

Knowledge to change the world: Reimagining the university of the future

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*“shores of affluence, self-importance, and horticultural
beauty at the edge of seas of squalor, violence and
despair” (Ira Harkavy)*



Knowledge.... for whose benefit?

“Although the potential exists [for universities] to respond to almost every issue on our formidable national agenda, the readiness to do so does not. Most universities continue to do their least impressive work on the very subjects where society’s need for greater knowledge and better education is most acute.”

Derek Bok (former President of Harvard) (1990)

“In public policy making, many suppliers and users of social research are dissatisfied, the former because they are not listened to, the latter because they do not hear much they want to listen to.”

Charles Lindblom and David Cohen (1979, p. 1)

“...people in this country have had enough of experts”

Michael Gove (2016)

“In short, the university has primarily become ‘a place for professors to get tenured and students to get credentialed’.”

Cynthia Gibson (2001)

“Communities have problems, universities have departments”

OECD (1982)

Structure

- The purpose of universities
- Opportunities – what needs to be done
 - Rethinking the research project
 - Rethinking the educational role
- Ideas and ways forward
- Concluding observations

...beyond arrogance and victimhood

The purpose of universities: strategic

- Public good
 - see charitable status, tax relief etc.
 - “...universities should be judged by the quality of life amongst the least of us” (Henry Taylor, 2017)
- What is the public good universities deliver?
 - Education, well-being and social mobility
 - Research... knowledge and wisdom...
 - “Knowledge is wisdom only if it is useful for the satisfaction of [human] needs” (Benjamin Franklin in James Campbell, 1999)

The purpose of universities: local actors

- Neighbourhood revitalisation
 - Community focused initiatives often in a locality adjacent to the campus
 - Economic development through corporate investment
 - Procurement – a local purchasing programme; and policies to support sustainability of the local supply chain.
 - Real estate development – planned development which is sensitive to the wider needs of the local communities and the city.
 - Responsible employment practices, including for example living wage policies.
 - Local capacity building
 - Locally inclusive hiring and recruitment practices.
 - Local labour clauses on contracts.
 - Apprenticeships.
 - Enterprise (and incubator) support for local businesses – business outreach.
- ...an anchor institution...

The purpose of universities: local actors

- Education and health partnerships
 - Focus on initiatives to support improvements in the performance of local schools and public health.
- Scholarly engagement
 - Academically-based community service learning modules (which are credit-bearing).
 - Community based scholarly research.
 - Revision of promotion criteria to include clear articulation of excellence in engaged scholarship.
- Multi-anchor, city, and regional partnerships
 - Metropolitan-wide multi agency partnership initiatives.
 - Joint planning with the city.

...an **anchor institution**

Rethinking the knowledge project

“We recall that the first colleges of the Anglo-Saxon race were established to educate religious teachers. For a long time it was considered the religious mission of the educated to prepare the mass of the people for life beyond the grave. Knowledge dealt largely in theology, but it was ultimately to be applied and the test of the successful graduate, after all, was not his learning, but his power to save souls. As the college changed from teaching theology to teaching secular knowledge the test of its success should have shifted from the power to save men’s souls to the power to adjust them in healthful relations to nature and their fellow men. But the college failed to do this, and made **the test of its success the mere collecting and disseminating of knowledge, elevating the means into an end and falling in love with its own achievement.**”

(Jane Addams, 1899, *The Function of the Social Settlement*)

“We have to rethink the knowledge project”

Ahmed Bawa (2017)

Rethinking the research project

- Expanding the knowledge ecosystem
 - Start from **problems in the world**, not abstracted problems
- Moving to more (genuinely) **interactive** forms of knowledge generation
 - More **meaningful questions**
 - **Partnerships** not projects
- Developing different ways of knowing
 - Beyond the empirical... description and analysis – what and why
 - To **synthesis** and the normative / ethical – **how and should**
- Getting beyond methods and assessment of desk-based narratives
 - **Ethical value** not just methodological rigour

Rethinking the educational project

- Educate for success, not assess for access – universities must be **student ready**
- **Educators**... not entertainers nor book keepers
- Critically review the nature of **research-led teaching**
 - If the ways of knowing underpinning research activities are narrow then what are the implications for the education provided?
 - Disciplines, specialisation and educational implications
- Universities are **part of an educational offer** not separate from it
 - Local implications – partner not competitor or parasite
- *What efficiencies are necessary to allow for the inefficiencies of learning and knowledge generation?*

Ideas and ways forward

- Rethink the knowledge project... research and education
- Critically scrutinise and **experiment** with new models:
 - **Academic freedom**... what is it a freedom to do? Detachment, independence and co-option
 - **Research-led teaching** and the ways of knowing embedded
 - **Academic practices**... peer review
 - **Institutional practices**... promotions criteria
 - **Leadership**... within universities and with local partners
 - **Partnership**... based on reciprocity
- Focus... **universal problems as they are manifest locally**... a **settlement house model** for the 21st Century
 - “attempt to test the value of knowledge *in action*”, rather than engage in the “**mere collecting and disseminating of knowledge**”

Concluding comments – the time is now

“If you truly want to understand something, try to
change it”

Kurt Lewin (1939)

Active knowledge not inert knowledge

The endless cycle of idea and action,
Endless invention, endless experiment,
Brings knowledge of motion, but not of stillness;
Knowledge of speech, but not of silence;
Knowledge of words, and ignorance of the Word.

....

Where is the Life we have lost in living?

Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?

Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?

An extract from Chorus I of T. S. Eliot's *Choruses from The Rock* (1934)

Implications – the real challenge

- More than knowledge generation

“The gross structural irrationality of contemporary academic inquiry, of knowledge-inquiry, is no mere formal matter. It has profoundly damaging consequences for humanity. ...granted that our aim is to contribute to human welfare by intellectual means, **the basic problems we need to discover how to solve are problems of living, problems of action, not problems of knowledge.** ...Instead of being at the heart of the academic enterprise, these vital activities are marginalized, pushed to the periphery, or ignored altogether.”

Nicholas Maxwell (2014)

- Co-production must address:
 - What is being exchanged and how?
 - Who should benefit and in what ways?

N8 / ESRC Co-production Programme

- *Making knowledge that matters: realising the potential of co-production*
 - <http://www.n8research.org.uk/research-themes/co-production/> - Co-production page
 - <http://www.n8research.org.uk/news/2015/3/co-producing-knowledge-the-future-of-social-science> - Press release
 - <https://www.researchprofessional.com/0/rr/funding/know-how/impact-and-benefits/2015/3/coproducing-knowledge-the-future-of-social-science.html> - Research Professional