

## Sector reports review: September 2015 to January 2016

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### Abstract

*Summary of UK higher education sector organisations' reports and publications between September 2015 and January 2016. Organisations featured in the review include:*

<i>ATOC</i>	<i>Association of Train Operating Companies</i>
<i>BIS</i>	<i>Department of Business, Innovation and Skills</i>
<i>British Council</i>	
<i>GuildHE</i>	
<i>HEA</i>	<i>Higher Education Academy</i>
<i>HEFCE</i>	<i>Higher Education Funding Council for England</i>
<i>HESA</i>	<i>Higher Education Statistics Agency</i>
<i>Hobsons EMEA</i>	
<i>Ipsos MORI</i>	
<i>Jisc</i>	
<i>NUS</i>	<i>National Union of Students</i>
<i>OIA</i>	<i>Office of the Independent Adjudicator</i>
<i>QAA</i>	<i>Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education</i>
<i>Rand Europe</i>	
<i>SCONUL</i>	<i>Society of College, National and University Libraries</i>
<i>The Sutton Trust</i>	
<i>THE</i>	<i>Times Higher Education</i>
<i>UCAS</i>	<i>Universities and Colleges Admissions Services</i>
<i>UCISA</i>	<i>Universities and Colleges Information Systems</i>
<i>UKCISA</i>	<i>UK Council for International Student Affairs</i>
<i>UK HE International Unit</i>	
<i>Unipol</i>	
<i>UUK</i>	<i>Universities UK</i>



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## The Higher Education Green Paper

The publication of the Green Paper (BIS, November 2015) dominated discussions at the beginning of the 2015/16 academic year. In the document the Government outlined draft ideas for a Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) and its plans for improving social mobility. Whilst the Green Paper only briefly touched upon the quality assessment reforms, it was proposed that this align with TEF (more detail on the TEF was promised in a technical consultation to follow in 2016).

The Green Paper also sought feedback on opening the sector to new providers, a proposed Office for Students and on reducing the complexity and bureaucracy in research funding. Institutions and sector organisations were invited to respond to the consultation document by January 2016.

## Partnerships with students

The Higher Education Academy (HEA) funded projects on the theme of 'Pedagogies of Partnership', and three reports were published between December 2015 and January 2016:

Wintrup et al. (December 2015) report on findings of a collaborative project between Southampton and Lund Universities to determine whether and how this partnership influenced Occupational Therapy students' knowledge, understanding and sense of identity as global healthcare citizens, and whether they considered intercultural capabilities through their professional education. Six pedagogic approaches form the basis of the findings:

- **Working on 'real' projects and shared concerns:** students described the short intensive visits as 'remarkable' in their effectiveness in forging productive project work groups, ability to carry out research, overcome language differences

and ability to present to peers after only five days.

- **Informal learning:** the importance to participants of time spent simply 'being', whether together in mixed project groups, or as friendship groups, or travelling and socialising - the importance of informal time could not be over-estimated.
- **High expectations, high support:** the stimulation of learning independently, with sometimes ambiguous or seemingly abstract briefs, was deeply rewarding. 'High level' support meant final year students were required to immerse in topics and were able to call upon 'experts' in informed ways.
- **Communities of practice and circles of partnership:** participants spoke of 'feeling' part of a community that went beyond education and practice contacts and of being involved in networks developed through social media.
- **Embedding principles of care, hospitality and reciprocity in partnerships:** this involves ensuring to involve students unable to travel, or who choose not to do so for a variety of reasons.
- **Students as producers of high quality healthcare:** final year students showed themselves to be fully aware of their contribution to practice, to education and to a global healthcare community. New insights meant healthcare decisions were critiqued in societal and political terms rather than through the lenses of pragmatism, expediency and necessity.

Pauli et al. (January 2016) presented findings and recommendations relating to experiences of students-as-partners pedagogy. The research draws on the discipline of Psychology and, as the authors assert, "a different approach to the scholarship of teaching and learning regarding partnership with students, through focusing on aspects of learning, feedback and assessment." In particular, the team

investigated the impact of teaching and learning methods aimed at fostering partnership in undergraduate students, and estimated how these experiences are perceived by graduates as relating to their current roles. The findings illustrate the value of students-as-partners in developing teaching and learning methods in relation to a range of outcome measures, most notably the development of graduate attributes. The authors highlight a range of considerations relevant for enabling greater partnership with students; through assessment, dialogue, and experiential learning.

Hardy et al. (January 2016) examined the benefits to students of sharing, evaluating and providing feedback on assignments written by their peers using a form of 'adaptive comparative judgement' (ACJ). Peer assessment using ACJ was implemented in undergraduate courses in Physics and pre-clinical Veterinary Medicine at the University of Edinburgh. In both courses, a moderate to strong correlation was found between the quality of assignments based on student ACJ rankings and numerical marks awarded by staff. Veterinary medicine students were provided with assessment criteria to aid their judgements, however, this was not the case for Physics students. There was evidence that Physics students used surface features to justify their judgements, however, the authors argue that it is not clear whether this implies that surface features correlate with disciplinary quality or whether students can discern quality but lack the skills needed to articulate the underlying disciplinary constructs. The authors argue that the importance of expert guidance to help students develop their assessment expertise is clear and opportunities for practice coupled with timely feedback are also needed. They conclude that comparative judgement has the potential to play a valuable role in this process.

Evans et al. (December 2015), in an HEA-funded study from a different programme,

produced a systematic review of the academic literature on high-impact pedagogical strategies in learning in HE, in order to answer the following questions:

- Which pedagogies are commonly used in disciplines to generate engaged student learning?
- For which of these pedagogies is there a robust evidence base evaluating the effectiveness of the pedagogy in generating student engagement?
- What are the key elements of effective practice that are identified within this literature?
- What gaps are there in the existing literature in relation to: (a) discipline specific pedagogies that are not widely evaluated and for which there is a strong prima facie case that they are high impact; (b) the scope for the existing evidence bases to be further strengthened and developed?

Their recommendations included:

- A greater emphasis on research-informed pedagogies, including discipline-specific approaches to pedagogic research;
- More explicit signature pedagogies, especially within Arts and Humanities and Health and Social Care;
- Greater transparency in the reporting of pedagogies and an associated clarification of how ideas can be applied beyond the immediate discipline; what generic principles can be taken away and be applied creatively to other contexts;
- Greater explication of the role of students in the learning process and as co-partners, with the latter area not being well represented within the literature reviewed;
- Inclusive pedagogy to embrace a wide range of differences and attuned to the impact of pedagogical initiatives on individual learners;
- Assessment practice to be meaningful in order to tap into deep learning

requirements. Institutional policies and procedures need to be able to respond quickly to the requirements of module and programme-level assessment requirements to ensure currency and alignment of practice. Reducing the burden of assessment and ensuring congruence between module and programme-level assessment are important in supporting an integrated and holistic approach to assessment;

- Areas of practice that warrant further attention within the research literature include service learning initiatives, team development, self-regulation approaches, creative and dialogic pedagogies and contemplative pedagogies;
- Whilst the evidence base to support the power of simulation activities to promote learning transfer is strong further literature is needed;
- Research initiatives need to be directed to facilitating more longitudinal studies with a greater emphasis on postgraduate learning and teaching pedagogies; and
- greater promotion of cross-cultural studies to explore the relevance of learning and teaching approaches to different contexts is required.

In summary, the authors posit:

In moving engagement agendas forward, students and lecturers need agreement on what meaningful and quality learning experiences are and how these can best be provided. The freedom to learn, to have opportunities to connect in being able to take disciplinary understandings forward, and being able to apply and offer them to workplace and other contexts as co-partners and producers are key concerns in developing students as partners within higher education within 21st century learning environments. The potential of technology to assist flexible pedagogies - to bring the outside in - and to

promote learner agency is key to pedagogical development. Supporting students to manage the higher education pedagogical landscape requires an emphasis on the development of self-regulatory skills in order to support student autonomy in learning (p. 9).

In their report to the UK funding councils, Ipsos MORI (October 2015) analysed National Student Survey (NSS) data to investigate whether students were considering their choices. The report was triggered by analysis of 2005-13 data, which identified the possible presence of 'yea-saying', whereby students provide the same response for every question. The report was carried out to understand whether, by not considering their responses, 'yea-sayers' were disengaged.

The authors considered a number of aspects: the time taken to complete the survey, the method of completing the survey, completion of additional and optional questions, time taken to complete the survey and the use of the open-ended comments. They conclude that their evidence shows not all 'yea-sayers' demonstrate signs of being disengaged. The report provides suggested techniques for minimising yea-saying.

### Supporting transition, engagement and achievement

A HEFCE (September 2015) briefing paper published the outcomes of a study of the degree outcomes of UK-domiciled first degree graduates from English HE institutions in 2013/14. The study examined the extent to which course and student characteristics affect graduates' chances of obtaining higher degree awards. The key points emerging from the study included:

- Across degree subject areas, there is a wide variation in the proportion of graduates who gained a first or upper second; this relationship itself varies depending on whether firsts are considered in isolation or in combination with upper seconds. The proportion awarded a first or upper second in 2013/14 ranges from 60 per cent of graduates in combined subjects to 90 per cent of medicine and dentistry graduates. When firsts only are considered, the range runs from 12 per cent of law graduates gaining a first to 35 per cent of mathematical science graduates;
- Graduates who study degree courses part-time do less well than their full-time counterparts. The difference between full- and part-time graduates is 18 percentage points, with 75 per cent of full-time graduates gaining a first or upper second class degree compared with 57 per cent of part time graduates. After taking into account other factors including entry qualifications, only four percentage points of the observed 18 percent point gap are explained. There remains an unexplained 14 percentage point difference between the proportions of full- and part-time graduates gaining first or upper second class degrees. Thus these other factors explain only a small amount of the variation in degree outcomes between full-time and part-time graduates;
- Although a lower proportion of mature graduates obtain a first or upper second class degree compared with young graduates, on a like-for-like basis mature graduates outperform their younger counterparts. In 2013/14, the difference between the two groups is 11 percentage points, with 64 per cent of mature graduates gaining a first or upper second compared with 75 percent of young graduates. However, after taking into account other factors including entry qualifications, mature graduates have an unexplained seven percentage point advantage over young graduates;
- Female graduates are more likely to achieve a first or upper second. The difference between men and women gaining a first or upper second class degree was four percentage points, with 74 per cent of female graduates obtaining such a degree in 2013/14 compared with 70 per cent of male graduates. After taking into account other factors, the unexplained difference between the sexes rises to five percentage points (as opposed to the observed difference of four percentage points): the proportion of males gaining a first or upper second is five percentage points lower than their female counterparts;
- Graduates with disabilities tend to do slightly less well than those without reported disabilities. Splitting by disability status shows that a lower percentage of graduates with specified disabilities achieving a first or upper second class degree than those without a disability. This difference is four percentage points in 2013/14, with 73 per cent of graduates with no specified disability gaining a first or upper second class degree compared with 69 per cent of those with a disability. Accounting for the additional modelling factors shows that graduates without a disability continue to have an advantage over graduates with a disability specified: on a like-for-like basis, the unexplained difference is three percentage points;
- White graduates have significantly higher degree classifications than graduates from other ethnicities. The proportion of white graduates who achieved a first or upper second class degree in 2013/14 is 76 per cent, compared with 60 per cent of black and minority ethnic (BME) graduates. This is a 16 percentage point difference between the two groups of graduates. Once other factors are taken into account, the proportion of black and

minority ethnic graduates gaining a first or upper second continues to be 15 percentage points lower than their white counterparts;

- For all but those with the very highest A-level grades, state school graduates tend to have higher degree outcomes than independent school graduates with the same prior educational attainment. In 2013/14, 73 per cent of state school graduates gained a first or upper second class degree compared with 82 per cent of independent school graduates. This is a nine percentage point difference. There is only a small difference between the two groups at the highest entry grades, but this difference widens considerably for those entering with A-level grades AAC and below. The modelled results show that after taking other factors into account, the percentage of state school graduates is higher than predicted. The observed nine percentage point difference is more than explained by other factors (such as the different distribution of A-level achievement), which results in an unexplained four percentage points advantage to state school students;
- Graduates from the highest-participation neighbourhoods have the highest degree classifications compared with graduates from other neighbourhoods. 66 per cent of graduates from the lowest-participation neighbourhoods gained a first or upper second class degree in 2013/14. This is 11 percentage points lower than the highest participation neighbourhoods, where 77 per cent of graduates gained a first or upper second class degree. Taking into account the other factors, the unexplained difference between those from the lowest and highest participation areas is three percentage points; and
- between 2010/11 and 2013/14 there has been an annual increase of around one and a half percentage points in the proportion of qualifiers with first and

upper second class degrees, around half of which is explained by changes in student characteristics. Around half of the annual increase is explained by changes in student characteristics such as entry qualifications, gender, ethnicity, disadvantage and previous school type. The rest could be due to other factors not taken into account, such as unmeasured changes in student characteristics, learning, teaching and retention practices at institutions, or behaviour following the introduction of higher fees.

In a scoping report on 'learning gain' for HEFCE, McGrath et al. (September 2015) noted that:

- Learning gain has been defined and conceptualised in a number of ways. (For the report the authors defined as the 'distance travelled', or the improvement in knowledge, skills, work-readiness and personal development demonstrated by students at two points in time.);
- Learning gain represents one among a number of potential measures of a high quality student experience;
- There is some awareness of the learning gain concept in English higher education, but understanding varies across the sector, and use of measures is nascent;
- A variety of methodological approaches could be used to measure learning gain, serving a range of developmental and accountability purposes; and
- a need for robust piloting of the validity and feasibility of the various different approaches to measuring learning gain within the English context, underpinned by dialogue with the sector and experts to build understanding and secure buy-in for further steps.

This Rand Europe report was the stimulus to HEFCE's £4m Learning Gain programme, involving over 70 universities

and colleges in 13 collaborative institutional projects (<http://www.hefce.ac.uk/lt/lg/projects/>).

A joint UK HE International Unit and British Council funded report found that a majority of the students surveyed perceived a relationship between spending time abroad during their studies and their employability, academic success and personal development. Key factors in the decision to go abroad were the availability of funding, personal safety and security and perceived quality of host and location. The encouragement of academic tutors was another significant factor, along with services and information offered by institutions (such as help completing an application, especially for students from disadvantaged backgrounds) (Mellors-Bourne et al., September 2015).

As part of the Government's National Scholarship Programme (NSP), which formed a key part of its policy of widening participation in HE in the context of the introduction of higher student fees, HEFCE commissioned CFE Research and Edge Hill University (Bowes et al., January 2016) to carry out an evaluation of the scheme from its formation in 2011/12 until the final year of the scheme in 2014/15. The report concluded:

- **Student access:** whilst the NSP was designed to address a concern that increased fees would have a negative impact on students from lower-income backgrounds, it was found that there was little correlation, as participation rates increased for all students, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds. It was rationalised that students understood, and accepted the deferred loan-repayment system. Furthermore, there was little evidence to suggest that the availability of NSP influenced choice of institution or course.
- **Retention:** evidence on the impact of the NSP on retention was mixed.

Whilst institutions felt that financial aid did help to support strong retention among disadvantaged students, without a comparison group of disadvantaged students without funding, it was difficult to be confident of any impact. Overall, it was deduced that there are a wide range of factors that affect student retention;

- **Achievement:** the authors concluded that it was difficult to directly attribute any impact upon success rates to the NSP. However, from interview data, it was acknowledged that the provision of bursaries that lessen financial pressures on students may indirectly support higher achievement.
- **Student experience and wellbeing:** similar to above, it was found that NSP, and financial aid more generally, could help alleviate stress and enhance student wellbeing. However, the authors asserted that the aid initiatives should consider providing enhanced support for students whose study and living costs were likely to be higher than others (e.g. those studying in London, or Visual Arts students); and
- **Part-time and mature students:** the report noted that many part-time students were not eligible for the NSP.

Overall, it was noted that smaller institutions were most likely to be effected by the ending of the NSP. In its time, NSP operated alongside other existing forms of financial aid, without duplication nor displacing them. The authors posit that “the NSP lacked more precise objectives [other than the general aim of benefiting disadvantaged students]” with “differing views among stakeholders and institutions” (p. 69).

An NUS and Unipol (December 2015) survey on accommodation costs found that though private providers had grown by 42 per cent over the last year, institutions still remain the largest supplier of accommodation. The report argues that a

move away from “affordable accommodation towards more high-end rooms” or studios had resulted in an 18.4 per cent increase in average weekly rents since the last survey in 2012-13; students now pay, on average, £146.73 per week for their accommodation.

In a HEFCE-funded study Wakeling et al. (December 2015) investigated the age at which young adults should be treated as independent from their parents in terms of assessment of eligibility for postgraduate funding. They found that:

- at the age of 25 a higher proportion of males (44 per cent) than females (34 per cent) live with at least one of their parents; at the age of 28, most graduates live away from parents;
- male graduates from intermediate, routine and manual occupations backgrounds show a slightly higher chance of living in the parental home in their 20s;
- at age 25, the majority of co-residential partnerships among graduates are cohabiting unions; among graduates aged 25, 38 per cent of females and 21 per cent of males are in a cohabiting union and only about 11 per cent of female graduates and about five per cent of male graduates are married;
- after the age of 28, marriage becomes more prevalent than cohabitation among male and female graduates and a substantial majority are in one or the other relationship;
- the proportion with dependent children is very low prior to age 25 and only starts to increase rapidly after the age of 28;
- the proportion of graduates enrolled as full-time students decreases after 25, with only two per cent of graduates being in full-time education after the age of 30;
- after the age of 25, almost 90 per cent of all graduates are in employment;
- before 25, only 45 per cent of graduates are in managerial and professional occupations; however, after the age of 30, around 75 per cent of graduates have such positions;
- graduates from lower socio-economic backgrounds tend to take more time to achieve higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations compared to their counterparts from better off backgrounds. In addition, they also display smaller total gross income;
- overall, 19 per cent of male graduates and 22 per cent of female graduates aged 21–34 received regular or frequent financial support from parents. The financial support received from parents diminishes with age; female graduates receive less financial support than males in their early 20s but more support in their early 30s;
- in the general population (all levels of education, aged 20–54), parental support also decreases with age; women receive slightly more parental support than males at all ages;
- both males and females who are economically inactive, unemployed, and especially those who are full-time students, receive more parental support than those who are employed; this holds for all the age groups although the parental support diminishes across the life-course;
- highly-educated males in the youngest age group (i.e. 20–24) receive the highest level of parental support (39 per cent reported that they receive regular/frequent financial support from parents). Young females (20–24) show smaller differences by education but young females whose highest education is lower than A-levels receive less parental support than, say, a female who has completed A-levels (i.e. 32 per cent versus 38 per cent). However, after the age of 25 lower educated men and women receive more parental support

compared to their higher educated counterparts.

As part of a ‘research brief’, The Sutton Trust published a paper on personal statements in the UK admissions process (Jones, January 2016). It posited that an applicant’s school type is a key predictor of the quality of their personal statement, stating “those from more advantaged educational backgrounds are more likely to receive better support and guidance” (p. 1). This briefing paper looked at a small selection of previous reports and made the following recommendations:

- universities should be more transparent about how specific subject departments use and evaluate personal statements. This information should be shared widely, and effectively, with applicants, schools and teachers.
- sections of detailed analysis and reflection in personal statements are highly valued by academics. Schools should support applicants in providing opportunities to undertake and reflect upon academic enrichment activities;
- schools and colleges need to improve the quality of staff training to ensure that key messages are consistent and based on up to date guidelines; and
- both universities and UCAS should consider whether the format of the personal statement could be improved to ensure it is a useful and fair indicator of an applicant's potential.

GuildHE (November 2015) launched a report showcasing good examples of student engagement work in UK HE. Based around The Student Engagement Partnership (TSEP) ‘Principles of Student Engagement’, the report highlights case studies in how successful engagement can enhance the education experience of students. The Principles of Student Engagement posit that students:

- are active members of a learning cohort

- engage in scholarly activity
- engage individually in and with their learning
- engage in a variety of learning spaces and opportunities
- engage in curricular content and design
- make independent judgements about the quality of learning and teaching
- effect change in a continual process of enhancement
- engagement is given strategic leadership
- engage through effective student leaders and governors
- engage in activities that support their wellbeing and encourage their sense of belonging

The Association of Training Operating Companies (ATOC) analysed 1.7 million journeys made in the UK in the third week of October 2014. It was reported that 337,000 journeys were made using the 16-25 Railcards, representing a 13 per cent increase compared with the usual weekly average. The ‘top five’ cities were: Exeter, with 64 per cent more journeys than the usual weekly average; Durham, up 61 per cent; Liverpool, up 52 per cent; Bristol, up 45 per cent; and Birmingham, up 42 per cent. It was suggested that this was attributable to increased student workload and homesickness, especially amongst ‘freshers’ (cited by BBC, October 2015).

In terms of the postgraduate experience, in an HEA-funded study, Zaitseva and Milsom (December 2015) analysed data from the 2014 Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES), which included 67,580 responses in 100 HE institutions (or representing 28 per cent of all students invited to take part in the survey). The report highlighted a number of critical success factors for successful participation and achievement in postgraduate taught education:

- the provision for scheduled, formalised contact time with both academics and peers;

- a consistent experience in relation to teaching, learning and assessment;
- an understanding of workload in the overall experience and quality of student outcomes;
- an appropriately challenging curriculum; and
- the creation of structured and timely opportunities for providing module and course level feedback.

### Institutional development and rankings

HEFCE (November 2015a) published its analysis of responses to a consultation on future approaches to quality assessment in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. In summary:

- there was strong endorsement (69 per cent agreed; ten per cent strongly agreed) of the proposed principles to underpin the future to quality assessment in established providers;
- it was felt that the diversity of providers, provision and students across the sector means that ‘one size’ of quality assessment is no longer appropriate (51 per cent agreed; 31 per cent strongly agreed);
- there was agreement (49 per cent agreed; 14 per cent strongly agreed) with the proposed pattern for external scrutiny, although agreement was often qualified, either with specific concerns, or with questions about how individual elements would work in practice. Those agreeing with the proposals endorsed, in particular, the aim to reduce bureaucracy and regulatory cost; the shift away from a focus on institutional processes; the proposals for peer review of providers seeking to enter the HE system; and the proposals for intervention where there was material evidence of a problem within an individual provider;
- there was very strong agreement (52 per cent agreed; 35 per cent strongly agreed) with the proposal to develop and

publish a ‘baseline requirement’ for the quality of the student academic experience against which providers seeking to enter the HE sector could be tested. Such a baseline requirement should build on the most helpful current reference points, but avoid the perceived burden and ‘tick-box’ operation of some aspects of the current UK Quality Code;

- there was strong support [for England], from all types of provider (50 per cent agreed; 13 per cent strongly agreed), for the proposals that, once through an entry gateway (and probation that incorporated the baseline requirement for quality), an established provider should not be repeatedly externally re-tested against that baseline requirement unless material evidence suggested that there was a problem;
- there was strong support for the proposals to shift the focus of quality assessment away from institutional processes onto student outcomes;
- there was very strong endorsement of the principle that a future quality assessment system must provide reliable assurances about the maintenance of academic output standards and their reasonable comparability;
- there were high levels of agreement with the proposal to use existing accountability mechanisms to seek and test assurances from a provider’s governing body;
- there was strong support (59 per cent agreed; 20 per cent strongly agreed) for rapid investigation and, as appropriate, intervention through external peer review, where there was evidence that something was going wrong within an individual provider; and
- there was very significant support (54 per cent agreed; 36 per cent strongly agreed) for the inclusion of a provider’s international activities in the proposed approach, with respondents frequently confirming that UK standards should apply wherever the provision is delivered and that preserving the UK’s

global reputation in higher education should be a central pillar of any new system.

QAA (October 2015) published findings from its Higher Education Reviews for 2014/15. Its report analysed the findings of 87 (including 24 HE institutions) HE Reviews (in England and Northern Ireland). It was noted, from the HE institutions, that:

- whilst students were satisfied with their teaching, assessment and feedback merited further improvement;
- nearly 20 per cent of the features of good practice related to employability; and
- of the HE institutions reviewed, only one received an unsatisfactory judgement. Areas of development included the delivery of research degrees through partnership arrangements and the breadth of subject and supervisory expertise available to research students.

QAA (September 2015) published a report of the Implementation Group, comprising QAA and UK Higher Education International Unit, detailing recommendations from a consultation on what was needed to strengthen the quality assurance of transnational education: it was recommended that a much more strategic and coordinated approach was needed.

The *Times Higher Education (THE)*, (September 2015) published its world university rankings for 2015/16. It was observed that European institutions were gaining on their US counterparts, including 34 UK universities in the top 200 institutions.

### Staff numbers

*Shifting Landscapes: Meeting the Staff Development Needs of the Changing Academic Workforce* (Locke et al., January 2016) is an HEA-funded report was built on an earlier study published (Locke, 2014). Examining HESA

data for 2013/14, it was found that the total number of academic staff in the UK grew by 8,655 (4.5 per cent) between 2012/13 and 2013/14 which, in the context of the reduction of direct government funding, was deemed to be significant. The study also found that this increase was made up of an additional 5,780 staff on teaching-only contracts and 3,230 academics on research-only contracts. In 2013/14, 27 per cent of all academics and 36 per cent of those who teach were on teaching-only contracts. Those on teaching and research contracts declined and, for the first time, now represent a minority (48.6 per cent) of the academic population. Other notable results, in terms of changes in career trajectories and pathways, from the qualitative dimension of the study revealed (Locke et al., January 2016: 5):

- a minority had pursued a career in higher education after what is often seen as the traditional, PhD and post-doctoral path;
- some early career academics had struggled to find secure employment with prospects and had taken on fixed-term and/or part-time teaching-only or learning support roles;
- many interviewees had moved from their original subject of study to work in other disciplines, departments and schools/faculties or in interdisciplinary work;
- some mid-career academics had substantial experience of working outside academia, such as in industry or occupational practice prior to, or throughout their higher education sector career. These individuals tended to have more positive views of working in academia; and
- the majority of the interviewees felt that their academic work was worthwhile and often intrinsically motivating. However, they reported differential opportunities for career progression in the different specialisms, hidden rules and practices in relation to recruitment and promotion,

and variation between institutions in the possibility of moving between different roles and types of contract.

Interviewees felt that time and workloads were the most significant barrier to engaging with professional development. Academic work was considered to absorb weekends and holidays. The authors posit that optimal value for development can be established if closely tailored to individual needs.

### Academic development

Fanghanel et al. (January 2016) investigated the way Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) is defined and supported in the UK sector. Their study encompassed, in addition to a literature review, a survey of SoTL practices in 62 UK-based HE institutions and interviews with eight heads of academic development. The main findings from the literature review were:

- there is a lack of clarity as to the status of SoTL in relation to the field of education, higher education and pedagogic research; and a perception that SoTL work lacks 'rigour';
- SoTL is a tool that is gaining traction internationally to develop and recognise teaching competence/excellence; the prevalence of research excellence in higher education, however, hinders its potential uses as a framework to recognise teaching excellence;
- the proliferation of definitions and varied conceptions of what SoTL is may hinder its progress as a vehicle to enhance and promote teaching, which points to the need for establishing a 'definitional framework' that allows for institutional adaptability in order to account for sector and disciplinary diversity, rather than providing a new definition;
- The literature signals a move away from the initial focus on individuals' practices

to a more strategic institutional and national policy foci to harness SoTL and develop competence and excellence frameworks;

- SoTL activity is becoming collaborative (including large projects);
- social media is more frequently being used for dissemination;
- the literature points to the need to ensure that initiatives at the three levels of the system are aligned so that SoTL is more tightly coupled to development, excellence and promotion frameworks;
- the case of SoTL career paths across the tertiary sector has been under-examined. Some literature suggests linking to 'knowledge exchange' type of activities (developing 'mode 2' research competence);
- disciplines and disciplinary units play a crucial role in building capacity in SoTL. It is difficult for SoTL to gain legitimacy in discipline environments, because discipline communities are the guardians of conventions, and the adjudicators of what counts as knowledge. This might account for the slow progress, and the accusation of 'lack of rigour' (often attributed to educational research);
- students can engage in SoTL and in discipline-based research with their tutors; there are important considerations to take into account to ensure this is a working relationship; and
- SoTL has the potential to develop global attributes among students.

Heads of academic development reported that:

- there is a lack of clarity as to what SoTL entails and how it is recognised, with a sense that public discourse about it does not always match reward and recognition processes;
- some common characteristics have been identified: SoTL reflects a range of public, scholarly and reflective practices scrutinised by peers that aim to promote the enhancement of teaching and

- learning and in particular the learning experiences of students;
- the processes involved in building scholarship within different disciplines highlights issues of disciplinary politics, culture and variation in the applicability of promotion criteria;
- institutional approaches varied between those with a strategic approach linking SoTL to the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF), to those engaged in a more ad hoc use of SoTL;
- HE institutions tend to recognise SoTL in the form of publications, and within these, they tend to value discipline-based research (often linked to institutional interpretations of the Research Excellence Framework (REF) demands) at the expense of pedagogic research.

In another study on academic development, Fung and Gordon (January 2016) examined how educators and education-focused leaders in 24 Russell Group institutions were rewarded and recognised for their work. Eight recommendations were made in this HEA-funded report:

- institutions review their ‘job families’ to ensure that all staff with substantive posts as teachers and/or education leaders are (a) defined as academic, in line with the HESA definition, and (b) afforded opportunities to rise to the most senior posts on the basis of the strength and scope of their contribution to the institution’s educational mission. If these recommendations cannot be effected, a clear rationale should be given to staff explaining why this is so, and parallel markers of esteem and opportunities for promotion should be developed;
- senior management teams in research-intensive institutions (a) develop a credible and persuasive narrative regarding the importance of education to the institutional mission, in the context of competing drivers for change, (b) ensure that this narrative is reiterated

- consistently to internal and external audiences and (c) use the narrative explicitly to inform and shape changes to reward and recognition processes;
- institutions review their promotion criteria to ensure that (a) they illustrate accurately the current balance of academic priorities, in line with the institutional mission and (b) they are fully understood by academics;
- institutions review promotion processes to ensure that (a) promotion panels have a diverse profile, fully inclusive of women and BME staff, (b) panels represent academic expertise from both the research and education domains, (c) all panel members are developed to understand issues of unconscious bias, and (d) cases for promotion can be made by all educators, in any job family, on the basis of the strength of their overall contribution to the institution’s mission;
- institutions review their provision for academic development to ensure that (a) it is sufficiently resourced to inform and engage academics who teach and who are education leaders throughout their careers, (b) it provides relevant and authentic developmental opportunities to academics at all stages of their career, and (c) it is aligned with agreed academic qualities and professional standards, for example through reference to the UKPSF, so that staff can gain and value professional recognition as higher education teachers and education leaders;
- institutions review their use of periodic (typically annual) professional development review to ensure that (a) it is genuinely supportive of individuals throughout their career, (b) it pays appropriate attention to the successes and developmental needs associated with the education-related dimensions of the individual’s work, and (c) it is undertaken by reviewers who are appropriately developed to understand

- the importance of education to the institutional mission.
- institutions (a) articulate the value of the contribution made by education-focused scholarship to the institution's evidence-base for developing practice, (b) encourage all educators and education leaders to engage with scholarly literature sufficiently to ensure that practice is evidence-informed, at a threshold level, and (c) enable individuals who wish to do so to continue to develop forms of education-focused scholarship designed to improve local or wider practices; and
  - institutions review their provision of prizes and awards to ensure that they (a) reflect parity of esteem for education with research, (b) reward collective as well as individual contribution and success, and (c) work with students as partners not only to develop prizes and awards but also to develop and enhance reward and recognition for staff more broadly.

In an HEA-funded study, Lyall et al. (December 2015) looked at the prospects for the development of interdisciplinary education and concluded:

- interdisciplinary learning and teaching is an explicit component of many institutional strategies in the UK;
- curriculum enhancement ambitions are becoming more widespread in the UK with many universities seeking to combine academic excellence with a greater focus on, *inter alia*, skills such as critical thinking and effective communication, engendering openness to more reflexive learning and personal development, and preparing students for global citizenship. However, curriculum enhancement and a more integrated approach to learning do not necessarily constitute 'interdisciplinarity' and the pedagogical approaches included in some descriptions of 'interdisciplinary'

- provision are not unique to interdisciplinarity;
- a range of activities taking place at different scales – at the level of one-off workshops, single course modules or units or, sometimes, full degree programmes. These activities have different (and not always fully articulated) aims, whether these manifest as a general awareness of knowledge beyond the student's immediate degree discipline, an ability to go further and apply that knowledge, or a more root-and-branch transformation of the student's way of thinking and viewing the world;
- what is largely missing from literature and from the empirical data collected, is a debate about, or evidence for, the underlying the principles, ideas, beliefs and epistemologies that might underpin interdisciplinary learning and teaching; and
- the issue of interdisciplinary provision points to the heart of how universities are organised and the purpose of higher education. A key unanswered question raised by the study is whether interdisciplinarity is evolving within universities or whether universities are, themselves, evolving.

### Student numbers

UCAS Analysis and Research (January, 2016) published its data relating to applicants for all courses by the January deadline. The number of applicants for all courses by domicile groups showed a small decrease in England (down one per cent), small growth in Scotland (up one per cent), Wales (up one per cent) and Northern Ireland (up two per cent). A relatively large increase was noted in EU (excluding UK) applicants (up six per cent), compared with 2015. Citing UCAS data, *The Guardian* (December 2015) reported that "the gender gap for university entrants had widened to record levels, with tens of thousands of men

‘missing’ from higher education.” The article noted that women aged 18 were 35 per cent more likely to start a degree course compared with their male counterparts; this equates to 36,000 fewer young men.

HESA (January 2016) reported on higher education student enrolments and qualifications at HE institutions in 2014/15. While the overall numbers of students were up in Scotland (up two per cent), other countries had declining numbers: England, down two per cent; Wales -18 per cent and Northern Ireland, down five per cent. Other trends noted included:

- the total number of HE enrolments showed an overall decrease of one per cent (33,280 in overall numbers), compared with 2013/14. Part-time enrolments decreased by six per cent between 2013/14 and 2014/15, whilst full-time enrolments and postgraduate enrolments showed no change over the same period;
- the overall numbers of EU students were down by one per cent, whilst the numbers of non-EU students were up by one per cent. In terms of enrolments by subject areas, as far as undergraduate enrolments were concerned, Creative Arts and Design and Agriculture and Related Subjects witnessed four per cent increases; Education (down seven per cent), Languages (down five per cent), Business and Administrative Studies (down four per cent) and Law (down four per cent) witnessed the largest falls. In terms of postgraduate enrolments, Agriculture and Related Subjects (+29 per cent) and Subjects Allied to Medicine (up ten per cent) saw the largest increases, whilst the biggest decreases were noted in Veterinary Science (down nine per cent), Business and Administrative Studies (down six per cent) and Medicine and Dentistry (down six per cent). Overall, a three per cent increase in enrolments in science subjects was noted. 56 per cent of all enrolments were female (55 per cent of full-time enrolments were female compared to 60 per cent part-time students);
- 62 per cent of part-time enrolments were aged 30 or over (for undergraduates this was 57 per cent, compared with 70 per cent for postgraduates);
- the disability status was similar amongst full-time and part-time enrolments with 11 per cent full-time and ten per cent of part-time known to have a disability;
- of the UK domiciled full-time enrolments with known ethnicity, 77 per cent were white compared to 83 per cent of UK domiciled part-time enrolments;
- there was a three per cent decrease in the number of students from non-EU countries. Around a third of non-EU first year enrolments were from China (an increase of 26 per cent from 2010/11) but it was noted that the share of Indian students had declined by 14 per cent since 2010/11;
- among EU countries, the largest number came from Germany (though with a three per cent decrease since 2013/14) and then France (which had increased by four per cent). Other notable increases were recorded from Italy (up eight per cent) and Romania (up six per cent); and
- the number of students studying wholly overseas increased by four percent.

UUK’s (December 2015a) *Patterns and Trends* noted an overall growth in students, staff and income, but also noted growth tailing off from 2010/11. The report also observed an increasing divergence between the UK nations and, on high uncertainty, stated:

The student body has changed over the period as well, becoming younger and with a higher proportion of full-time students, as the declines in the number of part-time and mature

students noted in previous editions of *Patterns* have continued. Full-time students now make up 74 per cent of the student body, up from 62 per cent at the start of the decade, and under-25s now make up three quarters of all undergraduates and a third of postgraduates. The number of students registered for 'other undergraduate' study (studying for foundation degrees, certificates and diplomas, and for institutional credit) has also continued to fall, dropping by a concerning 56 per cent over the decade.

As well as changes in the age of students and their mode of study, the student body has become more cosmopolitan over the decade. Students from outside the EU now make up 13 per cent of the student body, up from per cent in 2004/05. Behind this headline figure is a more complex story of shifting markets, with, for example, the number of students coming from India (the second largest source of international students for the past five years) falling by 49 per cent from a 2009/10 peak. This fall and the growing number of international students going to competitor countries is fuelling concern about the UK's ability to attract international students. In 2011/12, non-EU students contributed £7.2 billion to the UK economy with their tuition fees, accommodation and off-campus expenditure.

A detailed breakdown of international students in UK higher education has also been compiled by UKCISA (2016).

The UK HE International Unit (December 2015) published *International Undergraduate Students: UK's Competitive Advantage*. The report brings together data from the International Student Barometer for the UK, USA, Australia, New Zealand and

Canada, reporting high satisfaction ratings (91 per cent) on all dimensions of the international student experience in the UK; learning experiences had a satisfaction rating of 88 per cent (with the highest ratings for 15 of 23 measures of the teaching and learning experience).

In their survey of over 45,000 prospective international students, who enquired about study in 2014 in the UK, Australia and Malaysia, the following recommendations were made by Hobsons EMEA (August 2015) to UK institutions:

- Focus on employability skills;
- Promote 'soft' experiences and 'hard' outcomes;
- Communicate value in a tangible way (using league tables or, for those ranked poorly, to provide a context around the rankings);
- Communicate one-to-one (using digital technologies more effectively);
- Operationalise a recruitment and marketing strategy that is highly targeted and personalised;
- Engage with younger students and start early;
- Focus on the whole network (parents, careers advisers, friends and family) rather than the individual student; and
- Lobby government on post-study work rights.

### Social media in HE

UCISA (December 2015) published a toolkit to support the growing interest in the use of social media. The publication aims to provide contextual and practical example of social media use that offer new forms of engagement in HE, including its enhancement of learning and teaching.

## Employability

HEFCE (October 2015) examined the early career employment outcomes of UK-domiciled students who qualified from a full-time, first degree course in 2008/09. It identified differences in employment outcomes for different equality groups among those qualifying from publicly funded English HE institutions, and examined whether differences seen in a graduate's early career persist into the medium term. The key points of the report included:

- overall, there is a substantial improvement in graduate outcomes between six and 40 months after leaving HE;
- differences in employment rates diminish between six and 40 months after leaving HE and, in particular: there is a large variation in employment rates among graduates from different subject areas which diminishes as careers develop; employment rates among Chinese qualifiers increase dramatically across their early careers; female qualifiers have higher employment rates across their early careers, but male qualifiers make considerable gains to catch them up; and higher professional employment rates among mature qualifiers do not persist; and
- there are a number of characteristics where differences do not reduce across a graduate's early career, especially with regards to professional employment: lower professional employment rates among disadvantaged students persist across their early careers; ethnic groups see differences in their professional employment rates widen, with Black Caribbean qualifiers having the lowest rates of professional employment six months after graduation, 55.4 per cent, compared with 64.7 per cent among White qualifiers; and similarities in the professional employment rates of male and female qualifiers diminish as careers

develop, with a higher proportion of male qualifiers in professional employment or further study.

In November, Jisc published a report on the role technology played in developing student employability and developed recommendations distilled from 20 case studies across the HE, FE and Skills sectors (Chatterton and Rebbeck, 2015). The report authors conclude that the sector is not enabling students with the necessary digital skillset in order to thrive in the workplace.

UUK's (December 2015b) analysis on the supply and demand of higher level skills, reported that there is an undersupply of graduates and that there is no single definition of 'a graduate job'. Among the key findings in the study:

- projecting to 2022, under most models, there will be an undersupply of graduates, relative to the number of jobs demanding them;
- there will also be unmet demand for workers with higher, but not necessarily degree-level, qualifications, such as HNDs (Higher Education Diplomas);
- there must be greater discussion between universities and employers about 'employability skills'
- there will be a need for greater collaboration between further and higher education to develop workers with higher level skills; and
- in spite of a strong supply of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) students, there are continued shortages of highly-qualified workers in technical industries.

It was also noted that whilst many courses are imbued with opportunities for students to develop 'employability skills', such as problem-solving, critical analysis and entrepreneurial skills, the provision is not evenly spread. For example, creative arts students reported that through the course of their university education they developed

high-level entrepreneurial skills but not necessarily logical thinking, and mathematics-based students reported that they developed high-level problem-solving skills but not necessarily presentation skills.

In a report to The Sutton Trust, Kirby (October 2015) indicated that the earning potential of the best apprenticeships rivalled some degrees:

- Higher apprenticeships at Level 5 result in greater lifetime earnings than undergraduate degrees from non-Russell Group universities, according to the latest modelling by the Boston Consulting Group.
- Across a lifetime, someone with a higher (Level 5) apprenticeship averages earnings of around £1.5m, while someone with a degree from a non-Russell Group university earns just under £1.4m on average (when student debt repayments are considered).
- A higher apprenticeship at Level 5, and an undergraduate degree from a university (average of all UK universities), result in similar lifetime earnings on average.
- A higher apprenticeship at Level 4 and an undergraduate degree from a non-Russell Group university result in similar lifetime earnings on average.

### Information literacy

The Seven Pillars of Information Literacy was first devised in 1999, and underwent revision by a SCONUL working group in 2011 (SCONUL, 2011). The Seven Pillars are:

- **Identify:** able to identify a personal need for information.
- **Scope:** can assess current knowledge and identify gaps.
- **Plan:** can construct strategies for locating information and data.

- **Gather:** can locate and access the information and data needed.
- **Evaluate:** can review the research process and compare and evaluate information and data.
- **Manage:** can organise information professionally and ethically.

In a report to SCONUL reviewing perceptions of the ‘Seven Pillars of Information Literacy’, Goldstein (December 2015) concluded that in order for the framework to be useful:

- “there should be an effort to sustain the momentum of developing new lenses, couched in a language that potential users (not just librarians) can understand”;
- that the Seven Pillars model might sometimes require adaptation; and
- that it might be opportune to find a way of drawing out common, cross-cutting themes (such as the deployment of learning methods with several or all of the Pillars) and maybe relating them to other literacies.

### Legal and governance

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) produced ten principles which have been distilled from ten years of judicial review challenges (n=61) and informed the development of the OIA Scheme (Mitchell, December 2015). Furthermore, the OIA’s (January 2016) public interest cases were focused on extenuating circumstances and non-attendance and non-completion of work.

UUK (November 2015) published a briefing paper on legal and other considerations on the matter of free speech on campuses. This publication was circulated ahead of a House of Lords debate, and raised issues related to the Prevent Duty in the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, “Which go beyond existing legal requirements and potentially

restrict freedom of speech.” This followed the publication of the Prevent monitoring framework by HEFCE (November 2015).

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