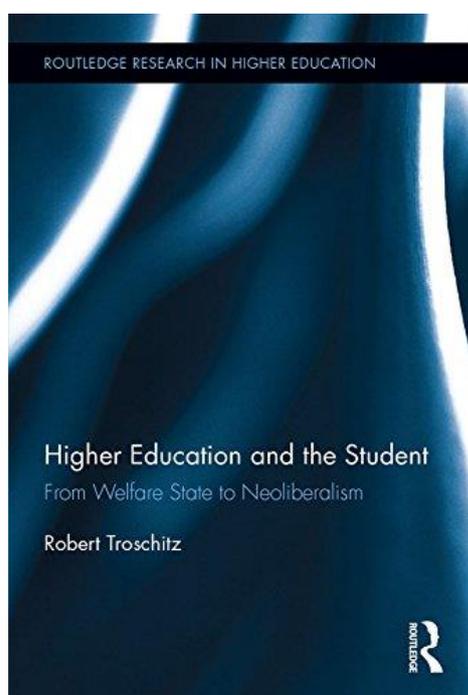




This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 Licence](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/). As an open access journal, articles are free to use, with proper attribution, in educational and other non-commercial settings.

**Robert Troschitz (2017) *Higher Education and the Student: From Welfare State to Neoliberalism* (Routledge Research in Higher Education), Abingdon: Routledge (ISBN 978-1-138-21350-0 [Hbk], 236pp)**



In *Higher Education and the Student*, Robert Troschitz offers a thorough study of the modern British higher education system. Written from a historian's perspective, this is an invaluable and introductory survey for all educational researchers. At 236 pages, Troschitz's first published monograph is digestible but also displays his broad

research interests, including cultural theory. Indeed, Troschitz attributes particular significance to language and meanings. I ought to confess that I studied History and was in the first cohort of students to have the maximum £9,000 tuition fees applied as I enrolled. This was back in 2010 and my experience was a far cry to my parents' generation who reflected nostalgically on 'grants' rather than 'loans'.

Britain, and primarily England, is the focus; the book captures the social and political changes and exposure of the HE system to neoliberal market forces. The timescale encompasses the 1940s to the 1990s, although post-2010 developments are considered. This chronological approach accentuates the historical narrative, based upon secondary published sources that contemplate the nature and purpose of higher education, such as government documents, reviews, consultations and Acts of Parliament.

Troschitz applies discourse analysis to investigate the role of students, interrogating terms associated with higher education to demonstrate their shifting nature. As he observes, the term "student" or "students" has proved particularly elusive. However, he is not concerned with the lived experience of students; his aim is to demonstrate "how the idea of higher education and the concept of the student have shifted over time." This is framed within the contexts of 'eligibility' and

‘power’. Thus, the biggest impact of the marketisation of higher education, it is argued, has not just been the financial implications for students, but a shift within the debate around the essence of higher education is and shifting sense of ‘the student’. As we have recently observed by the Higher Education Research Act 2017 and formation of the Office for Students, the emphasis on value for money has more firmly cast the student as customer.

Following an introduction and chapter that considers theoretical perspectives on higher education, the book divides into four parts. Part I focuses on higher education in the post-war era, highlighting a nascent student voice in the 1940s and 1950s. Part II emphasises the turbulence of the 1960s and 1970s, characterised by the expansion of higher education and student protest movements. Part III examines a turning point from the 1980s onwards, with marketisation and the introduction of tuition fees, as recommended in the Dearing Report (1997). The notion of the ‘student as customer’ is considered in light of the Browne Review (2010), the White Paper (2011) and the introduction of the Teaching Excellence Framework (2017). Part IV, for me, is the most prescient section, as it assesses the criticisms of marketisation, and leads to Troschitz’s articulation of ideas beyond the ‘oversimplified notion of student as consumer’ and ‘university as service provider’. Troschitz divides the new critical thinking on higher education between, what he perceives as, those who want to prevent further change and those who press for change, even if only to contribute alternative metaphors to the discourse (for example, reimagining students as “partners”). One chapter that stands out

for me is one devoted to the student protests of 2010. Troschitz draws parallels with the student protests of the 1960s – the awakening of a social movement.

The book demonstrates that, in spite of the changes, the British higher education system has remained consistently contradictory: this, I think, is one of the defining features of Troschitz’s thinking. The book dispels numerous myths about universities in the past, that they were academic paradises dedicated to academic enquiry. Higher education has been a consistent battleground for ideas and, despite changing government policy, three core senses persistently dominate the discourse: economic, liberal and social. The economic idea places higher education in relation to the workforce, whether the post-war concept of “manpower” or today’s quest for a “career”. The liberal idea focuses upon learning and individual development. Lastly, the social idea posits that universities are engines for social justice.

Nevertheless, despite criticisms of the current system, the fact is, access to higher education has improved: the student body is more diverse and more students from disadvantaged backgrounds have received a university education than ever before. Historical developments have brought the power and agency of students into focus. Thus, in the economic idea, students are customers whose power is reduced to choice; in the liberal idea, students are learners who yield their power to academic authority; and in the social idea, power derives from those served by higher education.

As one would expect, the chapters after 2010 feel less measured than the previous

ones and, I am sure, that a new edition will consider more carefully the implications of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 and formation of the Office for Students. Overall, the prose is clear and quite compelling to read. This is an invaluable addition to a vast body of work that is evaluating and speculating on the impact and future of higher education. The historical frame of reference that is applied is refreshing and an essential read to those interested in social and policy developments in higher education.

Reviewed by **Bethany Cragg**

*Placement Learning Support Unit, Faculty of  
Science, LJMU*

*Note: this review refers to the hardback version of the book (2017). A paperback edition was scheduled for release on 30 November 2018.*