donnish dominion' has been supplanted by managerial sovereignty (Brown and Carasso, 2013; McNay, 2006; Halsey, 1992).

Governmental expectations that new universities (the former polytechnics) would take on additional responsibilities (for industrial relations, estates management and strategic planning) subsequent to incorporation, and that all universities would both generate efficiency savings and adhere to new forms of accountability, have, as we have noted, played a significant role in precipitating this volte-face in institutional management. It would be wrong, however, to assume that governmental pressure was the sole driver. On the contrary, the growth of managerialism is as much attributable to the internal dynamics of institutional development as it is to any external pressure. Institutional expansion alone on the scale that we have witnessed (the size

of the average British university today – c.17,000 – is more than double that of forty years ago) would have required that universities be far more actively managed than had previously been considered necessary. As it is, it is more than simply a matter of size. Universities have also become increasingly complex institutions. The relentless specialisation and sub-specialisation of scholarship, the acquisition of new roles (such as technology transfer and lifelong learning), and the formation of collaborative partnerships with FE institutions and private enterprise, have all contributed to making universities far more heterogeneous than in the past. In addition, the re-designation of the former polytechnics as universities in 1992 also diluted the organisational exceptionalism still further. For all these reasons then, universities would – government pressure notwithstanding – have been obliged to manage their affairs in a much more self-conscious way than hitherto (GKP, 2015; PA Consulting, 2014; Bargh, et al., 2000; Scott, 1995).

Either way, the very fact that universities do need to be managed in a more proactive way has meant that issues concerning the internal operation of universities – principally, how should universities be optimally organised and how should they be managed (in an entrepreneurial or collegial way, for example) – have assumed far greater importance and significance in contemporary HEIs; a theme which we will return to later.

Academic specialisation and postmodernism

The two final change drivers have, unlike the previous ones, arisen from within rather than outside HE, one – the ever-increasing specialisation of scholarship – as a consequence of the growth of knowledge, and the other – postmodernism – as an intellectual challenge to the prevailing (modernist) epistemology of knowledge. The former trend is one which has, in turn, given rise to the professionalisation of knowledge. To the practice, that is, of scholars writing primarily for a specialist audience, invariably their academic peers rather than a generalist one. It has become a common and generally accepted practice.

Postmodernism, on the other hand, has been a more contentious and less well-understood phenomenon. A significant minority view it as so much ‘academic globaloney’; as a change in form and style, rather than one of any real substance. And indeed its very nature – its lack of coherence, and opposition to Big Ideas of the past and present – does not make it easy to define. The origins of postmodernism are obscure, though it appears the movement sprang from a seemingly disparate range of sources: the apparent demise of grand ideologies; the idea of post-industrial society; the theories of the post-structuralists (Derrida and Foucault) and the aesthetic reaction against the ‘international style’ of modern architecture. Roots, that is, united more by what they reject – modernist discourse – than in what they have in common with one another. Put another way, according to the postmodernists, the relationship between the researcher (the subject) and the object of study is a lot more delicate and complex than modernists have assumed to be the case. Indeed in the postmodern view modernist research is fatally flawed because of the way in which language is used – *unproblematically* – within this discourse to picture the essentials (atoms, neurons, economies, etc.) of ‘reality’. So much so, in fact as to call into question the very notion of objectivity which

has underpinned all traditional methods of scientific inquiry to date (d' Ancona, 2017; Reed and Hughes eds., 1992).

The impact of postmodernism in practice, then, has been profound. In subverting the conventional belief in the possibility of objective knowledge and scientific truth, it has not only undermined the epistemological basis on which the modern HE system developed, but has also spawned an academic environment characterised by *difference*; i.e. one in which – in the absence of any particular hierarchy of subjects or notion of authoritative knowledge – a plurality of mutually contestable knowledges (or 'multi-vocalism') prevails. Or, put another way, it has precipitated a transformation in the organisation of knowledge in universities away from what has been termed Mode I knowledge (traditional, homogeneous, hierarchical subject disciplines rooted in an apprentice-master relationship) towards Mode II knowledges (which are non-hierarchical, pluralistic, transdisciplinary, fast-changing and socially responsive to a diversity of needs). A trend which has itself been compounded by the relentless drive towards ever-increasing subject specialisation (Scott et al., 2016; Smith and Webster eds., 1997).

In practice, these two drivers have had a largely unsettling effect on academic communities. On the one hand, postmodernism has not surprisingly reduced, if not in all cases, the confidence and self-esteem of many intellectuals in their work – in both what they produce and the value of it. And on the other, specialisation has brought about a decline in the number of intellectuals who write for the wider public. For the simple reason that it fosters scholarship which places a premium on writing for the sake of professional advancement, at the expense of contribution to public affairs. Indeed, the scale of fragmentation in many disciplines is such that sometimes academics, even within the same faculty, cannot discuss their areas of expertise without misunderstanding (Back, 2016). And this is particularly manifest in areas such as the post-structuralist school of thought where self-styled 'radicals' (usually securely tenured at renowned universities) proffer opinion in language which is excessively and unnecessarily convoluted, self-referential and socially exclusive. In rebarbative jargon, in short. And it these same 'radicals', ironically, who have repeatedly railed at the language used by proponents of 'new managerialism'. (Ridley, 2017; Jacoby, 1997).

In consequence, then, the university community has become ensnared by its own peculiar notions of intellectual expertise. Many intellectuals have retreated to this private world apparently incapable of, or unwilling to engage with a wider public and public issues. And this at a time when, as we have seen, universities have come under greater public scrutiny than ever before. It is as if the university then has 'lost the plot' just when it can least afford to. More than that – in challenging the ethical base as well as the epistemological one on which the university rests – postmodernism has shorn the institution of any particular value structure. Thus we cannot assume any longer that the contribution of the university is necessarily a given 'cultural good'. A loss that has undermined intellectual integrity, freedom of speech and the primacy of reason within universities, and contributed to the erosion of common-sense notions of truth and reality beyond universities, that has spawned a 'post-truth' world in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief (d'Ancona, 2017; Ball, 2017).

The university identity crisis

When we place these outcomes alongside the consequences of the other change drivers we have examined – notably, the loss of organisational exceptionalism, the acquisition of novel roles and the emergence of ‘new-wave’ competitors – it is readily apparent why some commentators like Barnett (2015; 2000) have concluded that the university faces a crisis of identity and the prospect maybe of terminal decline. Today, these commentators argue, the university can mean all kinds of things in a mass system. Yet it does not stand for anything in particular. Nor does it have any essential qualities. As such, the university in their view is redundant both as a concept and as an institution.

The challenge this bleak prognosis presents is self-evident. It goes to the heart of the *raison d'être* of higher education. Yet the response from the academic community has for the most part been defensive or, as Smith and Webster (1997) put it, ‘passive’ (Barnett, 2012). Reluctant to articulate an overriding purpose, or unifying theme, for HE for the reasons given earlier, universities have tended to justify themselves primarily, and indeed with some justification, on practical grounds: on the contribution they, and their graduates, make to the wealth-creating resources of the nation. Frustratingly, however, this message is not always recognised outside the sector. Others, by contrast, maintain that we need the ‘Idea’ of a university more than ever before and that a broader and more profound case can be made of the institution. In their view the prospect is not nearly so bleak. On the contrary, the university is more likely to prosper than it is to wither in their future scenario.

What then is, or should be, the ‘idea’ of the university? What case can we make in defence of the institution?

The university as an ‘idea’

The irony of today’s condition – the absence of a commanding model or expressive vision of the university – is that it is an entirely novel experience in the institution’s long history. For in the past, indeed, HE has always been supported by a number of just such ideas. Visions, that is, which are invariably invoked by those seeking to defend the university ideal.

The first, and also the most famous was, of course, the one embodied in Cardinal Newman’s *The Idea of a University* published in 1852. A former Oxford tutor and Anglican convert to Catholicism, Newman’s vision was of an institution that was neither a tool of business, the State, or indeed (to the surprise of his sponsors) the Church. Universities needed ‘elbow room’, Newman argued, in which to pursue ‘a knowledge which is its own end . . . liberal knowledge’. Not to train up imperial rulers, as has sometimes been argued, but rather to cultivate in its students the values of civilised reflection. In Newman’s view then, knowledge is valuable for its own sake, not for the uses to which it could be put. And his university ideal – in keeping with the scholastic tradition of the medieval university – was that of a setting in which knowledge and culture, with a special emphasis on classical Greek culture, were conserved and passed on. His university then is strictly non-utilitarian; one in which there is no place for either professional training or indeed organised research. Rather it is teaching which is the activity at the heart of what Newman calls ‘the business of a university’ (Oesman, 2016).