

Higher Education Policy Network – University of Sheffield

Reforming English Higher Education: All Change or Business as Usual

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Three 'futures'

- All change: paradigm shift
- No change: resistance – and resilience
- Slow change: shifting tectonic plates

Thomas Kuhn 1922-1996



*The Structure of Scientific
Revolutions (1962)*

'Normal' science or
paradigm shifts

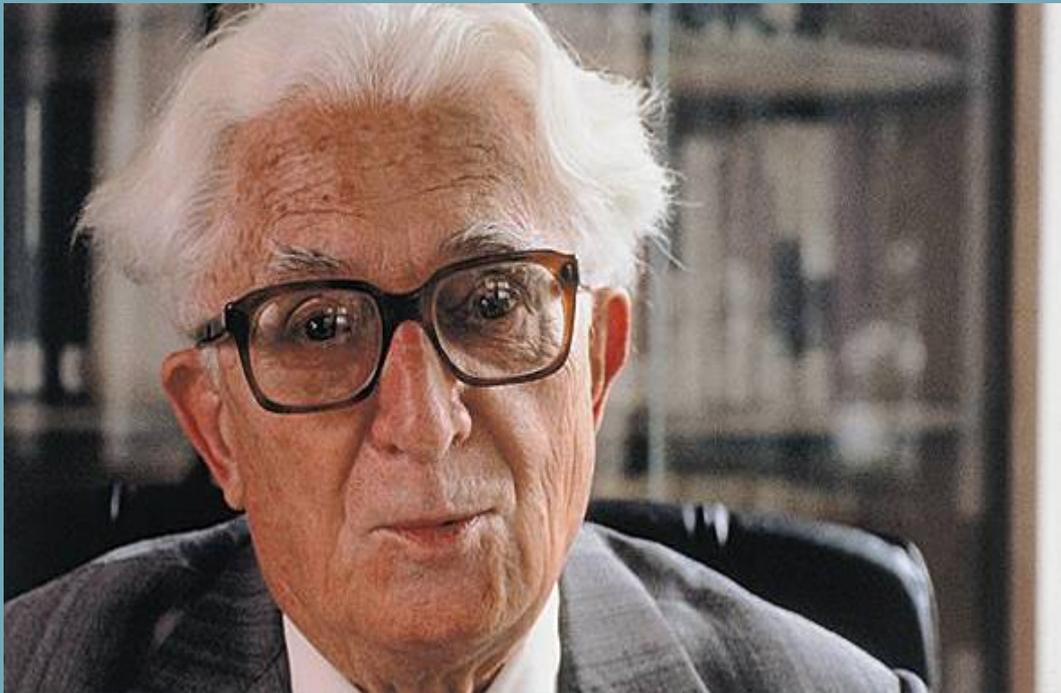
Giovanni de Lampedusa



'Things must
change so that
things can stay the
same' (Tancredi)

The Leopard

Fernand Braudel 1902 – 1985



Longue durée
(structure)

or

Histoire
évènementielle
(policy)?

Plan of presentation

1. UK higher education in 2016
2. Key points of the Green / White Papers / HE Bill
3. What's missing...
4. Other policy impacts
5. Tidying up the 2011 White Paper – or 'paradigm shift' (at last)?
6. The real revolution...

Facts & figures

- 2.2 million students / participation rate pushing 50% ('big four' in Europe: France, Germany, UK, Poland)
- Unified system dominated by (big) multi-faculty universities...
- ... But (a) hierarchy of esteem; (b) separate Scottish & Welsh HE systems; (c) alternative providers (90k students)
- 'Cost-sharing' (i.e. fees) accepted (in England)
- Elaborate quality systems / accountability instruments – NSS, KIS, TDAP... (+ league tables)

Key characteristics

- Mass system – but with elite features (low wastage, teaching-research nexus, small-group teaching...)
- ‘Excellent’ – as measured by scientific citations / (flattering?) global league tables
- ‘Efficient’ (low-cost per graduate, public spending 50% below OECD average, private contribution still modest)
- More ‘entrepreneurial’ (and managerial) and less ‘public’ (and collegial)?

The Government's proposals

- **Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF)**
- **A new regulatory framework (HEFCE >> OfS)**
- De-regulation (Privy Council-and-all-that)
- Simplifying research funding...
- **Opening up the sector / easier access for alternative providers**
- Social mobility & widening participation?

TEF: rationales

- Promised in the Conservative manifesto – but lengthy pre-history (CETLs...)
- Reflection of increasing professionalisation of teaching (ILT >> HEA)
- Analogue (counter-balance?) to Research Excellence Framework
- Rising tide of consumerism: measuring ‘satisfaction’ / success

Comparing the REF and TEF

REF

- Measures quantity of inputs / quality of outputs
- (Relative) consensus on definitions of quality
- Peer review based (panels of active researchers)
- 4-grade profile by UoA
- Link to funding allocations
- 'Goes with grain'
- Key management tool

TEF

- Proxy assessments of teaching 'excellence'
- No consensus on 'quality'
- Dependence on metrics
- Gold-silver-bronze 'awards' (by whole HEI)
- No easy link to funding (higher fees?)
- Invasion of academic freedom?
- Perverse effects ('gaming' indicators..)?

HEFCE >>> Office for Students

- Death of the arm's length principle (UGC > UFC > HEFCE > OfS)
- Death of dual-support (UKRI – QR and RCs)
- Conflicts of interest:
 - Funding high-cost subjects and regulating sector
 - Quality / reputation and opening up market ('challenger' providers)

Invasion of the for-profits?

- Limited interest following 2011 White Paper
- 100+k students in ‘alternative’ providers
- Levelling the playing field – down... (TDAP / university title thresholds)
- Governance issues (boards – and owners)
- Managing market exit / safeguarding students
- Reputational risks to UK HE
- ‘Alternative’ subsidiaries of ‘public’ HEIs

More 'wicked' issues...

- Linking fee rises to TEF performance (Russell Group revolt?)
- Will fees go down as well as up (HE-lite)?
- Making Councils responsible for quality
- Less generous loan repayment regime ('rescuing' the RAB charge)...
- Regulation and quality (outsourcing)

Other policy impacts

- Removal of student number cap – overall growth prospects + differential institutional impacts
- Longer-term impact of highest fees in any public HE system (demand, subject choice...)
- Graduate labour market - & rates-of-return
- Reconciling 'world-class' and WP
- Immigration, visas, Scotland-Wales, BREXIT...



All change or business-as-usual?

- Unfinished business / loose ends from the 2011 White Paper (regulation, legislation...)
- ‘Paradigm shift’ / irreversible shift to ‘market’ (+ strong State taking control – as with schools a generation ago)

The big(ger) picture

- ✦ Demand, demography and social change
- ✦ Globalisation – and its discontents
- ✦ Challenges in teaching and learning: Google-ising higher education, MOOCs, social networking, open universities...
- ✦ The knowledge revolution: Mode 2, 'impact', action / activist research...